

Are you ready?

By Scott Berry, Circuit Rider

As I sit here in our moderate climate and watch the horrific scenes from the devastation of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, I am thankful that we live in an area where that type of devastation can not happen. Or could it? It also occurs to me that much ink has been expended in telling water systems what to do in the event of a major catastrophe, either natural or manmade, but the most important part of your infrastructure has been widely overlooked... You. It is estimated that fully one half of all essential services personnel will fail to show up to work after disaster strikes. Water and wastewater personnel are among those considered essential services. Are you as individuals ready to make sure your families are safe and then show up for work to ensure the safety and health of your communities? Department of Homeland Security estimates that 89% of Americans are not able to take care of themselves for at least three days in the event of a major disruption of services. It should be the goal of every person to have what they need to take care of themselves and their families without outside aid for as long as one week before help arrives.

In this article we will discuss some of the potential threats as well as ways that you can see yourselves and your families through a disaster and still be able to fulfill your responsibilities to the communities to whom you serve. The manmade threats such as a terrorist attack have been covered in previous articles so we will focus on natural disasters. What are we Oregonians likely to face? The Department of Homeland Security has categorized the state of Oregon as at risk for the following emergencies;

Flood – Flood risk varies region by region. Talk to your city or county planning department for specific information as to your flood risk at your residence. You may also inquire as to the risk of your office, treatment plant and the routes to and from your home.

If you have checked your exposure and determined that you are in an area that is at risk for flooding there are some steps to take **before** a flood occurs.

- Avoid building in a flood plain unless you elevate and reinforce your home.

- Elevate the furnace, water heater, and electrical panel if susceptible to flooding.
- Install check valves in sewer traps to prevent flood water from backing up into the drains of your home.
- Construct barriers (levees, berms, and flood walls) to stop flood water from entering the building.
- Seal walls in basements with waterproofing compounds to prevent seepage.

During a flood:

- Listen to the radio or television for information.
- Be aware that flash flooding can occur, if there is any possibility that flash flooding can occur, move immediately to higher ground. Do not wait for instructions to move.
- Be aware of streams, drainage channels, canyons, and other areas known to flood suddenly.

If you must prepare to evacuate, you should do the following:

- Secure your home. If you have time, bring in outdoor furniture. Move essential items to an upper floor or storage area.
- Turn off utilities at the main switches or valves if instructed to do so. Disconnect electrical appliances. Do not touch electrical equipment if you are wet or standing in water.

If you have to leave your home, remember these evacuation tips:

- Do not walk through moving water. If you have to walk in water, walk where the water is not moving and check the firmness of the ground in front of you with a stick.
- **Do not drive into flooded areas.** Six inches of water will reach the bottom of most cars causing loss of control and possible stalling. A foot of water will float many vehicles. Two feet of rushing water can carry away most SUV's and pick-ups.
- Be aware of areas where flood waters have receded. Roads may have been weakened and could collapse.

- Stay away from downed power lines and report them to the power company.

-Hope for the best, but plan for the worst.-

You should also consider your location and determine the feasibility of additional flood insurance as that is not covered under the standard home-owners policy.

Some of the other Natural disasters you should consider in your planning are earthquakes, volcanoes, wild fire, extreme heat, winter storms, landslides and tsunamis. Each of these present a different set of dangers and responses. To better prepare yourself and your family you should have emergency supplies in your home, in your car, and at your place of employment. Each of these kits should include the following;

- Three-day supply of non-perishable food.
- Three-day supply of potable water, one gallon per person per day. Don't forget to include your pets in these equations.
- Battery powered portable radio or television.
- Flashlight and extra batteries.
- First-aid kit and manual.
- Sanitation and hygiene supplies (moist towelettes and toilet paper).
- Matches in a waterproof container.
- Whistle.
- Extra clothing.
- Kitchen utensils and cooking accessories including a can opener.
- Photocopies of credit and identification cards.
- Cash and coins.
- Special needs items such as prescription medications, eye glasses, contact lenses and solutions, and hearing aid batteries.
- Items for infants such as formula, diapers, bottles, and pacifiers.
- Other item to meet your family's unique needs.

It is important that you do what you need to take care of yourselves and your families so that you can then focus on the needs of your community. There are some utilities that have set aside space at their facilities for temporary housing for their employees in the event of a disaster. In doing this, they have insured their ability to provide their communities with the services they are charged with providing.