

Fire & EMS

2023

Disaster
Preparedness



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Be prepared

How many of you think you'll be affected by a disaster?

And what are you doing to get ready for it?

According to a 2019 poll by the American Institute of CPAs, 61 percent of Americans think they'll be affected by a natural disaster in the next three to five years—and only 34 percent had taken the first steps to prepare.

For our Fire/EMS section this year, the **River Reporter** has collected disaster-preparedness information, so you too can get started.

What do we need to do, no matter where we live? Ted Waddell has you covered.

In Pennsylvania, Owen Walsh looks at the disasters that are most likely to affect residents, and gives you tips on how to cope.

Our center spread gives you the all-important contact information, including which agencies cover what problem and how you reach them.

Then Ted has an interview with Sullivan County Fire Coordinator John Hauschild on how the county has coped in the past with disaster—and what people should do now.

And finally, we have four pages of information: what to do about your kids? Your pets? What should you put in an emergency kit? Should you store food?

Now you have no excuse. Take those first steps. Be prepared.

Annemarie Schuetz
Section editor



Illustration by Amanda Reed

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Be prepared!

By TED WADDELL

REGION — The New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services published a comprehensive guide to disaster preparedness titled “Emergency Information Handbook.”

The handbook covers nearly everything you need to know about disasters, both natural and manmade, and lists the top 10 steps to safety.

“An emergency—be it a natural disaster such as a flood or winter storm, a power outage or a terrorist act—can occur quickly and without warning,” reads the introduction to the fact-filled manual. “Although we cannot prevent emergencies, there are some simple things we can do as individuals, families, and organizations to be better prepared.”

The booklet cites two actions of life-saving importance in personal and family protection: “develop an emergency plan, and prepare a portable cache of emergency supplies that can be used at home or at work.”

The Emergency Services Handbook stresses the importance of being prepared. “Pay attention to the news... your local radio and television stations can provide you with up-to-date information during an emergency.”

It also recommends that people know which local radio stations are part of the Emergency Alert System. One can also purchase a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather radio.”

On the topic of being prepared for terrorist attacks, the handbook notes in part, “the most effective homeland security strategy begins with the individual in these uncertain times.” If people see something unusual or suspicious, they should call local law enforcement, or call New York State’s Terrorism Tips line at 866/723-3697.

The publication covers a broad range of tips on how to prepare for and deal with natural disasters from earthquakes, fires, wildfires, floods, hurricanes, landslides, lightning, thunderstorms, tornadoes, as well as seasonal issues such as winter weather and extreme heat.

According to the New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, the state created an all-hazards alert and notification system, “a web-based portal that allows state agencies, county and local governments, emergency service agencies and institutions of higher learning to provide emergency alerting information and private notifications to a defined audience (local, county, regional or statewide).”

There is no charge for NY-ALERT. Interested people can sign up, and they will receive emergency information regarding major road closures and adverse weather events via email or by a telephone call at home or at work. Alerts are also available by text, or on the web through a Really Simple Syndicate (RSS) reader. People can also visit the NY-ALERT website at www.nyalert.gov. A mobile app is available at iAlertz.com.

If you do not have access to the internet, you can still sign up for NY-ALERT by calling 888/697-6972.

Source: *New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services.*

1

Identify and discuss potential emergencies with your family.

2

Develop an emergency plan.

3

Identify two places where you and your family will meet in an emergency.

4

Practice your plan.

5

Review and revise your plan as needed.

6

Prepare emergency supplies.

7

Gather and safeguard important documents.

8

Be aware of your surroundings.

9

Know where and how to get information during an emergency.

10

Work with your neighbors, especially those with special needs.

Learn more

More information regarding how to prepare for a broad range of emergencies can be obtained online.

In New York

Visit the New York State (NYS) Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Services (www.dhses.ny.gov), NYS Prepare (www.prepare.ny.gov), the New York State Department of Health (www.nyhealth.gov), the American Red Cross (www.redcross.org) and the NYS Office of Cyber Security (its.ny.gov/eiso).

In Pennsylvania

Visit the Department of Homeland Security (www.homelandsecurity.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx), ReadyPa (www.ready.pa.gov), the PA Department of Health (www.health.pa.gov), the Red Cross Greater Pennsylvania Region (www.redcross.org/local/pennsylvania/greater-pennsylvania.html) and for cybersecurity, check out ReadyPA’s cybersecurity posts at bit.ly/40bPGrS.

