

Are You Prepared?

An emergency guide for
Polk County

When an emergency strikes, it can force you to evacuate your neighborhood or be confined you to your home.

If a destructive storm cut off your power, phone and other basic services for several days, or if a chemical spill forced you to stay in your home, what would you do?

Your family will cope best by preparing for disaster before it strikes.

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Information resources

If you need assistance in an emergency, dial 911. The resources below are provided to assist you in your emergency planning.

**Dakotas Region,
American Red Cross**
866-342-1799

<http://www.redcross.org/local/nd>

- _ Disaster planning resources
- _ CPR and first aid courses
- _ Educational presentations

**Polk County
Emergency Management:**

218-470-8263

218-470-8290

EmergencyManagement@co.polk.mn.us

Polk County Public Health:

218-281-3385

1-800-823-2858

http://www.co.polk.mn.us/index.asp?SEC=1A4A7D06-8C85-4A73-80C9-73ECCC1835D4&Type=B_BASIC

**Statewide Information and
Referral (Minnesota and
North Dakota):** Dial 211

**Gopher State One Call
“Call before you Dig”**

Minnesota and North Dakota:
Dial 811

**Minnesota Homeland Security
and Emergency Management**
651-201-7400

**Department of Homeland
Security**
www.dhs.gov

Poison Center
1-800-222-1222

Make a plan and **practice** it!

By preparing for emergencies, individuals, families and businesses can minimize property loss and injury and make the recovery process easier. Read this booklet to become more familiar with some of the hazards common to Cass and Clay counties. Then, develop a personalized plan that includes:

Escape routes—Draw a floor plan of your home or business and mark two escape routes from each room.

Meeting place—Select a predetermined meeting place away from your home or business; include pets in these plans. (see page 5)

Emergency communication— Your family or employees may not be together when disaster strikes, so plan how you will contact one another. Choose someone out-of-town who can relay information. Make sure every person has all contact names, numbers and e-mail addresses. (see page 4)

Insurance and vital records—Obtain or update property, health and life insurance. Review existing policies to be sure you have sufficient coverage to meet your needs.

Special needs—If you or someone close to you has a disability or a special need, create a network of neighbors, relatives, friends and co-workers that can provide aid in an emergency.

Check and update annually—Perform needed maintenance on your furnace, water heater, sump pump and air conditioning system each year. Review your emergency plan to make sure your contact list and escape routes are up-to-date. Check your emergency preparedness kit (see page 3) to make sure items are still in good shape.

Build an emergency preparedness kit

Disasters can occur quickly and without warning. Assemble a kit designed to help you cope with a variety of emergencies.

Items for your kit:

- First aid kit, essential medications, and a backup power source for any required medical equipment such as an oxygen tank
- Battery-powered radio, flashlight, extra batteries
- Canned food, manual can opener
- Bottled water (1 gallon of water per person per day for 3 days)
- Extra warm clothing including boots, mittens, and a hat
- Red or brightly-colored cloth
- NOAA weather radio
- A NOAA weather radio warns the public of severe weather, natural/manmade hazards from floods, forest fires, chemical spills, and other weather events.
- Consider preparing a kit for your car, boat and RV or camper.

In addition to the items listed above, **a vehicle kit should include:**

- Fire extinguisher.
- Jumper cables and tow rope.
- Compass and road maps.
- Shovel.
- Tire repair kit and pump.
- Extra clothing to keep dry.
- Road flare.
- Small tool kit.
- Kitty litter or sand for tire traction.

For more information on building emergency kits, contact the Dakotas Region chapter of the American Red Cross at 866-342-1799

Personal Contact Information

For emergencies, call 9-1-1.

