

INTRODUCTION

This brochure is a ready reference for Australian households and provides clear advice and practical actions to prepare for and deal with a range of emergencies. A checklist of items to make up an emergency kit is included.

Australia has a first class emergency management system but any emergency puts strain on that system. The more that we as individuals can do to prepare ourselves, the more effectively the emergency services can direct their resources.

Knowing what to do makes it easier to stay calm and confident in an emergency situation. Preparation is the key to best help communities and households prepare for the unexpected.

CONTENTS

About Australia's Emergency Management System	Inside Front Cover
Foreword	1
Preparing for Emergencies	3
Involve your family or household.....	4
Store important documents safely.....	4
Learn about your own home.....	5
Find out about your local emergency services.....	5
Emergency call line.....	5
Learn some basic first aid.....	5
Find out about emergency plans.....	6
Prepare an emergency kit and keep it handy.....	6
What to Do if an Emergency Occurs	8
Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS).....	9
What to do in specific emergency situations.....	9
1. Bomb explosion.....	10
2. Fire.....	11
3. Receiving a suspicious package.....	11
4. Hazardous chemicals release.....	12
5. Biological agent release.....	14
6. Influenza pandemic.....	14
7. Radiological incident.....	15
8. Tsunami.....	15
9. Natural hazard events.....	16
If you are asked to evacuate your area.....	16
First Aid Tips	18
Six key steps.....	18
Bleeding.....	19
Burns.....	19
Shock.....	20
Injuries to muscles, bones and joints.....	20
How to Cope Emotionally	21
Natural reactions.....	21
What to do.....	22
Helping children.....	23
Where to Go for More Information	Inside Back Cover

PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES



What are the most important steps you can take?

Think about what might happen.

In thinking about what you and your family or household might do in an emergency, bear in mind that you may be in a situation where:

- you may be separated from each other, for example children at school and parents at work
- normal communications might be difficult or impossible
- power supplies may be cut
- you may be injured, and others may be injured or deceased
- there may be fire or other dangerous elements present, and
- information about the emergency may be limited in the early stages of the event.

Talk with your family, household members and neighbours about things you could do.



Consider some or all of the following suggested activities.

Involve your family or household

- Decide how family members will stay in touch in the event of, or after, an emergency.
- Agree on how you will contact each other if not at home, who will collect family members, and who will check on neighbours.
- Organise an out-of-town person your family or household members can contact in case you are separated. Make a list of that person's contact details (home, mobile and work phone numbers, e-mail) and provide them to your workplace and to your children's school.
- Agree on a place for family or household members to meet if separated.
- Make arrangements for pets to ensure they will be safe and have food and water.

Store important documents safely

Store important documents including wills, passports, photos, birth and marriage certificates, powers of attorney and insurance policies in a fire and water-proof container or safe deposit box. Review your insurance policies to ensure they are current and adequate. If you keep them in your home, try to take them with you if you evacuate. Consider arranging authorised copies to be kept at an alternate secure location.



Learn about your home

Find out how and where to turn off electricity, gas and water supplies in your home.

Find out about your local emergency services

Make a record of your local emergency telephone numbers (State or Territory Emergency Service, local council, gas, electricity, water etc. – refer to the front of your local phone directory) and keep them near your phone. To contact the State Emergency Service for practical assistance call 132 500.

Emergency call line

Dial 000 for police, fire and ambulance attendance during life or property threatening situations. If you have a hearing or speech impairment, dial 106 through your textphone (TTY) to obtain emergency service attendance. When notifying the emergency services of your location, ensure that you provide the exact street address and the nearest cross roads.

Learn some basic first aid

Knowing the basics of first aid can be very useful in any emergency and you are encouraged to enrol in an accredited first aid course. The information on pages 18 to 20 can help you to cope until professional medical assistance arrives.

Find out about emergency plans

Research emergency prevention, preparedness and response plans and procedures relevant to your area, and actively participate in emergency exercises.

- Your children's schools – find out if children will be kept at school or sent home on their own and how you can arrange for them to be picked up.
- Your workplace – check if your workplace has plans in place for emergency evacuations and find out what you are meant to do.
- Your apartment building – check if your apartment building has plans in place for emergency evacuations and who is responsible for those plans.
- Prepare your own home evacuation and emergency plan (ask your local emergency services for advice).

