

Severe Weather Awareness Week – Wednesday: Tornadoes

RUN TIME: 6 MIN 52 SECONDS

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STEFANIE: It's Friday.

JEFF: It's Friday. And it's Family Preparedness Day – part of Severe Weather Awareness Week – and this will wrap things up for this year. So let's talk a few moments about family preparedness. And I'm here today with Lucinda and Stefanie from Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management to talk about things that you can do to stay safe in your home...

STEFANIE: Hey, Jeff.

JEFF: ...and yeah.

LUCINDA: Hey Jeff.

JEFF: Oh, hi. How are y'all?

LUCINDA: Well, something we want to stress to lowans is that they do have a role to play in the preparedness of their own family and their communities as well. And there are three simple steps that everyone can take to be more prepared for any emergency or disaster. And that first step, you mentioned, is being aware and learning about the hazards that are around you. Pay attention to the news. Tune into your television or radio stations for watch and warning information, or get a NOAA Weather Radio. I can vouch, uh, from my personal experience that a NOAA Weather Radio is a very valuable tool to have during severe weather. And, and something else that's important to do is to just know what kind of hazards can affect your community. Is it prone to flooding? Here in Iowa we know we're going to have severe thunderstorms. It's very common for us to have winter weather, although hopefully by the time Severe Weather Awareness Week rolls around we're not having any more blizzards. Find out what sorts of hazards you may have to react to.

JEFF: Mmm, kay. Well, awesome. Thank you.

LUCINDA: You're so welcome.

JEFF: Now how about the communication plan. What's that about?

LUCINDA: A very important component of your family emergency plan is to have a communication plan. And what that means is in case you're separated during a disaster, you need to know how you're going to get a hold of each other. So we urge people to choose a family contact. That could be someone who lives in another part of the state, it could be someone who lives in another community. And make sure everyone in the family knows if a disaster happens and we get separated, this is who we call – and we can all "check in" with this person. And we'll know we're all safe.

Another part of that family plan is an evacuation plan. Call your local emergency manager and find out if there are established evacuation routes in your community.

And last but not least as part of your plan, as Stefanie said, we need to make sure that people who have special needs – whether it be medical equipment [or] maybe there is some other special need or barrier – make sure they have the resources they need in an emergency. One other very important part of our family we all need to plan for is our pet. Oftentimes if we're told to evacuate and go to a shelter, shelters won't take pets. So have a family member, get some numbers of some kennels where you might be able to board your pet. And if you have to take them with you, make sure you have food. Sometimes pets need medications. So make sure that you're prepared for everyone in your family in case you need to evacuate during an emergency.

STEFANIE: And if you do find a shelter that will take your pet, make sure that you have the latest vaccination records for that pet.

JEFF: That's really good advice. You know, when you build the emergency kit what are some things that can be included and where can someone go to get a complete list?

STEFANIE: Well, they can go to our website at Be Ready dot Iowa dot gov, and we have sample lists that they can print off and use for their own emergency plans and when putting together their kit. The first thing I guess you'd think of would be food and water. You need to make sure that you can sustain yourself if you need to be in a place for an extended period of time or you need to load up the family and you may not know if you'll have access to those things. So, have non-perishable food and water for each person, enough for approximately three to five days.

LUCINDA: A good thing for your emergency kit is a first aid kit, because obviously sometime people are injured during disasters. Something else to have in your kit is money. If you think about it, if the power is off you may not have access to an ATM and there are times when you could need money.

JEFF: Okay. Who, which one of you would like to take on the personal hygiene item?

STEFANIE: If you have any personal hygiene items that you need to bring with you – I think we all know what those are – also specialty items, such as, like Lucinda mentioned for your pets, make sure you have prescription medications for those people in your family. And if you have children – babies in particular – diapers, baby formula. Also, extra clothing and bedding, including shoes for each family member.

LUCINDA: And copies of important documents like our drivers' licenses, birth certificates, insurance policies and maybe our bank account information.

Something that folks can do is think about: "If I have to be out of my home for three days, what are the things that I really need to have?" I'm sure there are items that aren't on our list that people may need if they're asked to leave their home. So please think it through, and...just think it through.

JEFF: Okay, well that's really good advice. Thank you. You know, having seen disasters first-hand in my career – you know, things like the Parkersburg event, where you've just seen so much devastation – and it's amazing how quickly, you know, this kind of thing can happen. So I think having these safety ideas and plans in place – and I think it's really important to sit down with your family and go through this, and know how to respond to something before it happens. So, really good advice, thanks.

Stefanie: let's turn our attention to another topic. How about if you have any special needs people in your house, or [that] you're aware of – what are some steps that we can do to help make sure they're safe in severe weather?

STEFANIE: Well, you need to make sure that if you have anybody in your family, or perhaps, a neighbor or a friend who has special needs, that you plan for those in case something happens. For instance, if you have somebody who needs a respirator or a ventilator and depends on that equipment on a daily basis, you need to make sure that that person would have that equipment should a disaster happen and they can bring it on the go.

JEFF: Well, that's some good advice.

STEFANIE: One thing I also wanna mention that can come in handy is taking a personal inventory of the items in your home. You can put together a list of everything in your home – taking pictures for the insurance company – in the event you need to replace those items.

JEFF: Yeah, one thing we do is we go around every room in the house taking a picture, then we put it on a disc and put it in the safety deposit box.

STEFANIE: And then–

JEFF: Or a thumb drive, or something.

STEFANIE: And that's exactly what people should be doing. And if you actually go to don't test the waters iowa dot gov, there is a link to a website where you can make your own inventory for free.

JEFF: Well, that'd be neat, because you'd be amazed how quickly you'd probably forget what's in your house.

STEFANIE: Exactly.

JEFF: You're gonna miss stuff.

STEFANIE: Right.

JEFF: Anything else family preparedness, you guys?

LUCINDA: People can get more information about how they can be more prepared and the plans and supplies they need to have on hand at W-W-W, dot Be Ready, dot Iowa, dot G-O-V. And also at Iowa Homeland Security dot org, and also at W-W-W, dot weather, dot G-O-V.