**Plan. Prepare. Pass it on.**

Each spring the clock “springs forward” one hour, batteries get changed in smoke detectors and we scramble to file our taxes on time. This is also the time to make, or review, your Emergency Disaster Plan. Many of the same documents you use to complete your taxes are important to your Emergency Di­saster Plan. Creating an Emergency Disaster Plan does not have to be overwhelming or time-consuming.

On any ordinary day you may have some ideas about the hazards in your community that put you at risk, and how you would respond to those risks if they became actual emergen­cies. The key is to write down those hazards and your response plans.

**Plan**

Every good plan starts with a hazard analysis to determine the risks. This depends on where you live – in the country, in the state, and in your county. As a Florida resident, your risks are primarily from naturally occurring incidents: thunderstorms, lightning, structure fire, tornados, freshwater flooding, drought, wildfires and hurricanes.

Many of these risks are common and require small or minimal response on your part: staying indoors, clear­ing brush from around your home, or observing watering restrictions. A few, howev­er, are not as frequent but the effects are widespread and may require you to evacuate to another building or another area of the state.

Once you’ve made a list of the hazards you face, the next step is evaluate what you need in order to respond to those hazards. For some hazards this can be as simple as having a designated meeting place and phone number for family members to call should you become separated, an evacuation map of your home in case of fire, and a place where you will stay in case your home is damaged.

However, for the larger hazards, more planning will be needed because they have the potential to affect the entire community. It is for these events that you need to have supplies such as food, water, and medicine as well as copies of your important papers. You will also need to consider where you will find shelter out of the area, and if you have pets, whether they can stay with you. It is also important to plan for a place to temporarily call home in the event that your home is de­stroyed and resources are limited in your community afterwards.

**Prepare**

Now that you have identified what you will need to sur­vive the hazards you identified, take a look around your home. Check your pan­try. Is there enough food for three days that does not need to be cooked? If you have food must be cooked, do you have a gas or char­coal grill that you can use outside your home to cook with? As you go through your list of supplies, identify items that you can purchase in small amounts throughout the year to spread out the cost.

**Pass It On**

You have a plan and have taken your inventory of supplies and are preparing. Now, sit down with your family to talk through your Emergency Disas­ter Plan. Share the plan for each type of hazard, the expected response, and where important documents – including the plan – and supplies are located. Include any family or friends located out of the area who have a role in your plan, in the conversation. Encourage co-workers, friends and other family members to take some time to write down their Emergency Disaster Plan. Review your employer’s Emergency Disaster Plan to ensure you know what is expected of you during an emergency and if it may affect your Family Emergency Disaster Plan.

**Now What?**

Enjoy everything that Southwest Florida has to offer each day, prac­tice your Emergency Disaster Plan with your family at least once a year and review it at least once a year for any changes or additions. When hazards threaten your commu­nity, listen to your local Emergency Management agency and activate your Family Emergency Disaster Plan accordingly.

Most Importantly: Evacuate when ordered to do so by your Local Emergency Man­agement Agency. Also check with your local Emergency Management Agency for Family Emergency Disaster Plan assistance, and ask if they have a fill-in-the-blank template you can use to make it even easier to complete.

If you have a family member liv­ing in an assisted living facility, or nursing home, it is important to know what the Facility’s Emergency Plan covers.