Local governments may also have plans affecting your area.

Prepare an emergency kit and keep it handy

Keep the items listed below in your home so they can become your emergency kit for use in all types of emergencies:

- battery-operated radio (with spare batteries)
- torch (with spare batteries), candles and waterproof matches
- first aid kit and manual, including personal protective equipment such as disposable gloves, face masks and goggles
- Medications (and repeat prescriptions), tissues, toiletry and sanitary supplies
- special needs for infants, the aged and people with disabilities
- spare clothes including strong shoes, broad brimmed hat, leather gloves and sunscreen for each household member
- sleeping equipment

- a mobile phone, spare battery and charger
- strong plastic bags (for clothing, valuables, documents and photographs)
- extra car and house keys
- copies of important family documents (birth certificates, passports and licences)
- contact details for your agreed out-of-town contact
- books, playing cards or games
- credit cards, key cards and cash, and
- a copy of this booklet.

If you have to remain in your home for several days following an emergency, and power, water or gas are not available, you should try to have the following at hand:

- duct or other wide tape and a sheet of plastic to seal doors and windows, scissors and a combination pocket knife
- fire blanket or fire extinguisher (seek fire service advice)
- barbeque or portable stove with fuel, and
- a quantity of clean water in a sealed container and enough easily prepared packaged food to last for at least three days (rotate supplies to prevent spoilage).

While many emergencies will only extend over a few days, some will last longer. For example the Australian food sector recommends planning for a 14-day stay at home by building and rotating food items in your pantry. An example of an emergency pantry planning list is available on the Australian food sector's website www.pantrylist.com.au. Naturally all households differ and you should customise the list to suit your needs.

If you live in an area where there is a high risk of bushfires, floods, cyclones or other natural hazards, emergency management agencies will advise on specific contents for an emergency kit. Your local council can advise whether your area is subject to those risks.

WHAT TO DO IF AN EMERGENCY OCCURS



If an emergency occurs in your presence where life or property is threatened, there are a number of things you can do.

- Call 000 (or dial 106 through TTY if you have a speech or hearing impairment) and request attendance by emergency services. **DO NOT** assume others will do this.
- **DO NOT** call 000 for information, as the operator will not be able to provide it.
- Seek reliable information about what is happening and advice from emergency services. This information may be provided:
 - in person by emergency services at the scene
 - via radio or television, or
 - by telephone from call centres set up to advise people about the specific event
 - telephone numbers will be broadcast over radio and television.

- Check for injuries. Attend to your own injuries first so you are able to help others. Seek medical assistance then consider the basic first aid tips mentioned on pages 18 to 20 until professional medical assistance arrives.
- Ensure that your family and neighbours are safe, especially those who are elderly or disabled or who may not understand English well.
- Call your out-of-town contact but keep the conversation short to free up the lines for others who need them.
- You may be advised to stay in your house or to evacuate, in either case, follow the advice given by emergency services as it will be tailored to the circumstances.
- Should evacuation be advised, remember to take all your prescribed medications (and repeat prescriptions), and your identification, credit and key cards and cash with you.
- Check for any damage to your home, including fires and gas leaks, and shut off electricity, gas and water if necessary. In darkness, use a torch to find them – **DO NOT** light matches or candles or turn on electrical switches.

Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS)

If you hear a wailing siren sound broadcast on radio or television anywhere in Australia, an urgent safety message is about to be made. It is very important to stop and listen to the message.



**Standard
Emergency
Warning
Signal**
stop & listen

What to do in specific emergency situations

The following guidelines outline steps to take in response to some specific emergency situations.



1. Bomb explosion

- Call 000 and ask for Police. Use landline telephones to call the Police.
- Turn off all unnecessary electronic transmitting equipment – radios, pagers, mobile phones etc. The use of communication equipment such as radios and mobile phones should be carefully considered in case of secondary devices.
- If applicable, get out of the building as quickly and calmly as possible. Follow building evacuation procedures, where applicable.
- In the event of falling debris, shelter under a sturdy table or desk until the situation has stabilised enough for your safe passage. When safe, leave quickly, watching out for weakened floors and stairs and overhead hazards.
- If trapped in debris, do not light a match. Cover your mouth with a handkerchief or clothing. Rhythmically tap on a pipe or wall so rescuers can hear where you are.
- Ensure your own safety before trying to help others.
- Stay away from tall buildings, glass windows and parked vehicles.
- Follow the instructions of the site wardens (where applicable) and emergency service officers.

