

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

A publication of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, Concord, NH (603) 271-3710

March 2012

Be the Master of Disaster —

Preparing for an Emergency Doesn't Have to be a Chore

March roared in like a lion with blizzard conditions and power outages in many parts of the state. A week later and we are breaking records for 60 (plus) degree days. Weather in New England is anything but predictable. Thankfully, this early storm did not result in extreme and widespread damages; however, extreme weather events occur and being prepared for its consequences never hurts.

In New Hampshire, blizzards, torrential rain, hurricanes and high winds make up most of our extreme weather events, which in turn causes flooding, power outages and waste debris issues. So what can you do to be a master of disaster in your home?

Extensive plans and preventive measures have been taken by the state to reduce the disruption and damage caused by flooding, but the homeowner, too, can take action to prevent loss and environmental contamination. Here are a few quick examples of what can be done **before** the threat of flooding occurs again.

- Buy flood insurance.
- Prepare your property. Construct barriers to stop floodwater from entering your home if you live in a flood-prone area. Seal walls in basements with waterproofing compounds to avoid seepage. Identify dams in your area and be aware of what could happen if they fail.
- Prepare your fuel tanks. Aboveground storage tanks should always be located on a firm, stable foundation (such as a concrete floor or pad) and mounted on steel pipe legs fitted with floor flanges. In a flood-prone area, added measures should be taken to anchor or brace the storage tank so that it will not float or roll over and cause a release.
- Prepare your basement to ensure that paints, cleaning products and solvents are properly stored.
- Prepare your drinking water well and septic system and other areas of your home so that they do not become contaminated or cause contamination within your property or to others.

Everyone should be prepared for power outages, since they can occur at any time regardless of the weather. If your power goes off for any reason, use alternative power/heating sources safely to avoid deadly accidents, including carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. The CO website <http://nh.gov/co> includes information on safely using portable generators, symptoms of carbon monoxide exposure, and more. Public Service of New Hampshire and Unitil both have very useful websites that give preparedness tips as well as up-to-date information on power outages in their service areas.

Having a safe source of drinking water should also be a concern for the master of disaster, in “good times” and during emergencies. Homeowners with private drinking water wells should test their wells regularly for bacteria and contaminants; and those on public water supplies should be aware of and heed boil order advisories, if and when they are issued. If you know or are unsure that your drinking water is unsafe, do not use it to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, wash hands or make baby formula. In the case of a flooded, private water well, disinfect and test the well as soon as possible after flood waters recede.

Lastly, be a good neighbor. During an emergency event, check on the welfare of elderly or handicapped neighbors or family members.

There is a wealth of easy to follow tips and detailed information on emergency readiness, clean up and recovery available from a variety of credible and knowledgeable sources, including, but not limited to: ReadyNH, the NH Department of Environmental Services, FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), USEPA (Environmental Protection Agency), NOAA (the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), and the American Red Cross.

In the next emergency, you can be the master of disaster!

###