Preparing for the worst in NEPA

The top five disasters in Wayne, Pike counties



Photo by Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash

Floods are one of the most likely natural disasters here.

By OWEN WALSH

NORTHEAST PENNSYLVANIA — With their proximity to major cities like Philadelphia and New York City, Wayne and Pike counties have experienced the unusual trends of population spikes resulting directly from some of the worst disasters in modern history.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as former metropolitan vacationers abandoned their high-rises for the Poconos, locals frequently drew the comparison, “It hasn’t been like this [since] 9/11.”

It bears remembering, though, that even bucolic oases from the relative dangers of city life see their own share of emergencies and disasters—natural and manmade. And when the worst-case scenario becomes a reality, being prepared can make all the difference.

Floods

According to Wayne and Pike counties’ hazard mitigation plans—both of which have been updated within the past couple of years—flooding is by far the most likely and significant threat facing the area. Flood events can arise slowly over time, or come in flash. Its effects range from damaging personal property to threatening residents’ lives.

According to www.Ready.PA.gov, residents should prepare for flooding by putting together an emergency supply kit (see “What’s in your go bag?,” page 15, and “Save your information,” at [\[porter.com/fire-ems\]\(http://porter.com/fire-ems\)\) and developing an emergency plan \(see “Make a plan,” page 7\) for everyone who lives in your household. The state also encourages residents to visit \[www.floodsmart.gov\]\(http://www.floodsmart.gov\), where you can assess your home’s flood risk and find options for flood insurance.](http://riverre-</p>
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During a severe flood, remember to get to an area of high elevation and to avoid driving. Half a foot of water is enough to cause drivers to lose control or stall, and just one foot of water is enough to float most vehicles. Pennsylvanians can call 511 to access their region’s current road conditions.

Getting information in an emergency

For general emergencies: 911 (call or text)

Wayne County Emergency Management: 570/253-5970, ext. 4220; director Steven Price can be emailed at sprice@waynecountypa.gov

Pike County Emergency Management: 570/296-1911, ext. 1940; director Tim Knapp can be emailed at tknapp@pikepa.org

For regional road conditions, call 511

For public health updates, visit www.health.pa.gov or www.cdc.gov

Severe winter storms

As anyone who has spent a full year in this area can attest, winter storms are a fact of life in northeastern PA. According to Wayne County’s disaster plan, “winter storms can cause more long-lasting damage than any other severe weather event.”

According to the state, all households should be stocked with rock salt and sand, snow shovels and other snow removal equipment, and enough clothing and blankets to keep you and your family warm.

If your home has no heat during extremely cold weather, close off unneeded rooms and stuff towels or rags in the cracks under doors. Cover windows at night. Cover pipes with insulation or newspapers and plastic, and allow faucets to drip a little during cold weather to avoid freezing.

Another tip: wear layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing. Several layers of lightweight clothing will keep you warmer than a single heavy coat.

NEPA - Page 6**Fires**

Between 2008 and 2021, there have been 12 fire-related deaths in Wayne County. Pike County experienced 1,920 structural fires between 2017 and 2021.

There are plenty of practical steps you can take that drastically reduce your risk of experiencing a house fire.

Install smoke alarms on every level of the home, in the kitchen and in every sleeping area. Smoke alarms should be tested once a month and batteries should be replaced twice per year.

Basic kitchen safety can make a big difference as well. Cooking accidents are the main cause of home fires, and unattended cooking is the leading cause of kitchen fires. Never leave your kitchen while frying, grilling, boiling or broiling food. Don't get distracted by other people in the kitchen or by electronic devices. Keep flammable things like oven mitts, paper towels and food packaging away from a lit stove, and keep a lid nearby in case you need to use it to smother a grease fire.



Image by m63mueller from Pixabay

Disease

If the past few years have been any indication, rural communities are not immune to the outbreaks of disease. To date, Wayne and Pike counties have experienced more than 300 deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unlike Sullivan County, Wayne and Pike do not have public health departments at the county level. During the COVID-19 pandemic, both communities coordinated with entities like the PA Department of Health, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Wayne Memorial Health System to provide updates, testing and vaccination clinics.