Your Information

Address: (Home or Business)

Physical Street Address City State Zip Code

Phone number: (Home or Business) _____

Cell phone: _____

Doctor: (name and phone #) _____

Pharmacy: _____

Prescription Medications: _____

Allergies: _____

Emergency Contacts

(names and phone numbers)

Relative: _____

Friend: _____

Neighbor: _____

Ambulance: 9-1-1

Veterinarian: _____

Poison Control (or 800-222-1222): _____

Hospital/Cinic: _____

Local public health: _____

Electrical company: _____

Gas/fuel oil: _____

Phone company: _____

Water/sewer: _____

Garbage: _____

Fire Department and Law Enforcement: 9-1-1

Pets and disaster

If you evacuate, the best way to protect your pets is to evacuate them with you. Leaving pets behind, even if you try to create a safe place for them, is likely to result in them being injured, lost or worse.

Have a safe place to take your pets

Red Cross disaster shelters cannot accept pets because of state regulations and other considerations. Service animals that assist people with disabilities are the only animals allowed in Red Cross shelters.

Keep a list of “pet friendly” places, including phone numbers. Ask if “no pet” policies could be waived in an emergency at hotels, motels or a friend’s apartment.

Ask relatives, friends or others outside the affected area if they could shelter your animals in their homes.

Bring all pets into the house when an emergency begins so that you won’t have to search for them if you have to leave in a hurry.

Make sure all dogs and cats are wearing collars and securely fastened, up-to-date identification.

Birds should be transported in a secure travel carrier. Provide a few slices of fresh fruits and vegetables with high water content. Have a photo for identification and leg bands. Bring plenty of paper towels or newspaper to collect waste in the bottom of the bird’s cage.

Snakes can be transported in a pillowcase but they must be transferred to more secure housing when they reach the evacuation site. Take a water bowl large enough for soaking as well as a heating pad.

When transporting **house lizards**, follow the same directions given above for birds.

Small mammals (hamsters, gerbils, etc.) should be transported in secure carriers. Take bedding materials, food bowls and water bottles.

Sheltering in place

One of the instructions you may be given when hazardous materials may have been released into the atmosphere is to “sheltering-in-place”. This precaution aims to keep you safe by keeping you indoors. (This is not the same thing as going to a public shelter at a school or other location.) **Shelter-in-place means selecting a small interior room with no or few windows and taking refuge there.** It does not mean sealing off your entire home or office building. You might need to shelter-in-place if chemical biological or radiological contaminants are released into the environment. If this happens, local authorities will provide information on TV and radio stations to help you protect yourself and your family. Keep a radio or TV on at work and at home so you can be alerted to hazardous conditions quickly.

Know how to shelter-in-place

- Close and lock all windows and exterior doors.
- If you're told there is danger of explosion, close window shades, blinds and curtains.
 - Turn off all fans, as well as heating and air conditioning systems.
 - Close the fireplace damper.
 - Get your emergency preparedness kit and radio.
 - Go to an interior room **without** windows that's above ground level.
 - Bring your pets with you.
- Use duct tape and plastic sheeting (heavier than food wrap) to seal all cracks around the door and any vents into the room.
- Keep listening to your radio or television until you are told all is safe.

Warnings and watches

A storm **watch** means a storm is possible in your area. When a watch is issued, listen to local radio and TV stations for additional information or visit www.weather.gov. Be alert to changing weather conditions and avoid unnecessary travel. A storm **warning** means a storm is headed for or is already in your area. When a storm warning is issued, safety experts recommend that you stay indoors; it's the best place to protect yourself.

Sirens

Outdoor warning sirens alert us to **chemical spills, severe weather and other outdoor emergencies**. When sirens sound, go indoors and turn on a local TV or radio station to find out what the threat is and how to protect yourself. **Do not assume there is no emergency because skies are clear**. Testing of the sirens occurs on the first Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. in Crookston.

CodeRED alert system

CodeRED is an automated notification system that can call home, business and cell phones with emergency messages recorded by local officials. CodeRED is available to all Polk County residents. Visit your city or county's Web site to register or call 218-281-0431.

Evacuation and community shelters

Local government officials issue evacuation orders when disaster threatens. Listen to local radio and TV reports when an emergency arises. If local officials ask you to leave, do so immediately!

