



Preparing for the Next Emergency

Prepared January 2012

The recent “snowpocalypse” serves as a good reminder of what additional emergency preparation we need in our homes. Before the memory completely fades, jot down a to-do list of things you wished were in place to help you better weather the last storm. Then see how many you can accomplish before the next disruption.

- There are emergency preparation lists available if you need a reminder of the basics: www.doh.wa.gov/phepr/handbook/hbk_pdf/list.pdf

During this column, I will focus on an important resource rarely found on those emergency preparation lists. People helping people! Neighbors helping neighbors! Looking out for one another is rarely quantified, or thought about when preparing for an emergency. Something so simple and basic, yet we somehow forget about what an important and sustained resource putting our fellow neighbors first can be. During an emergency, we may not be able to reach the people with whom we usually interact. Reaching out to our neighbors can make a critical difference.

We saw some amazing things over the course of this past storm. One colleague witnessed the most amazing acts of kindness and compassion in the grocery store during the storm. The store was on limited power. Everyone was so thoughtful and conscious of others needs, taking only what supplies they needed, not extra, so that all could get something. At one point, the power went out and many customers were asked to leave their full grocery basket at the front. Rather than just dump the basket at the front many of the customers took the time to put all the items back on the shelves.

Another comment was from a person who had no power and felt as though their family was not prepared in terms of food, water, etc. They were not in immediate danger and survived until the power came back on 24 hours later. When asked if they talked to their neighbors they said no, “we are new to the neighborhood.” A smile, a wave, or a hello takes no money and very little effort. Those simple efforts do not need to wait until you are an “old” neighbor. They help break down barriers that otherwise isolate us in our busy lives.

One simple thing we can do in our preparation for the next emergency is to meet, talk, and exchange cell phones with our neighbors. While we should be prepared with food and water to last for 3 days, many do not have the means or forget about preparedness until the next storm. Consider being a friendly neighbor and store extra for guests. If the power is out and you have a gas or wood stove, invite the neighbors over to warm up with a hot meal. If each one of us would reach out to offer help to one other person during an emergency the multiplier effect would be unbelievable. Challenge yourself to turn at least one stranger into a neighbor. Then encourage one another to accomplish those items on

your emergency preparation to-do lists. **Together we can be much stronger and more resilient!**

Dr. Diana Yu is the Health Officer for the
Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department
www.co.thurston.wa.us/health
360-867-2500