



Alabama Gulf Coast Chapter

DEVELOP A FAMILY COMMUNICATION PLAN

Disaster can strike quickly and without warning. It can force you to evacuate your neighborhood or confine you to your home. In either case, knowing that you are safe is very important to your immediate family members and close friends.

During a hurricane, however, basic services including electricity and phone service can be disrupted and may not be restored for several days. During this critical time, your family and friends may not be able to reach you. Your initiative to establish contact quickly and place a phone call to a designated person will save your loved ones from making multiple calls looking for you. This one simple act can help alleviate their anxiety about your well-being, and help to reduce the overwhelming number of phone calls that often times overload the system following a disaster.

To assist families with staying connected following a disaster, the Red Cross recommends having a communication plan in place beforehand:

Contacting family and friends inside the affected area:

- Plan ahead for the possibility of becoming separated from your family and friends.
- Because phone lines may be out of service or overloaded after a disaster, it's often easier to call out of the area.
- Choose an out-of-town contact that each family or household member will call or email to check in with should a disaster occur. Your selected contact should live far enough away that they would be unlikely to be directly affected by the same event, and they should know they are the chosen contact.
- All of your loved ones should have the phone number for the contact as well as each other's phone numbers and email addresses. Loved ones should agree to call the out-of-town contact to report their whereabouts and welfare. Consider having a laminated wallet-sized card made to carry with you at all times.
- Many people overwhelm telephone lines when emergencies happen. Your family and friends should know that if telephone lines are not working, they need to be patient and try again later or try email. Sometimes emails go through when calls don't.
- As calls or emails are placed to the out-of-town contact from family members affected by the disaster, there will be peace of mind that comes from knowing that everyone is safe.

Contacting family and friends outside the affected area:

- Make an emergency contact list.
- Write contact information including name, home, work and cell phone numbers and email address. Be sure to include the out of town contact on the card as well.
- Make a card or copies of the card for each loved one to carry with them in the event of a disaster or other emergency when you will want to contact each other.
- Place a call to family and friends as soon as possible after disaster strikes to let them know your whereabouts and your well-being.

Preparing for a disaster, such as a hurricane, ahead of time can help alleviate the stress you may face during the storm, and ease the burden on your family and loved ones. For more information regarding how individuals and families can prepare for disasters visit www.redcrossalcoast.org or contact the Alabama Gulf Coast Chapter at (251) 438-2571.