



# PREPARING FOR AN EMERGENCY

Emergency Planning Unit

Customer Care Service

Gwynedd Council



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This document provides information about how to prepare for a major emergency or accident.

It includes advice on how to create an emergency plan or pack for your home, what you should do in an emergency, and how the Council and emergency services respond in an emergency.

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# PREPARING YOUR OWN EMERGENCY PLAN

The Emergency Services and the Council prepare generic plans in preparation for possible emergencies. You can do the same for your home or workplace.

Start by looking around you and consider which emergencies could affect you. Is there a risk of flooding? Do you live near a chemical or nuclear installation? Don't forget the possibility of house fires.

Once you have decided on the possible emergencies, discuss how you would respond to each of them with everyone in the household.

Plan how you would stay in touch if you were separated. Identify two meeting places: the first should be near your home and the second should be away from your neighbourhood in case you cannot return home. Agree on a friend or relative who lives outside the area that you can call to say you're safe.

Place a list of emergency numbers by each telephone in the house. Teach children how and when to phone 999.

Make sure all your insurance policies are up to date and include the risks you identified.

Put together a pack which includes the details of insurance companies, banks, car registrations etc. Ask a friend or relative to keep a copy for you.

If you are disabled keep extra supplies of items you may need such as extra wheelchair batteries, oxygen, catheters, medication, food for guide or hearing dogs etc.

Be aware who in your neighbourhood or building is disabled so that you can assist them during an emergency.

# PREPARING AN EMERGENCY KIT

During a major emergency covering a widespread area emergency services may not be able to reach you immediately and, it's possible that you will have to fend for yourself for three days or more.

Therefore, having your own water, food and emergency supplies, and preparing to cope if you lose your power, gas and/or water supply may prove vital.

You may also have to evacuate your home, office or school at a moment's notice and take essentials with you.

Here are some few useful tips on what you should store in preparation for such an event. With this checklist you can put together your disaster kit based on the risks that you have identified.

- Use plastic boxes or backpacks to keep the supplies together.
- Make sure all household members know where the kit is kept.
- Make a list of all contents, remembering to note the expiry dates of food/medication etc. that may need to be replaced. Check the kit every so often and throw away any tins that have become corroded, swollen or dented. If in doubt, throw it out!
- You should store at least 2.5 litres of water per person per day, along with water for washing and cooking.
- Pack foods that you can eat without being cooked such as canned meats, fish, fruits, vegetables, UHT milk, crackers etc. If appropriate, remember to pack baby food.

## **Medical items:**

- First Aid Kit.
- Prescription medication. It may be difficult to obtain prescription medication during a disaster. Ask your GP or pharmacist about storing back up supplies of prescription medications.

## **Tools and other useful items:**

- A radio and torch plus extra batteries.
- Matches in a waterproof, and childproof container!
- Fire extinguisher – make sure every member of your family knows how to use it.
- Heavy duty gloves.

- Items such as a whistle, can opener, safety knife, heavy duty bin bags, needles and thread, bucket, small shovel.
- A small cooking stove and cooking fuel.
- Personal hygiene items.
- Disinfectant and household chlorine bleach.
- Clothes and sturdy footwear.
- Sunglasses.
- Blanket or sleeping bag.
- Something to keep you occupied, e.g. books and board games.

**Important documents:**

- Personal identification, cash and credit cards.
- Copies of important documents such as birth certificates, marriage certificates, wills and deeds, insurance papers and immunisation records. Store these in water tight containers.
- Extra set of house and car keys.

# WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

## I. FLOODING

It isn't possible to prevent flooding, but you can prepare for it. Information on how Gwynedd Council can help during floods can be found on the [Flooding](#) page.

[Natural Resources Wales](#) publishes information that can help you before, during and after floods.

Please note that **you** are responsible for protecting your property. It is not the responsibility of the Local Authority.

