

8/25/07

## **National Preparedness Month – September 2007:**

### **FIRST THINGS TO DO PART II:**

#### **Household Emergencies**

By John Cavanagh and Anne Malia

Emergencies in the home can range from very serious situations that encompass an entire area or neighborhood, to small emergencies that may only effect one person in a family. Either way, emergency situations need to be taken seriously and handled properly. Sometimes, your common sense might tell you to do something that is not the best possible solution in an emergency – which is why it is absolutely necessary to learn the first steps to take in each different type of situation.

#### **First Things To Do In A Thunderstorm or Hurricane**

Unfortunately, many fatalities occur each year from people who do not take thunderstorms seriously. Even in storms that you may not think are very dangerous, there is still a risk of electrical shock or being struck by lightning. Following these simple steps can ensure that you and your family will be safer during storms:

1. As soon as you hear of an oncoming storm, gather all family members inside the house – preferably, as close to the center of the house as possible, away from windows.
2. Secure outside objects, such as lawn furniture or garbage cans, which could blow away and cause damage or injury to others.
3. Gather candles, flashlights, and a battery powered radio so that if the power goes out, you will not have to search for these supplies in the dark. (Ideally, they should already be kept in a place that is known and easily accessible to all family members.)
4. Try to avoid: taking baths and showers, watching television, and running an air conditioner. All of these things put you more at risk for electric shock. Telephones should be used in emergencies only.

8/25/07

**REMEMBER:** If the power goes out during extreme cold or extreme heat, your home may not be safe to occupy without working heat or air conditioning. Call your town or city's information hotline to see about emergency shelter options.

### **First Things To Do In A Household Fire:**

Home fires are one of the most common household emergencies. Knowing the proper steps to take if fire strikes your home can be extremely important, and may save your life:

1. Take the fastest and least dangerous route out of the house. Do not stop to collect personal belongings or to call the fire department. Shut doors behind you to help contain the flames.
2. Once outside, call 911 or ask a neighbor to.
3. Get to your preplanned family meeting place. Figure out whom, if anyone, is left in the house. Talk to other family members about what room he or she might be in to you can help direct firefighters.
4. Do not go back inside for **anything**. Firefighters, when they arrive, will assist others out of the house.

**REMEMBER:** If a piece of furniture catches fire in your home, especially plastic-foam upholstered furniture, do not attempt to put it out. The smoke and fumes from burning plastic foam are *extremely* toxic and can kill in less than two minutes. Instead, get out of the room immediately! Be sure to close the door behind you to prevent the spreading of smoke and fire. Call 911 and report the fire immediately.

### **First Things To Do About A Burning Appliance or Electrical Socket**

Knowing how to deal with a burning appliance or socket could mean the difference between life and death. This type of fire is small and if dealt with properly, can be put out without causing much damage to your home or family. Following the steps below will allow you to help ensure that a small fire like this does not turn into a larger house fire:

8/25/07

1. Switch off the electricity in the main fuse box or pull out the plug if it is far enough away from the appliance itself. **DO NOT** use the switch to turn it off.
2. If the appliance is anything other than a TV or computer, you may use a fire extinguisher. Since televisions and computers can hold residual electricity even after the power supply has been cut off, **NEVER** use a fire extinguisher or water, or you risk electrocution. Instead, smother it with a blanket, rug, or fire blanket if one is available.

**REMEMBER:** It is important for every member of the family to know where the fuse box is located and how it works. In an emergency like this, you do not have the luxury of taking your time to find out where the fuse box is in your home.

### **First Things To Do In A Household Chemical Emergency**

Chemical emergencies in the home are very common when families are not careful about where they keep cleaning supplies, pesticides, paints, automotive products, and other toxic chemicals.

In order to prevent chemical emergencies, families should locate possibly hazardous items and lock them carefully out of reach of children, as well as away from heat and flames. Doing this can help stop chemical emergencies before they start; but in the case that one does occur, here are the first things that you should do:

1. If there is danger of a fire or explosion, get out of the house immediately. Call 911 only once you are safely outside. If you think there may be toxic fumes being emitted, stand upwind and away from the house.
2. If a person has been poisoned by or exposed to a household chemical, find any containers of the substance and call the Poison Control Center: (800) 222-1222. Having a container with a label will allow you to provide them with information that can help them to better assist you.
3. Do not simply follow the first aid advice on the label of a substance – it could be out of date or inappropriate. Instead, be sure to call the Poison Control Center and follow the operator's instructions carefully.

8/25/07

There are an endless number of household emergencies that can occur and it is your responsibility to protect yourself and your family. Preparing is one of the most important steps, but sometimes emergencies occur no matter how prepared we may be – that is why it is important to know the first and most important things to do during any emergency.

## **Resource 22 – Household Emergencies:**

**HOUSEHOLD EMERGENCIES: Be Prepared**  
<http://www.palatine.il.us/publicwrks/emergency.html>

This website offers different steps to take in case of household emergencies. It is organized by the many types of emergencies that can occur, such as gas leaks, power failures, wind damage, tornado warnings, and water emergencies.

TOMORROW: Emergency Preparedness in Non-English Speaking Families

**John Cavanagh** is Communications Director for Bridge Multimedia and Chief Researcher for Emergency Information Online.

**Anne Malia** writes about technology and emergency preparedness for people with special needs and has contributed to the production of [EmergencyInfoOnline.org](http://EmergencyInfoOnline.org) and [EdTechOnline.org](http://EdTechOnline.org).

**Article inquiries welcome.** On request, we can provide feature-length articles tailored to your audience and requirements. **Please contact John Cavanagh at Bridge Multimedia: (212) 213-3740 or [jcavanagh@bridgmultimedia.com](mailto:jcavanagh@bridgmultimedia.com).**