



Governor Proclaims February 20, "Family Protection Day"

Governor Sonny Perdue has proclaimed the week of February 19-25, as *Severe Weather Awareness Week* in Georgia. Encouraging Georgians to practice emergency preparedness and response procedures for severe weather events such as winter storms, floods, hurricanes, lightning, thunderstorms, tornadoes, heat waves and drought, is the goal of the *Severe Weather Awareness Week* observance.

"The first big event of the week is *Family Protection Day* on Monday, February 20," says Office of Homeland Security-Georgia Emergency Management Agency (OHS-GEMA) Assistant Director Charley English. "That's the time for everyone, from families and neighbors, to employers and employees, to teachers and students to plan and rehearse what they would do during the first 72-hours of any severe weather-related event or disaster," English added.

During some situations, such as winter storms, floods, tornadoes or hurricanes, it may take emergency teams at least 72-hours or more to reach certain areas in order to open roadways and restore utilities. The benefit of being self-sufficient for 72-hours, or longer, is that you and your family can survive circumstances that might be fatal, if you were not prepared.

"With a little effort, families can prepare for all severe weather hazards affecting our area and step number one is to develop a family disaster plan," said English.

Where will you and other family members be when severe weather or disaster strikes? Whether you are at work, at school, in the car or out-of-town, how will you find or contact each other? How will you know if your children are safe? Severe weather or a disaster may force an evacuation of your neighborhood or confine you to your home. What will you do if basic your utilities – water, gas, electricity, or telephones -- are cut off? These are the types of questions your family disaster plan must address in order to help protect your family.

Follow these basic steps to develop a family disaster plan . . .

- **Gather information about hazards.**

In addition to your local emergency management agency (EMA), you may contact the nearest National Weather Service office, or the American Red Cross. Find out what type of disasters could occur and how you should respond. Learn the community's warning signals and evacuation plans.

- **Meet with your family to create a plan.**

Discuss the information you have gathered. Pick two places to meet: a spot right outside your home for an emergency, such as fire, and a place away from your neighborhood in case you cannot return home. Choose an out-of-state friend as your "family check-in contact" for everyone to call if the family gets separated. Discuss what you would do if advised to evacuate.

- **Implement your plan.**

1. Post emergency telephone numbers by phones.
2. Install safety features in your house, such as a NOAA Weather Radio, smoke detectors and fire extinguishers.
3. Inspect your home for potential hazards: such as items that can move, fall, break or catch fire; and, correct them.
4. Have family members learn basic safety measures: such as CPR and first-aid; how to use a fire extinguisher; and, how and when to turn off water, gas and electricity in your home.
5. Teach children how and when to call 9-1-1 or your local Emergency Medical Services number.
6. Keep enough supplies in your home to meet your family's needs for at least three days.
7. Assemble a disaster supplies kit with items you may need in case of an evacuation. Store these supplies in sturdy, easy-to-carry containers, such as backpacks or duffel bags. Keep important family documents in a waterproof container. Keep a smaller disaster supplies kit in the trunk of your car. A disaster supplies kit should include a three-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day) and food which will not spoil; one change of clothing and footwear per person; one blanket or sleeping bag per person; a first-aid kit (including prescription medicines); emergency tools (including a battery-powered NOAA Weather Radio and a portable radio, flashlight, and plenty of extra batteries); an extra set of car keys and cash; and, special items for infant, elderly, or disabled family members.

- **Practice and maintain your plan.**

Ask questions to make sure your family remembers meeting places, phone numbers, and safety rules. Conduct drills. Test your weather radio and smoke detectors monthly and change the batteries at least once a year. Test and recharge your fire extinguishers according to the manufacturer's instructions. Replace stored water and food every six months.

For more information, contact OHS-GEMA at 1-800-TRY-GEMA, your local emergency management agency or visit these Web sites: www.gema.state.ga.us, www.srh.noaa.gov/ffc/, or www.redcross.org.

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