

PORTLAND, Ore. - With the approach of next weeks Top Officials (TOPOFF) 4 drill - a Department of Homeland Security counterterrorism exercise - many people have disaster on their minds. While this simulated event will primarily test the ability of local, state and federal agencies to respond to a disaster, it also serves as an excellent opportunity for individuals and businesses to assess their own emergency preparedness. However, two recent surveys conducted by the American Red Cross show that there's still work to be done.

In a local survey conducted by Moore Information for the Oregon Trail Chapter of the American Red Cross, 75 percent of Portland residents think they will be prepared in the event of a natural disaster or other emergency. Still, fewer than 50 percent of respondents have taken any steps to ensure they are actually prepared when the time comes.

Furthermore, a national survey conducted by the American Red Cross and FedEx Corp. found that while the majority of small business owners are concerned about how a disaster will affect their businesses, only 43 percent feel prepared to handle a one week disruption of service. The Portland survey offered similar findings: only 24 percent of those surveyed believe their workplace is very well prepared for a disaster or emergency.

HOW YOU CAN PREPARE

The Oregon Trail Chapter offers the following tips to help families prepare for a disaster or emergency before it happens:

- Stock emergency supplies and assemble a disaster supplies kit that includes flashlights and extra batteries, a first aid kit and enough food and water for your entire family.
- Post emergency telephone numbers by phones (fire, police, ambulance, etc.).
- Teach children how and when to call 911 for emergency help.
- Determine the best escape routes from your home, including two ways out of each room.
- Show each family member how and when to turn off the water, gas and electricity at the main switches.
- Consult your insurance agent to make sure you have adequate insurance coverage.
- Teach each family member how to use the fire extinguisher, and show them where it's kept. Make sure to test and recharge according to manufacturer's instructions.

- Install smoke detectors on each level of your home, especially near bedrooms. Test them monthly and change the batteries at least once a year.
- Take a Red Cross first aid and CPR class.
- Conduct fire and emergency evacuation drills with your family.

To help prepare your business for a disaster or emergency:

- Create a phone list of all key employees and customers. Provide copies to all employees and keep a copy yourself.
- Keep additional stock of basic supplies, materials and equipment needed to run your business.
- Back up your computer data often throughout the day and keep tapes in a remote location.
- Consult your insurance agent and review your current insurance policy. Most basic policies do not cover flood or earthquake damage.
- If you have voicemail, designate a remote number on which you can record messages for employees and their families in case of an emergency. Provide the number to everyone.
- Create a company emergency kit with flashlights and extra batteries, a first aid kit and enough food and water for employees and customers, should you be confined for an extended period of time.
- Appoint one employee from each shift to be the safety coordinator, responsible for all safety decisions during an emergency. They should have all the emergency contact information for both the owners and the authorities.
- Inform all employees of your disaster plan. Walk through the emergency steps with employees and practice, practice, practice!