

"Be disaster aware, take action to prepare!" September is National Preparedness Month and we focused last week on how to "Make a Plan"! I noted that there are four universal building blocks of emergency preparedness that FEMA suggests we focus on this coming month – Be informed, Make a Plan, Build a Kit and Get Involved. This week, we focus on How to Build a Kit.

Don't let me lose you yet!! I know you've already read about how to build a kit. I've written about building your emergency kit over and over again! You already know what needs to be included in it, right? One way to make it a little more interesting to prepare is to pack like you're going away to a vacation destination that only has a very expensive gift shop! Of course, you'd want to carry your money, credit cards, medications, makeup, personal care items and clothing. That's a wonderful way to begin! However, you would need to add a few more items to your list if you were really going to a place that didn't offer your favorite soda, had no bank, or had no electricity. Let's build on those needs, and let's consider how long we might plan on staying in such a place!

Personally, if there's no electricity and no banking system, I probably don't have any plans to be there – but then again, people don't usually choose to be affected by a disaster! (Of course there ARE responders and volunteers who DO choose to go to disasters to help victims and others!) Whatever the situation, we will focus on what we might need to have on hand to meet our basic needs for at least 72 hours. That can be very different for you and me, so our "Kits" may be very different, too!

A young couple with a baby needs to plan ahead for all of their needs. Their kit would probably include several packages of diapers, baby wipes, infant formula and food, along with blankets, pillows, mosquito spray, cash and water for starters. An elderly couple's kit might include medications, baby wipes, food, blankets, pillows, mosquito spray, cash and water, too. Although neither of these families may need to use the information, both should have prepared more than these obvious items. In times of disaster, it's usually too late to put together a list of your financial holdings, copies of credit cards, copies of deeds, titles, birth certificates, and the like. This is also part of building your kit!

You may be familiar with the term "Continuity of Operations Plan". Every person, family and/or business should have one! Think of how you would continue to thrive as a unit, family or a business if your records were completely wiped out! Would you have backup documentation somewhere that you could access if your home or business were lost? We should. Our emergency kit is a great place to have a reference to that plan. For example, a notebook or jump drive containing your banking information and passwords could be vital for family members to begin rebuilding after a disaster. Be sure to encrypt your information if using a digital device. Insurance policy information, prescription information, doctors and contact information, medical history, and land ownership documentation may need to be accessible. All of this information doesn't necessarily need to be IN your kit, but you need to have a record of where to find it and a hard copy somewhere off-site. For example, several medical facilities offer online access for their patients. Patients can see information on their medical visits, diagnosis, etc., by logging on to their provider's site. It's always a good idea to have a hard copy in a safe deposit box, but sometimes online access can get your information to you when you need it most. Go ahead, start building that kit, and Be Safe Out There!