

EVACUATION

Polk County Preparations

Because of ongoing concerns about potential terrorist attacks, the U.S. government is working to improve overall preparation against terrorism. One aspect of this preparation is to learn more about protecting ourselves against possible biological, chemical and radiological attacks.

If a public health emergency happens in our community, the Polk County Public Health Department will be the local agency responsible for preparing and guiding medical response and public information efforts. During such an emergency, a critical role of the Public Health Department will be to work with other local first responders, such as fire and police. The Public Health Department will also coordinate response activities with state and federal agencies.

The Polk County Public Health Department is providing this information to help you understand why you may be asked to evacuate in the event of a public health threat.

What is an Evacuation?

Evacuation means physically leaving the area of the actual or potential hazard. An evacuation may be called for as a response to a biological, chemical or radiological hazard that has been released or set-off.

Why Evacuate?

You may be asked to evacuate during a natural disaster such as fires, floods or earthquakes. Evacuation may also be called for during man-made emergencies such as fires, toxic material releases, radiological and biological accidents, terrorist activities and workplace violence. Evacuation would only be called for when it is no longer safe to remain in the area. In the case of an evacuation, emergency officials will provide information through the television and radio regarding who needs to evacuate and what routes to take. If an evacuation is asked for, it will be important to leave the area as quickly as possible.

What to do to Prepare for an Evacuation

Make your evacuation plan. Everyone should have a home evacuation plan and all family members should know what the plan is. Plan how you will assemble your family and where you will go. Choose several destinations in different directions so you have options in an emergency. Plan meeting places for your family, both within and outside of your immediate neighborhood. Your whole family should know your “out-of-state” contact who has agreed to coordinate your family in case local communications are not working in your area.

In the workplace, talk with your supervisor or emergency manager to find out about plans and procedures for evacuation. This will help to avoid confusion and get people out of an area safely and quickly.

It is important to prepare a “grab and go” emergency kit. Fill an easy-to-carry container such as a backpack or duffle bag with adequate emergency supplies and store it in a convenient location. Consider having separate kits for your home, office and car.

The kit should include a battery-powered or wind-up radio, flashlights with fresh batteries, first aid supplies including emergency medications, a cell phone with batteries charged, water and money. Additional supplies should include a water purification kit, a manual can opener, eating utensils, a week’s supply of food that doesn’t need refrigeration, trash bags, disposable gloves, fire extinguishers, a shovel, booster cables, walking shoes and a list of important telephone numbers. If you have pets, plan how you will care for your pets in an emergency.

(See other side)

If you have a car, add fix-a-flat and flares, and keep at least half a tank of gas in it at all times. If possible, know which routes have been designated as evacuation routes before an emergency happens. In any case, become familiar with routes and other means of transportation out of your area. If you do not have a car, plan how you will leave if you have to.

Learn how and when to turn off utilities and locate the electric, gas and water shut-off valves. Keep necessary tools near gas and water shut-off valves. Make sure all family members know how to shut off the utilities.

How to Evacuate an Area

If an evacuation is called for, local officials will tell you what routes to take. Once set up, they will also tell you the locations of centers that will provide food, shelter and other necessities. If you have pets, understand that only service animals may be permitted in public shelters.

- Keep a battery-powered radio on hand so that you know of any changes to the procedures for your area.
- Stay calm and immediately follow the protective measures recommended by your emergency officials.
- Lock the door behind you.
- Keep listening to the radio. You will be told when it is safe to return to the evacuated area.

If time allows:

- Check with neighbors who may need a ride.
- Leave a note telling others when you left and where you are going.
- Call or e-mail the "out-of-state" contact, telling him/her where you are going.
- If there is damage to your home and you are instructed to do so, shut off water, gas and electricity before leaving.

If you have any questions about evacuation, please contact the **Polk County Health Department at 515-286-3798**. Public Health Department staff members are available to answer your questions Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

For information about putting together an Emergency Preparation Plan, visit the Department of Homeland Security site at www.ready.gov. Also, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Web site at www.bt.cdc.gov for additional information.