To address a more specific, ongoing concern in the area, the Pike County Commissioners formed the Tick-Borne Disease Task Force in 2015. To reduce the risk of tick-borne diseases like Lyme disease, the task force urges hikers to wear light-colored clothing to help spot ticks, avoid contact with grass or brush, use products containing DEET for skin and Permethrin for clothes, check gear and pets for ticks before returning home, and throw clothes in the dryer as soon you get home.

Radon

Radon is an odorless, invisible, radioactive gas naturally released from rocks, soil and water. It can get into buildings through small cracks or holes and build up in the air. Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer after smoking cigarettes, and it's the leading environmental cause of any cancer. Around 40 percent of homes in PA have elevated radon levels.

There is information available online to give homeowners an idea of what the average level of household radon is in their area; see, for example, www.dep.pa.gov/Business/RadiationProtection/RadonDivision/Monitoring/Pages/default.aspx.

However, federal and state environmental agencies urge all homeowners to directly test for radon, which is relatively easy and inexpensive to do. Radon test kits can be purchased online or at most home hardware stores.

If your homes' radon levels are too high, a radon mitigation system might need to be installed.

Make a plan

Create a family emergency plan that includes evacuation routes, meeting points, and important contact information.

Practice the plan with your family members so that everyone knows what to do in case of an emergency.

For more on family emergency plans, visit www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/make-a-plan.html.

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WHEN DISASTER STRIKES, WHOM DO YOU CALL?

Compiled by TED WADDELL

When a disaster hits, depending upon the severity and scope of the incident, a wide range of emergency services—federal, state and local—has been established to respond.

There are first responders, such as fire departments, emergency medical services and law enforcement agencies. There are also numerous investigative organizations.

This list includes the various agencies that serve the Upper Delaware River Valley.

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES, ALWAYS CALL 911 FIRST!

AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

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fema.gov



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Washington, DC 20590
202/366-400
railroads.dot.gov



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National Park Service Delaware Water Gap Recreational River

P.O. Box 2
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570/426-2452
www.nps.gov/dewa



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U.S. Department of Homeland Security

www.dhs.gov/how-do-i-for-the-public.

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AT THE STATE LEVEL

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troopers.ny.gov/location/troop-f

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Pike County Barracks, Blooming Grove

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"The Department of Environmental Protection's mission during emergencies and disasters is to respond quickly and professionally to any incident which adversely affects the health and safety or the environment of the citizens of the Commonwealth," according to the DEP website. Information on specific situations can be found at www.health.pa.gov/topics/prep/Pages/Disasters.aspx.

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AT THE COUNTY LEVEL

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Sullivan County Department of Emergency Management/Homeland Security

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www.waynecountypa.gov



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Wayne County Sheriff's Department

925 Court St.
Honesdale, PA 18431
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waynecountypa.gov/500/Sheriff



The county sheriff and deputies work with the Court of Common Pleas, arrest fugitives, assist other law enforcement agencies, issue concealed-carry permits and more.

Pike County Sheriff's Office

412 Broad St., Suite 5
Milford, PA 18337
570/296-6459
www.pikepa.org/courts__law/sheriff_s_office/index.php



The county sheriff handles bomb disposal, assists other law enforcement agencies and more.

Pike County Emergency Management

135 Pike County Blvd.
Lords Valley, PA 18428
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Develops and maintains programs that will help preserve lives and property in event of a disaster; organizes all locally available manpower, supplies, equipment and services needed for emergency readiness, response and recovery.



Illustration by Amanda Reed

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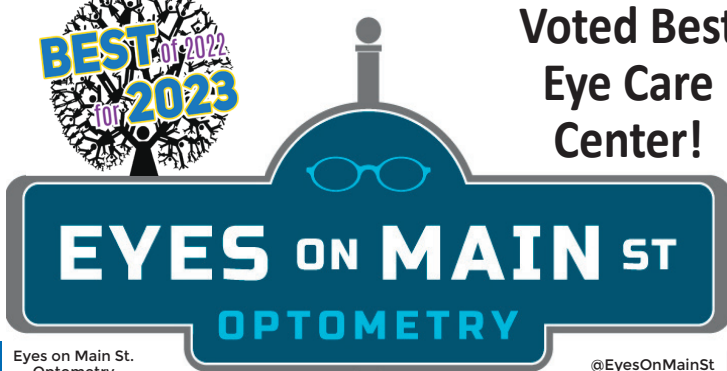
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Prepping for the worst

By TED WADDELL

SULLIVAN COUNTY, NY — “We respond to disasters and emergencies, and work hand-in-hand with all the other agencies,” replied John S. Hauschild, Sullivan County Fire Coordinator 53-1 when asked about disaster preparedness in the local region.

