

Alexandria CERT: Community Emergency Response Team

Police – Fire – Medical Emergency	911
Alexandria Non-Emergency	703-746-4444
Alexandria Animal Control	703-746-4774
National Poison Control Center	800-222-1222
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	800-273-8255

January - February
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Neighbors Help Neighbors

“The First 72 Is on You!” means your household should be prepared to get by for up to 3 days during and after a disaster. The better prepared you are, the easier it will be for you to recover. And being prepared will free up responder resources such as the Red Cross. Can you also be ready to assist your neighbors? Even for smaller emergencies, neighbors may not have prepared or may need help.

Beforehand. 1) Be aware of hazards in and around your neighborhood. For example, is your area prone to flooding? Could wind storms bring down trees? Is there a history of power outages? 2) Understand your neighbors’ vulnerabilities. Does anyone seem unlikely to be prepared with food, water, medications, etc.? What about a person with a medical condition, even temporarily such as recovering from surgery? Are there neighbors with access and functional needs? This includes those who are hard of hearing, with vision impairments, using a cane or walker or wheelchair, or with emotional, cognitive, or sensory challenges. Does a household have limited English proficiency, which means they may not understand emergency warnings? 3) Evacuation and Meet-up Locations. Talk with neighbors about the importance of planning two routes out of their home and out of the neighborhood, if they need to evacuate. Pinpoint possible meet-up locations that can provide safe, secure shelter and tell people about these. 4) Identify resources that might be used after a disaster. These include supplies, tools and equipment, services, and facilities such as nearby businesses. People are resources, too, such as persons with medical training or counseling skills, those who speak other languages, or experience in various trades such as plumbing, landscaping, etc. 5) Have contact lists of your neighbors – phone numbers and email addresses – in addition to the physical address, and keep a paper copy of this information.

During and After. Check on all neighbors to make sure they are okay, using the contact information you have and social media sites, such as a neighborhood Facebook page. Ask how they are and what they might need. If someone needs medical help, call 911 or the local non-emergency number. Report service needs to local government or to utilities. In case of an extended power outage, make sure neighbors 1) have the means to safely stay warm in winter or cool in summer, 2) stay hydrated and eat foods that don’t need cooking or refrigeration, and 3) that possibly spoiled foods are disposed of.

After a Disaster

What should you do when you return home after a disaster?

- 1) Assess the situation, starting with the outside. Look for gas leaks, loose power lines, or structural damage. If you have concerns, use a qualified building inspector or structural engineer to inspect it before entering. Do not enter if floodwaters remain, if you smell gas, or if your home was damaged by fire and authorities have not declared it safe.
- 2) Document damage, inside and outside, for insurance purposes. Take pictures of damage and your cleanup efforts. Record how much time you spent cleaning up.
- 3) Do It Yourself. Discard all fresh or frozen food or medications that were stored without proper refrigeration. Dispose of all food, medicines, and toiletries that were in contact with floodwaters. Sort contents to be repaired or discarded. Clean up inside. Remove minor outside debris.
- 4) Hire qualified contractors for inside or outside cleanup and repair, or to restore electrical service. For licensing and disciplinary actions, check the Virginia Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (dpor.virginia.gov/). If any appliances were touched by flooding, have a qualified service person check them.

Searching for Missing Persons

Adults and children may be missing for many reasons, and the first people to search for them are family or neighbors. If there has been a disaster such as flooding or heavy structural damage to a building, the safety of searchers is paramount, to avoid requiring professional responders to assist even more people. In other words, stay away from dangerous situations and call 911 instead.

In non-disaster situations, it's important to understand the profile of the missing person: Adult or child? Mental, physical, or emotional condition(s), such as Alzheimer's or other form of dementia, despondent, mental illness, neurological or behavioral disorder, cognitive or intellectual challenges, or substance abuse?

For all searches, try to establish where the person was last seen and use that as the starting point. Assess where they were likely to go, based on stated intentions or on past history. And determine when they were last seen.

Calling out for a missing person may not be successful. Children learn from an early age to not talk to strangers. Similarly, a person with traumatic shock or who has dementia or cognitive disabilities may not respond to voice calling.

Indoor Searches. Start with a search plan, such as from the bottom floor to the top floor. On a single floor, methodically proceed down hallways and through rooms along a right-hand or left-hand path. A disaster survivor may seek protection inside closets or bathtubs, underneath desks or tables, or next to or under beds. Children may hide inside closets or cabinets or under a bed, even if they are just playing a game.

Outdoor Searches. Consider how the person would leave the place they were last seen: On foot, by bicycle, in a vehicle, using public transportation? Then, what possible distance could they cover, starting from the presumed initial point of departure? A related consideration is the local geography: How streets are laid out; flat or hilly terrain; presence of gullies, ravines, creek or river beds, lakes, etc.; woods or open fields; etc. The time of day and weather conditions are also factors.

Plan the search based on these factors, plus how long the person has been missing and where they may have headed. For a recently missing person who is on foot, they are likely within a radius of 6/10th of a mile to up to 2 or 2.5 miles, depending on their abilities.

Organize the searchers so they stay within sight of one another. In open spaces, use a grid pattern with overlaps for better coverage. Searchers should stay in as straight a line as possible and check places where the missing person could be obscured, such as in brush, in a culvert, or in water. When the search area involves sides, such as streets, river banks or ravines, or parking garages, assign teams to each side and have them coordinate their progress. In all cases, mark and document the areas that have been searched.

Neighborhood Help in Seattle

Seattle has developed a four-level model for disaster preparedness and response. The foundation is household preparedness, and then neighbors helping neighbors after a disaster. These two levels are called SNAP – Seattle Neighborhoods Actively Prepare. The third level is called Seattle Hubs, and the fourth level consists of city government services. The Hubs are community gathering sites that are activated in emergencies and disasters where neighbors can meet and exchange needs, resources, and information among themselves and with the city. This helps the community respond more quickly and effectively.

Information is the primary focus of a Hub. The typical setup has three parts:

- Information on shelters open, local resources, and maps.
- Community Posting, for reuniting people and for lost and found.
- Education, with “how to” information, how to deal with power outages, sanitation and water purification, making go bags, pets in disasters, etc.

Resources is where people post messages needing or offering resources: assistance volunteers and other volunteers such as trades or translators; supplies including food, water, clothing, batteries, and tools. This area also provides minor first aid services.