If you only have moments to evacuate, grab the following:

- Medical supplies—prescription medications, diabetes test strips, etc.
- Eyeglasses or contact lenses and cleaning solution
- Emergency preparedness kit (see page 3)
- Clothing and bedding
- Car keys

If local officials haven't advised an immediate evacuation, take these steps to protect your home before you leave:

- Turn off electricity at the main fuse or breaker and turn off water at the main valve.
- Leave natural gas on unless local officials advise otherwise.
- If high winds are expected, cover the exterior of all windows.
- If flooding is expected, consider using sandbags to keep water away.
- Take important papers with you—driver's license, social security card, insurance policies, birth and marriage certificates, stocks, wills, etc.
- Community shelters may be opened in certain emergencies or disasters.
- Local media will announce their locations. In most cases the shelter will provide only emergency items such as meals, cots and blankets.
- Be aware that pets (other than service animals) usually are not permitted in community shelters for health reasons.

Fire safety at home

Install a **smoke alarm** outside each sleeping area and on each level of your home. If people in your home sleep with doors closed, install smoke alarms inside sleeping areas.

Test smoke alarms once a month and **replace** all batteries at least once a year. Replace alarms every 10 years.

Have one or more fire extinguisher in your home. Contact your local fire department for advice on which types work best. See page 1 for the fire department's phone number.

Plan your escape routes - Escape safely

If you see smoke or fire in your first escape route, use your second way out. If you must exit through smoke, crawl low under the smoke to your exit.

If you are escaping through a closed door, feel the door before opening it. If it is warm, use your second way out. If smoke, heat or flames block your exit routes and you cannot escape through a window, stay in the room with the door closed. Signal for help using a brightly colored cloth at the window. If there is a phone in the room, call 911 and tell dispatchers where you are. Once you are out, stay out! Call 911 from a neighbor's home.

- Determine at least two ways to escape from every room of your home.
- Consider escape ladders for sleeping areas on the second or third floor.
- Select a location where everyone would meet after escaping.
- Practice your escape plan at least twice a year with members of your household.

Test smoke alarms monthly and replace their batteries at least once a year.

Floods and flash flooding

Now is the time to determine your area's flood risk. If you are not sure whether you live in a floodplain, contact your local government to find out. If you are in a floodplain, consider buying flood insurance. When a **flood watch** is issued, move your furniture and valuables to higher floors in your home. Prepare for possible evacuation.

When a **flood warning** is issued, listen to the radio or watch local TV stations for information and instructions.

When a **flash flood warning** is issued, move to higher ground away from rivers, streams, creeks and storm drains.

Do not drive around barricades. If your car stalls in rapidly rising waters, abandon it immediately and climb to higher ground.

During a flash flood warning, do not drive around barricades or attempt to drive down streets that are covered by water. Underestimating the water's depth could be a deadly mistake.

Lightning and thunderstorms

If you can hear thunder, you are close enough to the storm to be struck by lightning. Go to safe shelter immediately, and listen to local radio and TV stations for information and instructions. Make sure your NOAA weather radio is turned on. When a storm approaches, unplug appliances and turn off the air conditioner. Avoid using the telephone or any electrical appliances, and do not take a bath or shower.

If you are in the woods, take shelter under the shorter trees. If you are **boating or swimming,** get to land and find shelter immediately!

If you can't find shelter, go to a lowlying, open place away from trees, poles or metal objects. Squat low to the ground, and place your hands on your knees with your head between them. **Do not lie flat on the ground!**

After the storm passes, stay away from storm-damaged areas. Listen to the radio or watch local TV stations for information and instructions.

If someone is struck by lightning, he or she does **not** carry an electrical charge and can be handled safely. Call 911 and give first aid. Basic first aid skills can be invaluable, so learn them now. See your local yellow pages for a list of providers who teach first aid classes.

Tornadoes

Pick a place where family members could gather if a tornado is headed your way. Basements are best; if you don't have one, choose a center hallway, bathroom or closet on the lowest floor. **If you are outside**, hurry to the basement or a nearby sturdy building or lie flat in a ditch or low-lying area. **If you are in a car or mobile home**, get out immediately and head for safety. After the tornado, watch out for fallen power lines and stay out of the damaged area. Listen to the radio or watch local TV stations for information and instructions.