2. Fire

- Call 000 and ask for Fire.
- Follow the directions of building fire wardens (where applicable).
- Stay low to the floor, as the smoke, poisonous gases and heat will rise to the ceiling.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a wet cloth and protect any exposed skin.
- Vacate the building as quickly and safely as possible and proceed to the agreed assembly area. Use the emergency exit to get out of the building – **DO NOT** use the lift.
- Do not go through closed doors that feel hot – there may be fire on the other side.
- If you cannot escape, try to alert rescuers to your presence.

3. Receiving a suspicious package

If you receive a package that appears to be out of the ordinary, for example, from an unknown source, or if it is badly wrapped or addressed, or has oily stains, or excessive weight or postage, **DO NOT** open or touch the package.

The following procedures apply whether you have opened the package or not:

- Leave the package where it is. **DO NOT** touch it or cover it. Quickly obtain as much information as possible for the Police without touching the package.
- Get everyone out of the room and close the door. Isolate the room and prevent others from entering. Keep people who were in the room together but away from others. If you are able, turn off the air conditioning.
- Call 000 and ask for Police.
- Make a list of people who were in the room to give to authorities when they arrive.
- If applicable, alert the building security staff or floor warden.
- Wait in a safe place until emergency services arrive and follow their instructions.

- If possible, wash your hands with soap and water. Do not touch your mouth and eyes with your hands.
- If you are experiencing any immediate physical symptoms call 000 and ask for Ambulance.

4. Hazardous chemicals release

Hazardous chemicals can be released by accident or by a deliberate criminal act. They range from household chemicals and more toxic industrial chemicals through to highly toxic chemical warfare agents.

Exposure could cause serious or fatal injury. Emergency services will identify the hazard and tell you what to do. You may be asked to either, remain in the protection of your home or workplace and seal windows and doors, or to evacuate the area.

If the chemicals are heavier than air, emergency services may ask you to move to higher ground.

For your safety, in all circumstances, listen to advice from emergency services.

If a spill or other chemical release occurs it is important to:

- stay away from the scene
- attempt to get upwind of the contaminated area, and
- call 000 and ask for Fire.

If you are asked to stay inside your home:

- stay inside and close and lock all windows and external doors – however, ensure your keys are readily available, or that you have an accessible escape route if you need to evacuate
- if advised by emergency services, turn off all fans, heating and air conditioning systems (remember to consider your automated air circulation systems, if you have them)
- close the fireplace vent
- close internal doors to reduce air movement
- gather your emergency kit and make sure the radio is working



- go to an internal room, ideally one at ground level with no windows
- if advised to do so, use duct tape or other wide tape to seal all cracks around the doors and any vents into the room – seal over windows with plastic and tape; and
- continue to monitor your radio or television until you are told all is safe or you are advised to evacuate. Emergency services may later call for the evacuation of specific areas in your community and issue specific instructions.

If you believe a toxic chemical has been released in an enclosed space such as a tunnel, underground railway or a building:

- move away quickly to an upwind location nearby to avoid the spread of contamination and try not to inhale fumes
- call 000 and ask for Fire
- if you have any of the chemical on you or your clothes, avoid touching your mouth and eyes – remove your outer clothing and do not leave the area. For your own safety and that of others you will then need to be decontaminated by emergency services before you receive any medical treatment that may be necessary
- to assist emergency services to identify the chemical, keep track of your symptoms including your breathing, heart rate, perspiration, dizziness, blurred vision, skin tones and deliriousness, and report them as soon as possible; and
- use caution in helping others who may be contaminated as you may become affected.



5. Biological agent release

Biological agents are bacteria, viruses or biological toxins that can be released by accident or deliberately dispersed in a population to cause injury or death. Some are infectious and can be passed from person to person.

If biological agents are released without any warning, the first indication that a release has taken place may be the reporting of symptoms by those affected, which can be several days later. If you experience any unusual symptoms, you should seek medical attention.

If you are at a site where emergency services advise that there has been a deliberate release of a biological agent, you should comply with their directions.

