

# PREPARING FOR THE UNEXPECTED

## An Emergency Planning Guide

by Michael G. Carter  
Community Emergency Response Team Coordinator  
Mendocino County

Emergencies and disasters come in all shapes and sizes and can happen anytime. An emergency could be as simple as a traffic accident that knocks out power for a day to a catastrophic earthquake that destroys all basic services for an extended period. But in this age of paid professional police and fire departments, ambulance and air ambulance services, readily available commercial resources and interconnected forms of communications, many people take government services and private enterprise capabilities for granted and are ill prepared for an emergency. One just has to remember the chaos of Hurricane Katrina, and the collapse of government and private services on all levels, to realize that we all need to be prepared to take care of ourselves in the event of a major disaster. The key to coping with an emergency is planning and preparation.

### Emergency Planning

So how do you plan for an emergency? The first thing to do is to plan for the worst so you are prepared for anything. It is better to be prepared for a 9.0 earthquake and have a 3.0 than to prepare for a 3.0 earthquake and have a 9.0. By having a plan, you will not be caught off guard and feel the panic of wondering what you should do. You will have a plan, have things in place and be able to take action.

#### Assess the Situation

Begin by assessing the possible emergencies that could arise. Earthquakes, forest fires, floods and landslides and, with the current world-wide fiscal situation, civil disturbance, are all emergencies that could occur in our community. So begin by thinking about what you would do in each situation and put your plan in writing.

#### Checklist

By having a written plan, or checklist, you will not forget some important part of your plan. It will also give you a timeline so you know how much of your plan can be implemented in the time you have to respond. You can prepare individual plans for each emergency, or prepare a multi-staged plan so you can move from one stage to another based on the time available and the situation.

Print a hard copy of your plan and put it in a safe place where all family members have access. In an emergency, time can be critical and having a hard copy can save a lot of time. This also allows any family member to start implementing the plan in the event you are absent. We have our plan in a manila envelope taped on the inside of a kitchen cabinet door. There is also a mechanical pencil (will not dry out) attached to the envelope to mark off items as they are completed.

While we are discussing checklists, I should mention having lists in stored items and kits. When you prepare a food storage box, first aid kit, or other box with stored emergency items, you should make a list of the items contained in the box and pack it inside the box. This can be done on your word processor. To protect the list from the elements, you can print the list and seal it. I use clear plastic shelf paper on both sides of the list with a little overlap on the edges so the two glue areas stick together. This makes a good water-tight seal and will protect the list.

#### Be Proactive

You can be proactive with your plan. If you think there is a possibility that you may have to evacuate (forest fire, flood, mudslide, etc), don't wait until the sheriff shows up and says you need to leave. You may want to initiate part of the plan. You can either move your important items to a location close to a door, or even load them into your vehicles. This can save time if you are told to evacuate. The most you lose is having to unload your vehicles and put everything back.