The Sullivan County Division of Public Safety is “charged with ensuring the safety and security of the citizens and government” of the county, and includes the Bureau of Fire, Bureau of Emergency Medical Services (EMS), the Office of Emergency Management/Homeland Security, and the 911 Center.

“In a disaster, we all come together, and activate the emergency operations center here at the Emergency Services Training Center”, he added.

The training center, located near Swan Lake, is under the supervision of Hauschild in his role of training coordinator, and serves fire, EMS, law enforcement (sheriff, state and local), and county government, providing in-service training. That includes how to respond to disasters, either natural or terrorist-inspired.

As an example of how multiple agencies work together in a natural disaster, he cited the storm on March 2018. Power companies teamed up with highway department crews to clear the roadways and restore power after high winds and heavy snowfall blocked roads and downed trees, which caused many electric lines to snap, cutting power to thousands of residents.

“We had NYSEG, Orange & Rockland and Central Hudson working with local highway departments. The county DPW [Department of Public Works] and state [Department of Transportation] assigned crews to go out and work together... If the power companies couldn’t get to their lines because the roads weren’t plowed, the guys couldn’t plow the roads because the lines were hot and trees were down... Everybody had to work together to make it safe.”



John Hauschild, Sullivan County fire coordinator, is pictured outside the Sullivan County Emergency Services Training Center.

RR photo by Ted Waddell

On the critical importance of disaster preparedness, Hauschild said, “People need to be aware of situations that could happen.” Common examples are fires, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, lightning, thunderstorms, tornadoes, wildfires, extreme heat and winter weather, he said.

In addition to natural disasters, folks should be aware of the life-disrupting effects

of cyberattacks and terrorist threats, both domestic and foreign.

Recalling the effects of Superstorm Sandy, the tail end of a hurricane that battered the region with high winds and rainfall, he noted that many residents were forced to use generators. If you use one, “make sure you have gas or propane... If you’re out of power for a couple of days, you don’t want

to run out of fuel.”

Hauschild noted that New York State Homeland Security and Emergency Services has published a comprehensive guide on how to prepare and survive emergencies titled “Emergency Information Handbook.”

“People need to be prepared before an emergency happens, and be aware of what can happen,” he said.

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PREPARED for an emergency

Emergencies can happen suddenly. Here are steps you should take so that your family is ready if something terrible happens.

Start here for the basics, and visit [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov) for more.

Make a plan: Create a disaster plan for your household that includes emergency contact information, evacuation routes and a meeting place in case you are separated. Practice the plan with your family or household members.

Pets too: Ensure your pets are safe too. See “And don’t forget your pets,” page 13.

Build an emergency kit: See “What’s in your go bag?,” page 15.

Stay informed: Sign up for emergency alerts and notifications through your local emergency management agency. Stay updated on the latest weather conditions and emergency alerts in your area. Sign up for local alerts and notifications.

Know whom to call: See the call list, pages 8-9.

Know your utilities: Can you turn off your home’s water, gas and electricity in case of an emergency? If not, take time to learn how.

Secure your home: Make sure your home is secure by installing smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguishers in key locations. For more, visit riverreporter.com/fire-ems.

Think about a backup power source: Consider investing in a generator or portable battery charger, in case of a power outage.

Stay connected: Keep your mobile devices fully charged, and have backup batteries or portable chargers available.

Safeguard your info: Store important information in a USB drive containing digital copies of important documents. You can also keep this information in a secure place in the cloud, or save paper copies in a waterproof container. See “Save your information,” at riverreporter.com/fire-ems.

Remember, being prepared can make a huge difference in how you and your family cope with an emergency.

Information from ready.gov.



Photo by Lawrence Aritao on Unsplash

Don't forget a can opener as you store canned goods.

Should I store food or other items?

If you have painful memories of the toilet paper shortage—or the supply-chain-related lack of another item—you might want to keep a supply of some things on hand.

Not all emergencies require you to evacuate. Maybe you’ll be at home, but the closest stores will be closed or inaccessible.

Make a list of items—such as toilet paper or toothpaste—that you use and replace regularly. Consider buying a few extra and saving them just in case.

When it comes to food—and we all have to eat—many people keep a supply of canned goods and other items on hand. This can be enough for a week, a month, three months—even a year or more.

