



FAMILY COMMUNICATION PLANS ARE CRITICAL DURING DISASTERS

DON'T CHANCE LOSING CONTACT WITH YOUR LOVED ONES

When disasters of the magnitude of Superstorm Sandy and Hurricane Katrina occur, it's a scary situation for everyone, but particularly for children, the elderly and those with special needs.

And while we can't predict the whims of Mother Nature, with a little planning we can be better prepared to handle the challenges such an event presents. The most important first steps to take is to develop a family communications plan that every member of the family can rely on should another disaster occur.

Here are a few tips on reducing the worry and stress that naturally arises when you're unable to get in touch with those you love:

- Complete a contact form for each member of your family that includes name, address, and home, work and cell numbers for family members. Include the name of a neighbor or relative who is willing to respond in an emergency.
- Agree on a meeting place in your neighborhood as well as out of town where family members can gather should you be unable to go home.
- Identify a family member or friend who lives out-of-state who can act as a central contact for household members to notify that they are safe. It may be easier to make an out-of-town call than to get a local connection.
- Be sure that every member of your family knows the phone number of that contact person, has a cell phone, or carries change or a prepaid phone card to be used in an emergency.
- Family members can program an "ICE" (In Case of Emergency) number in their phone. If you or a family member is injured, emergency personnel can use that number to contact your family or friends. Be sure to alert the person you choose that you are designating him or her as your emergency contact.
- Teach family members how to use text messaging. Text communications can often get through when phone calls fail.
- Subscribe to alert services. Many communities relay emergency messages to residents via phone calls, emails and text alerts. Once you have created your family communications plan, practice your plan once or twice a year. That way, should an actual disaster happen, you'll be comfortable with the routine and ready to act. AND, don't forget to update information regularly.