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JOINT PRESS RELEASE: CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

Don't Wait: Have a Family Communications Plan Before an Emergency



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Ft. Walton Beach, Fla.— As we know, emergencies can happen any time of the day and in any month of the year. It important for families to be prepared for the unexpected by planning now. Families planning for emergencies should start with one simple question: “What if?”

“What if something happens and I’m not with my family?” “Will I be able to reach them?” “How will I know they are safe?” “How can I let them know I’m okay?” During a disaster, you will need to send and receive important information from your family.

Don’t Wait. Communicate - know how to reach each other and where to meet up in an emergency. Communication networks, such as mobile phones and computers, could be unreliable during disasters, and electricity could be disrupted. Planning in advance will help ensure that all the members of your household—including children and people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs, as well as outside caregivers— know what to do in an emergency.

Planning starts with three easy steps: (Get/Share ideas at #NatlPrep online chat.)

1. **COLLECT:** Create a paper copy of the contact information for your family and other important people/offices, such as medical facilities, doctors, schools, or service providers.
2. **SHARE:** Make sure everyone carries a copy in his or her backpack, purse, or wallet. If you complete your *Family Emergency Communication Plan* online at www.ready.gov/make-a-plan, you can print it onto a wallet-sized card. You should also post a copy in a central location in your home, such as your refrigerator or family bulletin board.
3. **PRACTICE:** Have regular household meetings to review and practice your plan.

If you are using a mobile phone, a text message may get through when a phone call will not. This is because a text message requires far less bandwidth than a phone call. Text messages may also save and then send automatically as soon as capacity becomes available.

The use of social media networks can also help individuals connect with loved ones during a disaster. Facebook Safety Check was designed to allow individuals near a major crisis to send a notification to their friends and families to tell them they are safe. Recently, this has been available for emergencies like the Pulse Night shooting in Orlando, Florida and last month’s flooding in Louisiana.

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National Preparedness Month

Okaloosa County Department of Public Safety and Florida Department of Health in Okaloosa County (DOH-Okaloosa) are observing September as National Preparedness Month in order to remind residents of easy ways to keep their families prepared and safe during emergencies.

Weekly messaging will be released to news media outlets and community partners to help spread the word about the importance of emergency preparedness.

The overall theme of the month is *Don't Wait, Communicate. Make Your Emergency Plan Today.*

The following is the schedule of press releases and topics:

- Week 1—Family Emergency Communications Plan
- Week 2—Emergency Supply Kit and Pet Plan
- Week 3—Emergency Preparedness and Information Apps
- Week 4—Special Needs Shelter Registry

For more information, please visit www.co.okaloosa.fl.us or www.healthyokaloosa.com

About Okaloosa County Public Safety

The Okaloosa County Department of Public Safety mission is to protect the health, safety, and welfare of our community with pride and professionalism and consists of the following divisions: 911 Communications, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Emergency Management and Beach Safety. Since 2002, Okaloosa County has been an official **Storm Ready County**, and meets several emergency management criteria: the 24-hour Warning Point, the six different means of receiving National Weather Service warnings, the ability to monitor real time data at both the Emergency Operations Center in south Okaloosa and the 24-hour Warning Point in the north.

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

For more information, please visit www.FloridaHealth.gov. Follow us on Twitter: [@OKALOOSAEOC](#) or [@FLHealthEmerald](#) or on Facebook: [Okaloosa Public Safety Emergency Management](#) or [Florida Department of Health](#).