

Be prepared

What You Should Know About a Terrorist Attack

No section of the nation is immune to assaults by terrorists—from smaller towns to major metropolitan areas. Although fear of terrorism should not paralyze your daily life, it might be prudent to take a few precautions, just as you would for any weather emergency. Here are a few guidelines to help you get ready now.

Make an Emergency Kit

You'll want enough supplies to last three days, including a gallon of water per person per day. Pack canned and dried foods. Have a flashlight, a battery-powered radio, extra batteries, a first aid kit, toilet articles and prescription medicines.

Some terrorist attacks could send tiny contaminants into the air. Pack something for all members of the family to cover their noses and mouths, such as three layers of a cotton t-shirt or handkerchief. Or consider filter masks (available in hardware stores), which are rated based on how small a particle they filter. Also include duct tape and garbage bags or plastic sheeting that can be used to seal windows and doors.

Plan for What You Will Do

Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so decide how you'll contact one another. Each family member should know to call or e-mail the same friend or relative. It may be easier to make a long-distance phone call than to call across town, so an out-of-state contact may be better than a local one.

If the air is contaminated, you may want to stay where you are — or "shelter-in-place." Choose an interior room or one with as few windows and doors as possible. Consider precutting plastic sheeting to seal windows, doors and air vents; duct tape the sheeting over the openings and flat against the wall. Quickly bring your family inside. Close doors, windows, air vents and fireplace dampers. Turn off air conditioners, forced air furnaces, exhaust fans and clothes dryers. Watch TV, listen to the radio or check the Internet for instructions.

For a situation in which you must escape the area, plan how you'll assemble your family and where you'll go. Choose several destinations in different directions so you have options. Keep at least a half tank of gas in your car at all times. Take your emergency supply kit. If the air is contaminated, drive with your windows and vents closed and keep the air conditioning and heater off. Listen to the radio for instructions.

Be Informed about What Might Happen

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Various terrorist weapons pose different dangers and require different protective actions. A biological attack is the release of germs or viruses. A chemical attack is the release of a toxic gas, liquid or solid that can poison people and the environment. A nuclear blast is an explosion with widespread radioactive material that can contaminate the air, water and ground surfaces for miles around. A dirty bomb uses conventional, non-nuclear explosives to spread radioactive materials. For information about appropriate protective responses to each of these (and for more detailed information about protecting yourself generally in disasters), visit the Department of Homeland Security's web site, www.ready.gov/index.html, or the American Red Cross 's site at www.redcross.org/services/disaster.

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