Here is a basic list of what you could keep on hand. Books or sites about food storage can be very helpful, and can guide you in how to create food storage when your income is low, or how to store food in a limited space.

Consider these emergency food supplies

Choose foods your family will eat.

Remember any special dietary needs.

Ready.gov suggests the following items when selecting emergency food supplies. You may already have many of these on hand.

Ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits, vegetables and a can opener

Protein or fruit bars

Dry cereal or granola

Peanut butter

Dried fruit

Canned juices

Non-perishable pasteurized milk, such as Parmalat

High-energy foods

Food for infants

Comfort/stress foods

Food safety and sanitation

When the power goes out, especially in the summertime, refrigerated or frozen food can become unsafe to eat.

Bacteria in food grow rapidly at temperatures between 40 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit, and if these foods are consumed you can become very sick.

Remember, “When in doubt, throw it out.”

Eat—and replace—your stores, so you know the quality is good.

Learn more at www.cdc.gov/food-safety/food-safety-during-a-power-outage.html or at [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov).

Children and disasters

When you have kids, emergency management becomes even more critical. Your plan should include evacuation routes, designated meeting places and emergency contacts.

If possible, develop the plan with your kids.

Practice it with your family members.

Involve a child in creating a go bag.

Teach children about different types of disasters and what to do in each situation.

Explain the importance of staying calm and following the emergency plan.

Have a communication plan: In case of an emergency, ensure that your child knows how to contact you and other designated emergency contacts. Also, be sure that your child knows their home address and phone number. Emergencies can happen when you aren't together.

Practice safety measures: Teach your child basic safety measures, such as how to use a fire extinguisher, how to turn off the gas and water lines, and how to recognize danger signs.

Consider your child's specific needs. If your child has any special needs, ensure that your go bag or emergency kit includes medication, medical equipment and assistive devices.

Remember, the key to disaster preparedness for children is to involve them in the planning process. Educate them on what to do in case of an emergency and practice the emergency plan regularly.

Learn more at ready.gov/kids.



Photo by Freepik

And don't forget your pets

Pets are part of your family too, so make plans to take care of them in the event of a disaster.

Identify pet-friendly shelters in your area before an emergency occurs. Not all shelters accept pets, so it's important to have a backup plan in case you need to evacuate with your pets. Could a friend take the pet? Can you afford to stay in a motel that is pet-friendly? You can also consult your vet for suggestions.

Keep your pet's identification up to date: Make sure your pet is wearing a collar with identification tags that include your current contact information. Consider microchipping your pet to increase the chances of being reunited if you become separated during a disaster.

Prepare an emergency kit for your pet. Include enough food, water and supplies for at least three days. Ready.gov recommends a two-week supply of medications. Don't forget litter boxes for cats and pee pads for dogs, if necessary. Make sure you have a copy of your pet's medical records and vaccination records in the kit. And be sure the name and contact information for your vet is clearly marked. Include recent photos of your pet.

Keep handy one carrier or crate per pet in case you need to evacuate quickly. Make sure your pet is familiar with the carrier or crate and is comfortable spending time in it. (In other words, don't just take them to the vet in it.)

If you have a larger pet, provide a leash or harness so the pet can be transported safely.

Pet first aid: Your vet can advise best. But a pet first-aid kit could include a bag of storage-safe treats, antiseptic, triple antibiotic ointment, bandages and bandage scissors, liquid bandage spray, tweezers, hemostats, sterile purified water, syringes of saline solution, medical sponges/gauze pads, a small needle, paper tape, tongue depressors, a rectal fast-take thermometer, superglue, a small pair of safety scissors and a cone for their head.

Source: aspc.org, ready.gov.



Photo by charlesdeluvio on Unsplash

You love your animals. When you make plans for emergencies, don't forget the needs of your pets too.



Building a shelter: Whether it's finding natural shelter or building your own, being able to create a safe and secure shelter can protect you from the elements and help you maintain body heat.

Finding and purifying water: Being able to locate and purify water is essential to survival. Knowing how to filter and boil water can help prevent dehydration and illness.

Finding food: The Red Cross will distribute food and water during disasters. Contact your local agency to find out more. If foraging for food and water interests you, watch for local classes.

What if a disaster happens, and you're far from civilization?