If you don't have a basement, a bathroom on the lowest floor of your home is a good place to seek shelter during a tornado. Be sure to take your weather radio into your temporary shelter.

Downed power lines

If you come across a downed power line, leave the area immediately and seek help by calling 911. **If you are in a vehicle when a power line falls onto it**, wait inside the vehicle until help arrives. If you must leave the vehicle because of fire or life-threatening injury:

- Leap from the vehicle, landing on both feet.
- Do not hold onto the door while leaping.
- Once on the ground, hop away—do not run.

Heat waves

Dangers we face during periods of very high temperatures include:

Heat cramps: These are muscular pains and spasms due to heavy exertion. They are an early signal that the body is having trouble with the heat.

Heat exhaustion: This typically occurs when people exercise heavily or work in a hot, humid place where body fluids are lost through heavy sweating. Blood flow to the skin increases, causing blood flow to decrease to the vital organs. This results in a form of mild shock. If not treated, the victim may suffer heat stroke.

Heat stroke (sunstroke): Heat stroke is lifethreatening. The victim's temperature control system, which produces sweating to cool the body, stops working. The body temperature can rise so high that brain damage and death may result if the body is not cooled quickly.

If a heat wave is predicted or happening...

- **Slow down.** Avoid strenuous activity.
- **Stay indoors** as much as possible.
- **Wear** lightweight, light-colored clothing.
- **Drink** plenty of water regularly and often.
- **Eat** small meals and eat more often.
- **Avoid** using salt tablets unless directed to do so by a physician.

Heat exhaustion can cause mild shock and can lead to heat stroke, a life-threatening condition.

Drink plenty of water during a heat wave and eat smaller, more frequent meals.

Winter storms and extreme cold

Before a storm comes, have extra blankets on hand and ensure that each member of your household has a warm coat, gloves or mittens, a warm hat and warm, water-resistant boots.

During a storm, avoid going outside. If you must, wear several layers of lightweight clothing—this will keep you warmer than a single heavy coat. Cover your mouth to protect your lungs from cold air and debris. You should **avoid traveling by car** in a storm, but **if you must:**

- Carry an emergency preparedness kit in your car. (see page 2 for contents)
- Keep your car's gas tank full.
- Let someone know your destination, route and estimated time of arrival.

If you become stranded in a vehicle...

- Stay with your car. Do not try to walk to safety.
- Tie a brightly colored cloth (preferably red) to the antenna for rescuers to see.
- Start the car and run the heater for about 10 minutes every hour.
- Keep one window (away from the wind) slightly open to let air in.
- Leave the overhead light on when the engine is running so that you can be seen.
- As you sit, move your arms and legs to keep blood circulating and to stay warm.
- If you shovel snow after the storm, be careful not to overexert yourself. Strenuous activity in cold weather can put a strain on your heart.

Wildfires

Wildfires often begin unnoticed and spread quickly, igniting brush, trees and homes. People are the cause of most wildfires. Reduce the risk of a wildfire occurring in your area by:

- Adhering to any burning bans that are in effect.
- Calling 911 to report grass fires or other types of outdoor burning.
- Teaching children about fire safety and keeping matches and lighters out of their reach.

There are other ways you can prevent wildfires, too. Design and landscape your home with wildfire safety in mind. Select materials and plants that can help contain fire rather than fuel it. Use fire resistant or noncombustible materials on the roof and exterior structure of the building.

Plant fire resistant shrubs or trees. Create a 30- to 50-foot safety area around your home by raking up leaves and twigs. Clear all flammable vegetation. Remove branches that extend over the roof. Ask the power company to clear branches from powerlines. Remove vines from the walls of your home and mow grass regularly.

Clear a 10-foot area around propane tanks and grills. Stack firewood at least 100 feet away and uphill from your home or business. Maintain an adequate outside water source. Have a garden hose long enough to reach any area on your property. Install exterior water outlets on at least two sides of the home.

