What to do during a difficult event

Canadians have seen their share of natural and man-made disasters over the past few years. Explosions, floods, ice storms, fires, and blizzards have driven thousands from their homes and cut electricity, water and gas to thousands more. While we can’t control many of these difficult events, we can prepare for them and lessen their impact on our families and property.

Life is full of unexpected events. Sometimes they cause a minor inconvenience and sometimes they result in major upheaval. Sometimes we have time to prepare, but often we don’t. Do you know what to do in the event of an emergency situation that could endanger your family and/or home?

Before the event

If you have time and it is still safe to do so:

• **Bring pets indoors and confine them to one room.** Animals will run if they’re scared, so putting them in one room will allow you to find them quickly if you need to leave. This should be the same room you are in during the event.

• **Bring outside objects indoors or secure them in an appropriate outdoor shed.** This includes lawn furniture, garbage cans, children’s toys, garden equipment, clotheslines, hanging plants, and any other objects that may be damaged, blown around or swept away.

During the event

• **Listen to local radio, television or log onto news sites** and follow the instructions issued by emergency officials.

• **Remain calm and be patient.** Staying calm will help avoid delays or accidents caused by panicked or irrational behaviour.

• **Be careful of candles.** Candles are easily forgotten and can tip over during the course of a disaster. More than three times as many people have died in residential fires caused by using candles after a disaster than from the direct impact of the disaster itself.

• **Stay in your home** until all is safe or until you are ordered to evacuate.

• **If an immediate evacuation advisory hasn’t been issued,** but your area has been told to be on standby for evacuation, put your medications and important papers in your vehicle, or keep them with you if you may be leaving on foot. Also pack a change of clothes, pillows and blankets for each family member.
If advised to evacuate, do so immediately. Authorities do not ask people to leave unless they feel lives may be in danger. Before you leave:

- **Turn off electricity and water.** Unless told otherwise, leave gas on because a licensed professional is required to restore it, and in the aftermath of a significant event, that may take weeks.
- **Take your wallet,** personal identification for each family member, medications, copies of essential family documents, a cellular phone and spare battery or charger.
- **Wear protective clothing** and sturdy shoes.
- **Secure your home.**
- **Notify relatives that you are leaving** and tell them where you’re headed.

If driving, use travel routes specified by authorities. Don’t use shortcuts because certain areas may be impassable or dangerous. Return only when authorities advise that it is safe to do so.

**Immediately after the event**

If you’ve weathered the initial event without having to evacuate:

- **Make sure all family members are safe.** Part of your family emergency preparedness plan is to have a meeting place outside the home or, for those not at home at the time of the incident, the home of a relative or friend.
- **Check for injuries.** If required, administer first aid until emergency responders arrive.
- **Help neighbours** who may require assistance.
- **Carefully check your home** for damage and potential hazards.
- **Try not to use your telephones (cells and landlines)** if a large area has been affected. Only use phones to report life-threatening situations and to call your emergency contact (who will let your family and friends know you’re safe).

**Be prepared**

The Government of Canada recommends that every family have an emergency preparedness plan and an emergency kit in place. A government website—www.getprepared.ca—explains in detail the steps you should take to prepare for emergencies. The site contains helpful tips and information on the natural disasters that are most likely to affect your region. The site also has a free, downloadable emergency preparedness guide and family emergency plan template.

Accidents happen. Know what to do and be prepared.