Here are a few basic survival skills that can be important in an emergency situation. There are plenty of classes available; you can search online or ask friends or local first responders what they recommend. The **River Reporter** events calendar lists local classes in foraging as well.

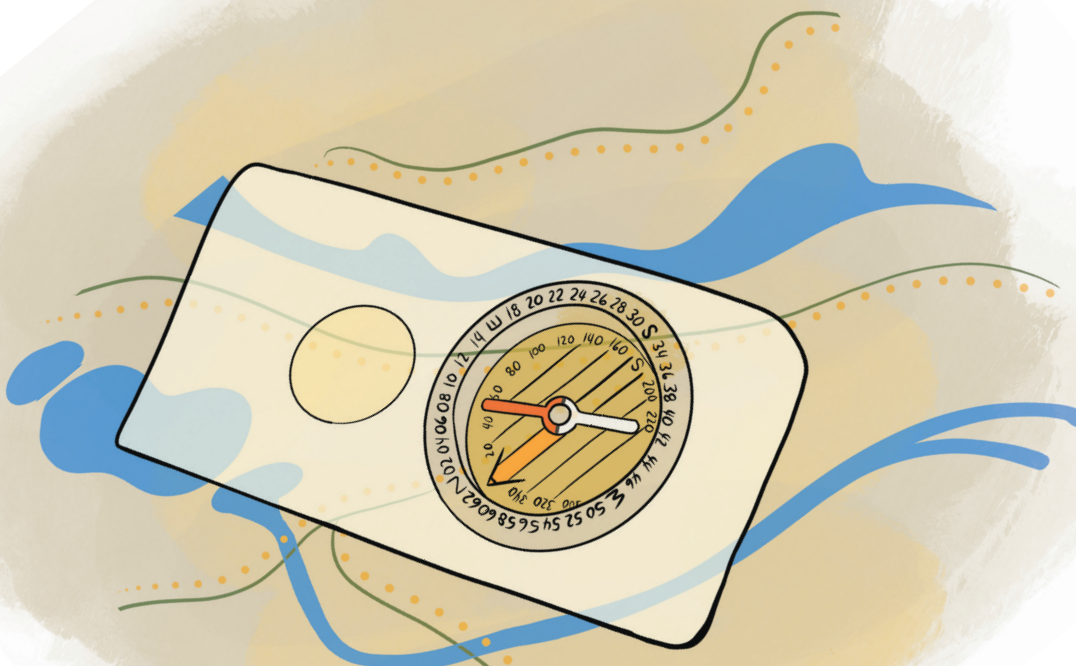


Starting a fire: Fire can provide warmth, light and a means to cook food. Knowing how to start a fire without matches or a lighter can be important in a survival situation. And knowing how to create a fire safely is just as important. Reach out to your local fire company for information on fire safety.

Basic first aid: Knowing how to dress wounds, control bleeding and perform CPR can be essential in an emergency. Check the Red Cross website for local classes.

Self-defense: Knowing basic self-defense techniques can help protect you from physical threats.

Navigation: Knowing how to read a map, use a compass and navigate without modern technology can help you find your way to safety.



What's in your go bag?

Go bags, aka emergency kits, can range from a basic three-day bag to multiple plastic tubs meant for a longer-term crisis.

What you choose to take is up to you. But **here are some items to consider:**

Water, at least one gallon per person per day for drinking and sanitation

All necessary family and pet medications. Ask your doctor or vet for an extra prescription's worth of each. Organize and protect your prescriptions, over-the-counter drugs and vitamins to prepare for an emergency.

Cash, in small bills. Cash machines can stop working, the cell network can go down, and credit cards might not work either. Cash was useful during Hurricane Sandy.

Quarters for washing machines

Instant coffee or tea

Several days' worth of non-perishable food per person

A first aid kit, including non-prescription medications such as pain relievers, anti-diarrhea medication, antacids or laxatives, as well as necessary medical devices

Cell phone and a way to keep it charged

Feminine hygiene items

Soap and laundry detergent

Prescription eyeglasses and contact lens solution

Infant formula, bottles, diapers, wipes and diaper rash cream

Flashlights and extra batteries

A radio and extra batteries

Whistle to signal for help

Dust mask, to help filter contaminated air

Plastic sheeting and duct tape, if you need to shelter in place

Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties, for personal sanitation

Wrench or pliers, to turn off utilities

Manual can opener, for food

Local maps

Consider adding the following items to your emergency supply kit based on your individual needs:

Soap, laundry detergent

Pet items: see "And don't forget your pets," page 13

Sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person

Complete change of clothing appropriate for your climate, plus sturdy shoes

Fire extinguisher

Matches in a waterproof container

Mess kits, paper cups, plates, paper towels and plastic utensils

Paper and pens

Books, games, puzzles or other activities for children

Keep the kit in a portable container or containers, and store in a designated location that is easily accessible.

