

# ***YOUR PREPAREDNESS FACT***

**This Week**

## ***How Well Do You Know Your Neighbors?***



Along with the changing times, our relationships with our immediate neighbors are not like the “good ole days.” Forty years ago, the majority of women were not working outside of the home, and thus there was a closeness with our neighbors that extended beyond the “Hey, how are you doing?”

We had so much time for each other back then. We felt more like a family. Where have those days gone? Unless we need to borrow something, are having car trouble, need someone to watch the kids in a bind, or your power goes out and you want to know if theirs has too, we really don’t communicate much any more with our neighbors do we? Maybe you are surrounded by apartments or rental houses where no one stays long enough to get to know them, or your neighbors may have such conflicting work schedules that you are like ships that pass in the night.

Whatever the case may be, did you know that you could include your neighbors as part of your emergency plan? Think about it for a moment. You can double your power by teaming up, **“networking”** if you will. Organized neighborhoods can bring about a stronger sense of security. Rather than just planning for yourself, how about making a secondary plan; pulling together as a neighborhood. What if something was to happen to the adults in your household, but your children were left alone? Would your neighbors know to look for who is missing, or injured? Who would account for them? Maybe you or your neighbors have special needs that others are not aware of (i.e. special medications or medical conditions, the elderly, people living alone, small children, etc). The reality of any emergency/disaster is that professional help may be hours, even days away depending on the severity of the incident, and you may not be able to wait for help to come.

This is where you and your neighbors come into play. A neighborhood network can empower you to become more effective in helping each other within minutes and hours after a disaster. Like a “neighborhood watch” program, you can become one strong team. For businesses, your neighbors are of course those community partners that you have a standing relationship. Rather than

just planning for yourself, how about pulling together as a neighborhood/community. Just think of all the scenarios where you might need the help of another human being.

## *How to get started*

In your neighborhood, you may not have very much success getting families to buy into your plan of networking, and that is ok. You can start out small with 2-3 other families besides yours and go from there.

- **Contact the families** you think will be interested and arrange an informal meeting.
- **Discuss the types of disasters** that are most likely to happen in your area and how, as a neighborhood, you can help one another in case of a disaster; natural or otherwise.
- **Identify the skills** (ex: medical, technology, language) and equipment (i.e. chain saws, generators, ropes, car jack, water pumping mechanism) each neighbor has that can be helpful in an effective response.
- Discuss if you want to go in and purchase **supplies** as a group, or as families.
- **Discuss the special needs** such as those listed above, including a list of doctors and prescription information. How would you help these neighbors in an evacuation or other emergency?
- Don't forget to discuss planning for your **pets** too!
- Talk about the possibility of **taking first aid and CPR training** as a family or group.



**The more neighbors you can convince to prepare, the greater your group resources!**

## ***Get Organized!***

- After you have your first meeting, you might want to designate a captain for direction/information purposes only. When working with other families on a topic such as disasters, you have to try to be sensitive to each family's feelings and beliefs. Let families make their own decisions without causing them to feel guilty or apart from the group. The captain's role would probably be more like a liaison.
- Each family within the group should have a copy of each other's emergency contact list, including those out-of-town contacts. This list should include emergency response numbers and those of relatives and friends that can be notified in case of a disaster. It is also best if each family keeps their list next to each telephone.
- Teach children how and when to dial 911. You might want to write a script for them to follow that contains their name and address so they can convey the necessary information clearly to the call taker.
- Determine the best escape routes from your neighborhood.
- Document work and school schedules to support accountability for each neighbor/family member involved should someone appear missing.
- Find out where each family's utility shutoffs are and how to turn them off. Create a neighborhood/household map for each family involved.
- Create an inventory of each family's equipment and skills that can be contributed as discussed in your first meeting.

## ***Maintaining***

- **Schedule an annual meeting** preferably in September after school begins when you have the new school schedule, or you might want to meet twice a year – when the time changes.
- **Go over all your lists** and inventory for any additions or corrections.
- **Network** - In between meetings, each family could try to get one more families in the neighborhood involved in your network group.
- **Educate them**, let them know what your group is doing and answer any questions they may have. I think a great idea would be to have a neighborhood pot luck/block party in the spring/summer time and have a more casual, enjoyable setting for the top of conversation.



**Remember:**

However you decide to get started, organized and maintain your neighborhood network group, just remember, it's ok to start out with a small group. As long as you have the basics, you are on your way to becoming an empowered and more effective neighborhood. Like the saying goes, **“There is safety in numbers”**. **How safe are you?**

