

SHELTER-IN-PLACE

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 shelter-in-place during a public health emergency.

What is Shelter-in-Place?

Shelter-in-place means remaining inside your home or place of work and protecting yourself there. Shelter-in-place may be called for as a response to a biological, chemical or radiological hazard that has been released into the outside environment. If you are asked to shelter-in-place by health officials, it has been determined that evacuating (leaving) the area would be more dangerous than staying indoors.

Why Shelter-in-Place?

Shelter-in-place would be called for only if it were absolutely necessary to protect you from harm. Should you be asked to shelter-in-place, you would get information from local authorities through television and radio about how to protect yourself, co-workers and family. The important thing is to follow instructions of local authorities and to know what to do if they ask you to shelter-in-place.

Choose and Equip a Shelter Room

Select interior room or rooms above the ground floor, with the fewest windows or vents. Especially in the case of a chemical threat, a room above ground is preferable because some chemicals are heavier than air and may seep into a basement.

The room should have adequate space for everyone to be able to sit. Avoid overcrowding by selecting several rooms if necessary. Large storage closets, utility rooms, pantries, copy and conference rooms without exterior windows will work well. Avoid selecting a room with mechanical equipment like ventilation blowers or pipes, because this equipment may not be able to be sealed off.

Gather essential disaster supplies, such as nonperishable food, bottled water, battery-powered radios, first-aid supplies, flashlights, batteries, duct tape, plastic sheeting and plastic garbage bags.

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(Continued) SHELTER-IN-PLACE**How to Shelter-in-Place**

If you are at home and emergency officials advise you to shelter-in-place:

- Stay calm.
- Bring children and pets indoors immediately.
- Close and lock all windows and outside doors.
- Turn off all fans, heating and air conditioning systems, and close exterior doors and windows. Turn off clothes dryers.
- Some systems automatically provide for exchange of inside air with outside air. These systems, in particular, need to be turned off, sealed or disabled.
- If you have a fireplace, close the damper.
- Gather your disaster supplies and battery powered radio.
- Go to your shelter room. Use duct tape (wet towels if you don't have duct tape) to seal doors, exhaust fans, vents and windows.
- Have a phone available if you need to report a life-threatening condition.
- Listen to the radio or television for emergency instructions and remain where you are until you are told all is safe.

Shelter-in-Place at Work

If you are at work and there are customers, clients or visitors in the building, provide for their safety by requiring them to stay inside the building.

- Unless there is an imminent threat, ask employees, customers, clients and visitors to call their emergency contact to let them know where they are and that they are safe.
- Turn on call-forwarding or alternative telephone answering systems or services. If you have voice mail or an automated attendant service, change the recording to indicate that your location is closed, and that staff and visitors will remain in the building until authorities say it is safe to leave.
- If you are told there is danger of explosion, close the window shades, blinds or curtains.
- Have a phone available if you need to report a life-threatening condition.
- Write down the names of everyone in the room, and call your business' designated emergency contact to report who is in the room with you, and their affiliation with your business (employee, visitor, client, family member).
- Listen to the radio or television for emergency instructions and remain where you are until you are told all is safe.

If you have any questions about shelter-in-place, 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.

