

Disaster Preparedness. Emergency Preparedness. Preparedness. These are the “buzzwords” of today. Following the likes of 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and Kansas’ F-5 Tornado, one would think that we are all prepared for the worst but that could not be farther from the truth. Over a year ago there was a fire in our office building and although to look at the building today there remains no evidence, there is significant evidence in the businesses that are no longer there and the emotional scars of the tenants.

We all look at someone else’s disaster and think “that won’t happen to me” for what ever reason. The truth is, it will happen at the most inopportune moment in your life, with the greatest of consequences to you and your family. Murphy (who said “if it can go wrong it will”...) was an optimist!

Our next hope is that “they” will save me. Who is “they”? If you’re referring to the folks who show up after you’ve called 9-1-1, don’t be so sure. Remember that professional rescuers have families too. If they have disasters and emergencies at home, what reason do they have to show up to work? Throughout the country, it is recommended that you have at least 3 days of supplies stored away to “survive” until professional help arrives. As we have seen with major disasters (hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, and the like) 3 days is just not enough; a week or longer may be absolutely necessary to survive on your own before any help of any kind is able to reach you. Now we have to look to the alternative...depending upon ourselves and our family, friends, and neighbors...Disaster Preparedness.

The wonderful thing about being prepared is that it significantly reduces the stresses surrounding the disaster. Albeit there are reasons they call them “disasters”, if you’ve thought through how to “manage” your actions and reactions, and those of your family, you’ll discover that there is a significant reduction in the “stress” you are experiencing.

Sure, the house burned down, but you and your family are safe and healthy. You’ve got the phone and telephone numbers with you to call the people you need. The kids each have a back pack with snack food, their favorite stuffed animal or toy, change of clothes, necessary medications, eye glasses, toothbrush and the like so they will be easier for you to “manage” through the crisis. You have your back pack with your extra medications, a spare set of contact lenses, money, and “comfort snack food” as well as photocopies of your driver’s license, passport, and insurance cards so you can much more easily replace them. You have a few cherished pictures of family members long-gone so you can still recall them fondly; not to mention one or two baby pictures of the teenager so you can remember the “good old days when...”.

The value of having a clean set of clothes, “comfort food”, water and a toothbrush inside your back pack cannot even be measured in a MasterCard TV Ad! Now, add to that, ear plugs (have you ever tried to sleep in a shelter?), a nice soft towel, first aid kit, sun screen and insect repellent. Are you beginning to develop a “warm fuzzy” inside on dealing with these emergencies?

The more you are able to surround yourself with familiar items, the more “closer to home” you will feel. The result will be a whole lot less stress.

Why, you ask, am I focusing so much on stress? The truth is the greatest enemy you have in a disaster is the stresses you face and feel when you are not able to provide yourself, and the ones you love, something to help them (and you) deal with the matters-at-hand.

Why do we talk about a back pack rather than some other type of bag? The reason is rather simple. With a back pack (properly designed for comfort on your back), you have BOTH hands free! You have everything you absolutely need on your back and are now able to help your family and friends address their issues...comfortably.

Speaking of family and friends and neighbors; where do you keep copies of the “written authorization” which allows you to take your neighbor’s kids (or your second niece/nephew twice removed) out of school to meet their parents at the hospital? That back pack you’ve got with all of the photocopies of your identification (and that of your family) is a great place for another photocopy of that document which provides you “in loco parentis” authority should you need it.

Well, you say, that would only happen to someone else. My house won’t burn down! What about being caught in traffic for 8 hours with a mini-van full of tired pre-schoolers? How on earth are you going to keep them all satisfied (your car’s DVD player just swallowed a peanut butter and grape jelly sandwich on whole wheat)? If they each had a back pack with their “favorites” such as some snack food, bottle(s) of water, quiet toy or stuffed animal, would not your stress level be exponentially reduced? And why not! They learn at a very young age why it is so wonderful to be prepared...and you helped them make a “game” out of it...

Now, you’re saying, there is something else here to worry about in this 8-hour traffic jam (I know, it took me to go to foreign jungles to learn this one) and that is TOILET PAPER. Contrary to Johnny Carson’s scare some many decades ago, toilet paper is still on the shelves, but is it in something waterproof in your back pack or car? How about some rather stout plastic trash bags for the results?

What is all this talk about “comfort food”? Have you ever tried to each one of those 5-year shelf-life United States Coast Guard approved high-calorie meals? If you have, you understand what lemon-flavored cookie dough is like. The other thing that is interesting is now that you’ve opened the package, what do you do with the other 8 meals you have yet to eat...YES; there are 9 meals in that single vacuum-packed foil package. Now that you’ve tested it, you now realize that you need a Ziploc® bag to put the remnants in so you have food for the remaining three days... So lemon-flavored cookie dough isn’t your favorite...how about an MRE? The term (in case you forget) means Meal Ready to Eat. Some folks are very fond of these...and then there are those who have been living on them for months already. “Comfort food” is what YOU like. Whether it’s Cracker Jacks, granola bars, popcorn, jerky, or dried fruit this is what YOU like. When you’re “stressed”, what do you like to eat? That is YOUR “comfort food” and it is just as important as a clean pair of socks in a disaster.

Water is an absolute essential, but adding an electrolyte-replacement drink is even better. Watch the sugar and carbohydrates, though. With an ever-growing percentage of our population that is

diabetic-challenged, get an electrolyte-replacement drink that tastes good (this is a necessity, not a luxury) but has ZERO sugar and carbohydrates. Now, you can re-hydrate everyone and not be “stressed” about who can and who cannot handle the sugars.

Should you and your loved ones become separated, the simplest way to re-connect is to have an out-of-state point-of-contact for everyone. This may seem silly, but in many disasters, local telephone service can be devastated but long-distance telephone service remains fully functional. Having an out-of-state point-of-contact for everyone will make it much easier to get the necessary information to all of your loved ones. Another help is to identify different “safe havens” around town if all your loved ones are capable of getting to these places.

The real issue with preparedness is the planning. The more thought you put into the preparation and planning, the less stress you will have to deal with when (not if) the emergency or disaster arrives in your life.