

A Guide for Pulling Together a Disaster Preparedness Kit on a Tight Budget

Written by Carrie Akerstrom with special thanks to Carol Dunn, Seattle Red Cross, Mary Schoenfeldt, Everett Office of Emergency Management, and Cindy Van Wambeck, SAMMI volunteer of the year in Sammamish 2007 and to ReadyCorps staff and volunteers.

- 1) Reminder: You don't have to put together a disaster preparedness kit together all at once so take a deep breath and do it little by little.
- 2) Start by asking yourself some basic questions: What will I need to stay warm? What will I need to stay cool? What will I need to store water (tip: you can use empty soda bottles after you wash them with soap and hot water for water containers) and food in? What will I need to see in the dark? What will I need to eat, drink, and cook with? What will I need to build a make shift shelter? What will comfort me and give me a sense of relief (i.e. comfort foods, travel sized lotions that smell good or a favorite book)? You have the idea!
- 3) Ask yourself this: What do I already have in my home? More than likely, you already have a few items you can add to your disaster preparedness kit and free stuff is a bonus. Think about clothing, sleeping bags, blankets, flash lights or head lamps, a whistle, a back packing stove, duct tape, tools, a can opener, batteries, a whistle, pet supplies, plastic bags, things you need to eat with, personal care items, shoes, gloves, a hard hat and matches (* take care not to burn candles or cook on an unauthorized stove inside your house! Doing so may lead to a fire). You can add anything else you may need... Be Creative! After you have a list of items already in your home you can calculate how much the remaining items will cost you.
- 4) Look in your pantry! Do you have extra canned tuna (packed with water) or cans of soup? Both may help hydrate you in a pinch. How about peanut butter? This is good for sustaining your energy. Do you have any protein bar? These are small, inexpensive and good to eat on the run. Nuts are also good at giving you energy. Anything else that travels well and packs up small would be good to add.
- 5) Food wise don't forget some comfort food. Chocolate, hard candy, gum or mints can be a good mood elevator and they're cheap to buy.
- 6) Work with friends and family. They often have extras of things they don't use and you can take them or trade for them.
- 7) Use the Web! Two great sites to surf for free, trades or cheap goods: www.craigslist.org and www.freecycle.org
- 8) How about shopping at thrift stores, surplus warehouses or any dollar store in your area? Often you can find inexpensive essentials like: back packs, bins, things you need to eat and drink with (no glass), toys for kids or clothing. Look around when you are there and ask yourself the basic questions listed on line #1 above.
- 9) What about department or large discount stores (tip: look for sale bins sometimes placed in the very front or back of the store). Membership clubs and warehouse stores are also great and they sell items in bulk (tip: go in together with others on bulk items you may need and split them up for cost savings). Ask your doctor, dentist, or eye doctor if they have any free samples you can

add like bandages, a tooth brush, some paste or floss, contact solution, a contact case or a glasses case.

- 10) Are you planning to stay at a hotel in the near future? Take the personal sized soap or small shampoo, the plastic cup, or any other small sized freebie items left by the staff.
 - 11) Check the community pages, bulletin boards and garage sales in your area for inexpensive items you can add.
 - 12) Don't forget about personal documentation and money: have copies of your driver's license, social security card and birth certificate in your kit. If possible keep a little money (like \$5, \$10 or \$20 in small bills and some quarters (for the phone booth if your phone is out) on hand. Keep all personal information and money in a secure location at all times.
 - 13) "Kids are people too". Kids will need toys, coloring books, and treats, which provide them a sense of normalcy and routine in a disaster. Check with your local fire department because they may have some cool story books, coloring books and calendars for free. Not only are they fun, but they also list great disaster preparedness tips.
 - 14) Manuals that tell you how to survive in the woods are a great reference. Often they will tell you what you can and cannot eat right in your own yard. Now that's free!
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