You may need to be decontaminated to remove any agent from your clothing and skin. Emergency services and health authorities will assess and manage the risks for anyone who has potentially been exposed to a biological agent.

Health authorities may recommend treatment with antibiotics if you have been exposed. Pay close attention to all official health instructions.

6. Influenza pandemic

The Department of Health and Ageing states that an influenza pandemic occurs when:

“... a new strain of influenza virus emerges, spreading around the globe and infecting many people at once. An influenza virus capable of causing a pandemic is one that people have no natural immunity to, can easily spread from person to person, and is capable of causing severe disease in humans.”

For preparedness actions relating to influenza pandemic refer to the Department of Health and Ageing website www.health.gov.au or phone 1800 020 103.

7. Radiological incident

The likelihood of a radiological incident of any kind is extremely remote due to the stringent controls in place for the movement and use of radioactive materials.

However, a radiological emergency could result from either an accidental or deliberate release of radioactive materials. Exposure to radiation can have serious adverse health effects.

If you are outside at the time of the incident:

- move away and upwind of the incident site
- call 000 and ask for Fire
- wait for instructions from emergency services
- if you think you have been contaminated, ensure you advise emergency services on their arrival; and
- you may have to undergo preliminary decontamination under supervision of emergency services, including removal of your outer clothing and rinsing your hair and body in a shower.

If you are inside at the time of the incident, remain inside and follow the instructions mentioned on pages 12 and 13 about a chemical release.

Public health authorities will assess the risk from radiation exposure quickly and will implement measures to limit the dangers.

8. Tsunami

The warning signs of tsunami vary between events depending on a number of factors, including how far away the tsunami was generated. For example, evidence of a large undersea earthquake may be felt prior to a tsunami by an ongoing shaking of the ground in coastal regions. As a tsunami approaches shorelines, the sea level may, but not always, recede/drop dramatically before returning as a fast-moving wall of water. A roaring sound may also precede the arrival of tsunami.

If you suspect that a tsunami is approaching, or are warned by the media or government authorities that a tsunami is approaching, then:

- evacuate immediately to higher ground or well away from the water's edge
- do not go towards the water to watch a tsunami. Tsunami reach the shore many times faster than normal wind driven waves, and if you are close enough to observe one, it is likely that you are not far enough away to escape
- wait at a safe place for several hours or until an appropriate official issues the 'all clear'. The tsunami may arrive within 30 minutes of the earthquake or other warning sign. The backwash of a tsunami is also dangerous. As the large volume of water pushed onto land recedes back towards the ocean it may carry debris and people back to sea with it, and
- stay out of the water. Even a very small tsunami causes strong turbulence and dangerous currents.

9. Natural hazard events

The Australian Government, State/Territory and local governments produce a range of community education and preparedness publications relating to natural hazards, such as floods, cyclones, severe storms, bushfires, earthquakes and landslides. Check with your local emergency service organisation, local government office, or local library, or visit the Emergency Management in Australia website www.ema.gov.au for current information.

If you are asked to evacuate your area

- When directed by emergency services, turn off the electricity, gas and water, unplug appliances, lock doors and windows.
- Take your emergency kit with you, including important documents, or as much as you can manage.
- Listen for emergency warnings and safety advice on radio or television.
- Leave as quickly as possible as you may become more endangered the longer you stay.



- Allow for special needs of infants, the aged and people with disabilities.
- Consider your pets.
- Wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, a hat and sturdy shoes (preferably all made from natural fibres) so you can be protected as much as possible.
- If you have a mobile phone, take it with you, along with a spare battery or charger.
- Collect family members or go to your agreed meeting place.
- Use travel routes specified by emergency services. Do not use shortcuts because certain areas may be impassable or dangerous.
- Stay away from fallen power lines.
- If you go to an evacuation or relief centre, register your details at the registration desk.
- If you evacuate to a relative or a friend's house, consider registering with the local evacuation centre to help others find you.
- Call your out-of-town contact and let them know where you are going.
- Follow the instructions issued by emergency services.
- When you return to your home after being told it is safe to do so, open windows to provide ventilation.

If you plan to self-evacuate prior to an imminent emergency event, ensure it is safe to do so, follow emergency service advice and leave early taking into consideration all the points above.