When a wildfire threatens: Back your car into the garage or park it in an open space facing the direction of escape. If you are advised to leave, evacuate immediately!

Blackouts

Before the blackout...

- If you have an electric garage door opener, locate the manual release lever and learn how to operate it.
- Keep your car's gas tank at least half full; gas stations rely on electricity to power their pumps.
- Have an extra battery on hand for battery-operated wheelchairs.

During the blackout...

- Only use a flashlight for emergency lighting—never use candles because they increase your risk of a house fire dramatically.
- Most cordless phones won't work if the power goes out, so be sure to have a standard telephone in your home.
- Cellular phones may not operate properly during a blackout because cellular networks may lose power to the towers that transmit your call.
- Turn off electrical equipment you were using when the power went out. Leave one light on so you'll know when power returns.
- Avoid opening the refrigerator and freezer. Most medication that requires refrigeration can be kept in a closed refrigerator for several hours.
- Don't run a generator inside a home or garage or connect it to a home's electrical system. If you use a generator, connect the equipment you want to power directly to outlets on the generator.
- Listen to a radio for the latest information.

Natural gas emergencies

You can help prevent natural gas emergencies by calling the locator service (811 in North Dakota and Minnesota) before you dig on your property. This will help you avoid hitting gas lines.

If you smell gas outdoors, move away from the area until you no longer smell the gas and call 911. Do not return to the area until authorities tell you it is safe to do so.

If you smell gas indoors, get outside immediately, leaving doors open to help ventilate the building. Do not use light switches, electrical appliances or phones (cell or land line) in the affected home or building. Extinguish cigarettes and do not light matches. Move a safe distance from the home and call 911. Do not return to the area until appropriate authorities tell you it is safe to do so.

Make sure you call a utility locator service before planting trees, installing fence posts, or doing any other digging in your yard. That call could prevent a home emergency.

Chemical emergencies

Under certain conditions, chemicals which are normally safe can be poisonous or harmful to your health. A major chemical emergency is an accident that releases a hazardous amount of a chemical into the environment. Accidents can happen underground, on railways or highways, and at manufacturing plants. They may involve fire or explosion, or you may be unable to see or smell anything.

You may be exposed to a chemical by:

- Breathing the chemical.
- Swallowing contaminated food, water or medication.
- Touching the chemical, or coming into contact with clothing or other items that have touched the chemical.

If you are outdoors during a large-scale hazardous material release, stay upwind or upstream of the release and find shelter immediately. Many people think of chemicals as only those substances used in manufacturing processes. But chemicals are found everywhere—in our kitchens, medicine cabinets, basements and garages.

The most common home chemical emergencies involve small children eating medicines.

Keep all medicines, cosmetics, cleaning products and other household chemicals out of sight and reach of children. If your child eats or drinks a non-food substance, find any containers immediately and take them to the phone. Call the poison control center (see page 1 for number) or 911 and carefully follow the instructions you are given.

Home product precautions

- Avoid mixing household chemicals.
- Always read the directions before using a new product.
- Never smoke while using household chemicals.
- Clean up chemical spills immediately, protecting your eyes and skin.
- Dispose of products properly to protect our environment and wildlife.

Public Health Emergencies

A public health emergency includes disease outbreaks, biological or chemical emergencies, and natural disasters. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention encourage you to prepare an all-hazards emergency kit that could be used during any disaster. See page 3 for information on building an emergency kit.

A bioterrorism attack is the deliberate release of viruses, bacteria or other germs (called “agents”) used to cause illness or death in people, animal or plants. Biological agents can be spread through the air, through water or in food. Terrorists may use biological agents because they can be extremely difficult to detect and may not cause illness for several hours to several days. Some bioterrorism agents, like the smallpox virus, can be spread from person to person and some, like anthrax, cannot. Polk County Public Health has plans to distribute medications and give vaccinations to the general public during a public health emergency. Mass dispensing sites will be announced publicly at the time of an emergency.