

# Family First

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It is great that many of us give of our time and volunteer in ARES or similar organizations. However, all too often many volunteers run out the door to help other and leave their family stranded, in peril, or at risk.

We are responsible to ensure the safety and well-being of our families and ourselves first and foremost during any disaster. Doing otherwise could cause you to become part of the problem, instead of part of the solution. It can be a serious distraction because you are thinking about them and wondering if they are OK. This is dangerous to those you serve and those you are trying to help.

Steps to put Family First:

1. Identify and learn about potential hazards and emergencies your family could face where you live: thunderstorms (lightning), tornadoes, micro-bursts, torrential downpours, floods, hail, windstorm, freezing rain, fire, wildfire, winter storms, extreme heat, extreme cold, droughts/famine, earthquakes, explosion, hazardous materials spill, terrorism, medical epidemic, rail car derailment with unknown potential for exposure. Think about those incidences that could cause you to be separated (1-2 day) from you family if you work in a different part area than where you live.
2. Hope for the best and plan for the worst. Prepare for the surprises that nature can muster up for us as well as events induced by mankind.
3. Be proactive and mitigate any risks you can, if possible. Do this beforehand. Having to act reactively does not produce the best result. Clearly you cannot mitigate every situation that can occur, but you should take steps to remedy as many potential issues as you can. Such as, you have ignored a crack in your roof, which could expand and become an issue during the next heavy rain.
4. Make arrangements with someone with the needed skills, who lives and works near your family that could check on and help them out if you can not get home for some reason. You may need to do the same thing for someone else that has family close to where you work.
5. Make sure you have the supplies with you in case you can not get home for a few days.
6. Does your community, school, or workplace have an emergency plan?
  1. Shelter?
  2. Medical facilities?
7. Create a family disaster plan
  1. Decide whether to evacuate or shelter in place
  2. Keep gas tanks topped off, and spare gas in appropriate containers. Alternative transportation.
  3. Listen to a radio for instructions
  4. Evacuate if instructed, use established routes, and exercise caution in case of washed out roads, down power lines, flood waters, hazardous gas releases.
  5. Don't leave and get trapped.
  6. Keep maps, compass, GPS in your car.
  7. Have cash available in smaller denominations.
  8. Warning systems and signals
  9. Have a emergency communications plan for your family in case communications where you live fail. Use someone outside your geographical area as a message center for your family. Give family members HAM operators' contact information at both ends.
  10. Insurance and other vital or medical records

11. Electric, gas and water utility shutoffs
8. Be aware of Special needs: ones familiar and others not so familiar.
  1. Hearing impaired
  2. Mobility impaired
  3. Visually impaired or blind
  4. Mentally handicapped
  5. Young children, or the elderly
  6. Special medical needs
  7. Single working parent
  8. People with no vehicles
  9. Special dietary needs
  10. Non-English speaking
  11. Caring for animals
9. Assemble a disaster kit or kits.
10. Practice the plan!
  1. Talk about what might happen and what the family will do in a disaster.
  2. Test and maintain your communications plan.

In some ways, living in Lee County has put us in a less prepared or handicapped position because most of what we have dealt (weather) with we have advance notice of. However, there are several disasters that we could experience that will not give any lead time. The February freeze of 2021 was much worse than many thought it would be. One way to help prepare for the unexpected is to learn from the preparations that those who live in earthquake areas have made – or who failed to prepare! Also remember that no matter how well you prepare, you are going to need to be flexible for the specific situation. Ensure that you have what is needed to allow and facilitate that flexibility both in knowledge, ingenuity, and materials.

Practice the Boy Scout motto: **Be Prepared!**