



## September is National Preparedness Month

It's been a rough year for many Americans, with the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) chalking up more than 20 "billion-dollar" natural disasters and counting.<sup>1</sup> Costly incidents have struck nearly every region, from firestorms to hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, and hail. With the El Nino cycle in full swing and hurricane season lasting until November 30th, some believe our nation's severe weather situation may be far from over this year.<sup>2</sup>

The Federal Emergency Management Organization (FEMA) first declared September National Preparedness Month in 2004, raising critical awareness of the simple, practical steps to help keep yourself and loved ones safe. If you haven't already, consider these key recommendations:

- **Assess your risk.** Are you in a fire, flood, tsunami, earthquake, or hurricane zone? Do you have any other unique risk factors to plan for?
- **Make a family plan.** Preparedness starts with a good plan. Make time to discuss scenarios and responsibilities.
- **Keep in touch.** How will you stay connected if communication lines go down? Establish an out-of-area contact and a designated meeting place in case of emergency.
- **Plan to evacuate.** Map and practice primary and secondary evacuation routes from your house and neighborhood.
- **Keep a kit.** Ensure your emergency kit contains nonperishable food, water, first aid supplies, flashlights, batteries, blankets, and essential documents. Don't forget medications, assistive equipment, or critical items for other special needs.
- **Don't forget the pets!** Failure to plan for pets is a key reason many fail to evacuate. Make a plan to get out with any animals, including food, water, and medication, or identify safe pet boarding facilities.
- **Stay in the loop.** Register for local alerts and warnings through government agencies or trusted third parties. Keep an eye on the forecast during severe weather periods.
- **Practice makes perfect.** A plan is only effective when everyone knows what to do! Schedule periodic discussions or drills with your family to maintain readiness.

National Preparedness Month reminds us that staying prepared is more than just a choice, but a responsibility. A little thoughtful preparation and family communication may be necessary to keep yourself and your loved ones safe during unexpected situations.

1. National Centers for Environmental Information, 2023

2. NOAA.gov, May 25, 2023

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