

# Disaster Preparedness: It's Not Just for the Work Place Anymore



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As disaster recovery consultants, the authors of this article sometimes revisit the question of whether we are prepared for a disaster in our office. In terms of our business we are indeed prepared. The answer to the same question with regard to our home however, is not always so definitive. The answer, well, sort of is not good enough to wit: Did we have a 3-day survival kit? No. Did we have the kids prepared for evacuation complete with escape routes from every room and a place to meet? No. Does everyone in the house know where the shut-offs are for gas, electricity and water? No. Does anyone besides Leo know how to start the emergency generator? No. You get the picture. Therefore, this month we resolved to become more proactive and change our lives.

Each year, September is earmarked as National Preparedness Month (NPM). This will be the 6th year that NPM has taken place. NPM affords us all the opportunity to ask ourselves how well WE are prepared, not only as organizations but also as individuals. It is designed to encourage Americans to take the simple steps to prepare for emergencies in their homes, businesses, and communities. National Preparedness Month (NPM) Coalition membership is open to all public and private sector organizations through the READY campaign. By visiting <http://www.ready.gov> and clicking on the NPM banner, groups can register to become a NPM Coalition Member. Coalition Members share preparedness information with their members, customers, employees and communities. Last year, the Ready Campaign partnered with more than 3,200 organizations to highlight the importance of public emergency preparedness throughout September. The focus will be on changing the way one thinks about emergency preparedness and helping others understand what it means to be READY.

Throughout the year, the Ready Campaign promotes individual emergency preparedness. A national advertising campaign, produced in partnership with The Advertising Council, is designed to educate and empower Americans to prepare and respond to emergencies, including natural disasters, terrorist attacks and other threats. Ready.gov is one way that the Department of Homeland Security educates the public.

The Campaign lists its web sites as <http://www.ready.gov> and <http://www.listo.gov>; with two toll free numbers, 1-800-BE-READY and 1-888-SE-LISTO that are also available to provide Americans with free emergency preparedness information.

What are some of the things that you can do as an individual or business to promote National Preparedness Month?

- Send out a Company-wide newsletter or write a blog about events scheduled around National Preparedness Month.
- Hold a Company sponsored blood drive in your community
- Recruit your local Fire/EMS/Police departments to teach CPR and basic emergency skills.
- Utilize your talents and education by assisting others if you are in one of the service oriented professions such as doctor, nurse, or veterinarian
- Join one of the organizations listed below either as a company or an individual so you will know how to help yourself, your family and your community should a disaster occur

The following contains the names of organizations dedicated to promoting public awareness through education, training and volunteer service

## American Red Cross

Clara Barton founded the American Red Cross in 1881. It differentiates itself by coming to the aid of victims of natural or manmade disasters. The organization's main goal is to provide relief and to prevent suffering while assisting victims with food, shelter and financial aid as well as lending guidance, comfort, and encouragement. ARE YOU READY? Not sure, then take a survey from the Red Cross at [www2.redcross.org/preparedness/npm/](http://www2.redcross.org/preparedness/npm/) titled, *What's Your Readiness Quotient?*

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

## Citizens Corps

The mission of Citizen Corps is to harness the power of every individual through education, training, and volunteer service. They pledge to make communities safer, stronger, and better prepared to respond to the threats of terrorism, crime, public health issues, and disasters of all kinds. Citizen Corps promotes a range of measures for you to make your family, your home, and your community safer from the threats of crime, terrorism, and disasters of all kinds.

Local Fire and Police Departments offer classes to citizens interested in learning more about personnel and policies and taking an active role in helping to protect their communities. Class topics include:

1. Emergency medical training
2. Communications,
3. Codes and
4. Hands-on training

Citizen Corps states on its web site that it brings together community and government leaders to tackle issues at the local level including emergency preparedness, planning, mitigation, response and recovery. These Councils enable collaborative planning between government and civic leaders and provide localized support for outreach and educational efforts directed to the public. Training and exercises effectively integrate emergency responders, volunteers and the general public that encompass the full range of emergency response services.

Contact your local police or fire department to find a Citizen Corps group near you. If you'd like to take an active role in helping your community prepare for emergencies, join Citizen Corps. Get information at <http://www.citizencorps.gov>

## Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT)

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program can be found at <http://www.citizencorps.gov/cert> and operates under the umbrella of Citizen Corps. It provides education and prepares citizens on how to respond to potential disaster hazards that may have an effect on their area by training them basic disaster response skills. These might include such skills as fire safety, light search and rescue, damage assessment, team organization, and disaster medical operations. Following an event, CERT members apply what they have learned in the classroom and training exercises by aiding residents and employees sometimes even before emergency responders have had a chance to arrive. By taking a more active role in emergency preparedness projects in their community, CERT members become a support system alongside emergency response agencies. On a personal note, Sharon has been accepted as a CERT member and begins her training in September.

## Cities Readiness Initiative (CRI)

Federally funded, the Cities Readiness Initiative (CRI) prepares major US cities and metropolitan areas to effectively respond to a large scale bio-terrorist event by dispensing antibiotics to their identified population within 48 hours of the decision to do so.

Sharon recently had the opportunity to participate in one such exercise. CRI along with the Texas State Civil Defense staged a mock anthrax event in a nearby city. Sharon's role was that of a client who did not exhibit any signs of anthrax. She waited in line with several other clients for her turn to be evaluated on the level of sickness. Depending on how sick she was, she would either be detained for further evaluation in a holding room or since she was not sick, she moved to the next station. Security asked her for proof of identification and moved her along to the processing station where she filled out paperwork. Sharon moved to the dispensing station where she was given anthrax medication in the form of candy and then sent on her way. Everything and everybody had to move smoothly as a NIMS (National Incident Management System) type of command and control.

CRI's success comes from enhanced communication and collaboration across state and local boundaries, resulting in optimal use of shared resources. Through exercises, assessments and reviews, local and state planners have identified capability, strengths, and shortcomings. Success is also hinged upon the availability of federal resources to local areas.

For more information consult the CRI web site <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/cri>

## Department of Homeland Security

*"The President proposes to create a new Department of Homeland Security, the most significant transformation of the U.S. government in over half-century by largely transforming and realigning the current confusing patchwork of government activities into a single department whose primary mission is to protect our homeland. The creation of a Department of Homeland Security is one more key step in the President's national strategy for homeland security."*

*-From the Department of Homeland Security June 2002 - George W. Bush*

Ready.gov is one way that the Department educates the public sector by encouraging citizens to educate and take responsibility for themselves, their families and their community so that they can keep safe during an emergency.

The Department of Homeland Security's primary mission is to protect our homeland whether it is from terrorists, disease, fires or storms.

For more information go to: <http://www.dhs.gov/index.shtml>

September is National Preparedness month. How will YOU prepare? It's as good a time as any to begin your own self-assessment toward being prepared in both business and home

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