FIRST AID TIPS

Please remember the basic first aid steps set out below are not a complete first aid guide. Knowing the basics of first aid can be very useful and you are encouraged to enrol in an accredited first aid course. The best people to handle any medical emergency are health professionals.

Six key steps

If someone is injured, six key steps will help keep everyone at the scene as safe as possible until professional help arrives.

1. Make sure the situation is safe, for example, keep clear of power lines, gas, smoke and fire.
2. If the injured person is unconscious and not responding, or if the incident has not otherwise been reported, call 000 immediately and ask for Ambulance.
3. If the person is not breathing, remove any blockage to the airway. If you (or any bystander) have the necessary skills, commence cardiopulmonary resuscitation.
4. Attend to severe bleeding or shock, and then care for injuries to muscles, bones and joints. Use gloves where available.
5. Monitor the injured person's condition while waiting for professional assistance to arrive.
6. Help the person rest in the most comfortable position and give reassurance.



Bleeding

- Cover the wound with a dressing or clean cloth and place direct pressure on it.
- Encourage the person to lie down if necessary.
- Raise the injured part above the level of the heart, but take great care if you suspect a broken bone.
- Cover the dressing with a bandage to hold it in place.
- If the bleeding does not stop, apply additional dressings, pads and bandages on top of existing ones.

Burns

- Cool the burn with plenty of clean, cold running water.
- Do not break blisters.
- Gently remove rings, watches, belts or tight clothing (unless sticking to the burn).
- Cover burned areas with dry, clean, non-stick dressings or cloth.
- Treat for shock as required.



Shock

- Encourage the person to lie down.
- Keep the victim from getting either cold or overheated.
- Raise the legs about 30cm, if you don't suspect broken bones.
- Do not give food or drink.

Injuries to muscles, bones and joints

- Rest the injured part. Avoid movements that cause pain.
- Immobilise the injured part before moving the victim or giving additional care.
- Apply ice or a cold pack to reduce swelling and pain.
- Raise the injured area to slow the flow of blood and reduce swelling.

HOW TO COPE EMOTIONALLY

People react to emergencies in many ways. You need to understand that your emotional reactions may change.

Natural reactions

During or following the emergency you may experience a range of physical, behavioural and emotional reactions. This is common and normal.

Reactions may include:

- shock and disbelief, or increased focus
- fear and anxiety, including shaking, nausea, diarrhoea and difficulty in breathing
- helplessness, or hope/strength
- guilt or shame
- horror, and
- depression, anger and grief.

These reactions may change, be delayed, or may not occur – everyone is different.



What to do

Keeping calm may help to control your fear and actions. Remember that someone may need your help and that you may also need help. If you are feeling particularly anxious or frightened, follow this advice:

- keep your family together wherever possible
- shelter and safety are a priority in the coming hours and days
- comfort each other and support those who are with you or have come together during or after the emergency - everyone will react differently
- focus on your feelings and thoughts - talk calmly about them with family or friends who you can easily talk with
- focus on what practical tasks you and your family can do - practical actions are helpful and will lessen anxiety
- monitor information from emergency services by listening to your radio or television – **DO NOT** continuously watch disturbing footage on television. If necessary, take turns listening to the news with other adult members of your family or household
- if separated from family members, find out where they are and arrange to reunite with them when it is safe to do so; and
- when the danger has passed, check your neighbours are safe.



Helping children

After an emergency, children are often afraid that the event will happen again, someone will get hurt or injured, they will be separated from the family, or that they will be left alone. Children may also appear to be coping better than they are.

Children are generally resilient. To help children cope:

- comfort and re-assure them
- keep them with you
- explain what is happening and what they may be feeling
- encourage them to talk, draw and play about what happened, and respond simply and clearly to their questions
- let them help
- avoid exposure to excessive television replays of events, and
- provide normal activities such as school and shared family activities as soon as possible, when safety is assured.

Positive actions and attitudes, and comforting yourself and others, will help adults, families and children deal with emergencies. However, should feelings become too intense or persistent after the emergency, consult your local health service. State and Territory health authorities have professionals who can help you deal with these normal reactions to an emergency.

Additional information is provided in the Australian Red Cross brochure *'Coping with a Major Personal Crisis'*, which is available at website www.redcross.org.au