Information from ready.gov.

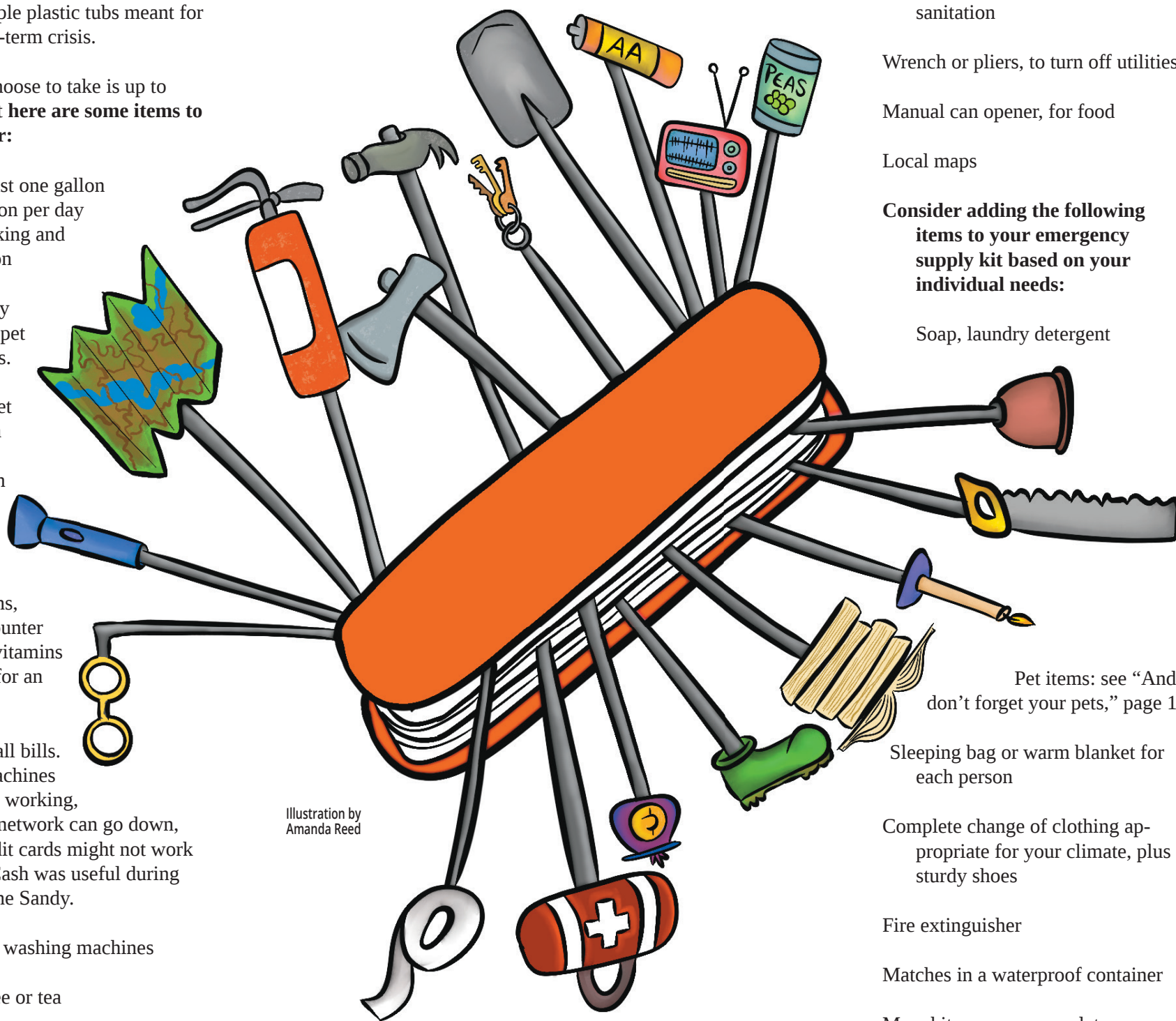


Illustration by Amanda Reed

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