### **Advice on what to do:**

- If you know that you live in a flood risk area subscribe to the Natural Resources Wales automated flood warning system. This service is free. You should also arrange insurance cover for your property.
- Prepare a list of useful telephone numbers e.g. the Council, emergency services, your insurance company, Natural Resources Wales Floodline and keep it to hand.
- Listen to the local radio for up-to-date news on the flood.
- Have a few sandbags or floodboards ready to block doorways and airbricks.
- Don't rely on the Council to provide sandbags at the last minute when flooding occurs.
- Assume that flood water contains sewage or is contaminated. Ensure that you wear plastic / rubber gloves when handling affected items.
- Check that vulnerable friends and family know about any flood warnings issued.
- Put together a Flood Kit including a torch, blankets, waterproof and warm clothing, wellingtons, a portable radio and batteries, first aid kit, rubber gloves, food and pet food (if applicable) and important personal documents.
- In the event of a flood switch off gas, water and electricity.
- Store valuable or sentimental personal belongings upstairs or in a high place downstairs. If it's safe to do so, remove vehicles to areas unaffected by flooding.
- If you live in a bungalow, caravan or any other dwelling without access to a second storey and you find yourself in difficulty, phone 999. If you are able to evacuate, inform the Emergency Services of your new location.
- If you are trapped in your home by the flooding, stay by a window and try to attract attention.

**Advice on what not to do:**

- Don't allow children to play in floodwater areas. Wash children's hands frequently. Throw away or disinfect floodwater infected toys.
- Don't walk in moving water, just 6 inches of moving water can sweep adults off their feet.
- Don't throw rubbish into watercourses or leave debris on the banks – it can add to the flooding problem.
- Don't use electrical circuits or equipment exposed to floodwater until checked by a qualified electrician.
- Don't use contaminated water to drink, wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash or prepare food or to make ice.
- Don't dispose of damaged goods until your insurers have had a chance to inspect them.
- Don't trust rogue traders. Always get a written quotation as your insurer will require one. Make sure that it is on headed paper with landline contact numbers and an address you know exists. Never pay in advance and only pay when the work is done to your satisfaction. Always get a receipt.
- If evacuating private motor vehicles to a place of safety, do not block access roads above the water level. Do not lift drain or manhole covers or grills.

## 2. WINTER WEATHER

For information on how Gwynedd Council keeps roads clear during wintery weather, go to the [severe weather](#) page on this site.

There can be extreme dangers if you are caught in a snowstorm. However, you can protect yourself, your car and your household from the many hazards of winter by planning ahead.

### Winter Driving

- Each winter the Council plans which roads will be gritted when ice and snow are forecast.
- Always check the weather forecast before starting your trip.
- Ask the question 'Is my journey necessary?', if not, then don't travel. If it is, plan your journey using the primary route road network.
- Find out if you can use public transport.
- Allow extra time for your journey.
- Clear the windows before setting off.
- Ensure your vehicle has suitable anti-freeze added to its radiator and low-freezing screen-wash to the washer bottle.
- Ensure that your vehicle is in good working order – wash all lights and indicators frequently.
- In cold conditions always drive with extra care and never assume that a road has been gritted.
- Tune into your local radio station for regular travel news updates.
- Use dipped headlights when driving in rain, fog or snow.
- Always keep plenty of fuel in your tank.

### Keep an emergency supply kit in your car, which includes:

- Suitable winter clothes and footwear and a blanket or sleeping bag.
- Mobile phone, radio, torch and extra batteries.
- Shovel and windscreen scraper.
- Water and snacks.
- Tow chain or rope.
- Jump leads.

### If you get stuck in a winter storm in a remote area:

- Pull off the road. Turn on hazard lights and hang a distress flag from the radio aerial or window.



- Remain in your vehicle. Only leave the car if there are buildings nearby where you know you can take shelter. Distances are distorted by drifting snow - a building may seem close but may be too far to walk in deep snow.
- Run the engine and heater for about 10 minutes each hour to keep warm. When the engine is running, open a window slightly to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. Periodically clear snow from the exhaust pipe.
- Move around to maintain body heat, but avoid over-exertion.
- Huddle with passengers.
- Make sure that someone in the car stays awake to keep an eye out for rescue teams.
- Drink fluids to avoid dehydration.
- Don't waste battery power.

### **Make your home safe for winter**

Prepare to survive in your home on your own, without outside help, for at least three days.

Assemble an emergency supply kit for your home. Information on how to prepare an Emergency Plan, can be found on the [Write your own emergency plan](#) page.

### **If your house is isolated:**

- Ensure that you have sufficient heating fuel for your house. Arrange that you have alternative heating equipment plus sufficient fuel for it in case the electricity supply is cut off.
- Maintain ventilation when using kerosene heaters to avoid a build-up of toxic fumes. Keep fire extinguishers to hand and make sure everyone in the house knows how to use them.
- Listen to the local radio or television for weather reports and emergency information.
- Eat regularly and drink ample fluids (avoid caffeine and alcohol).
- Dress appropriately. Several layers of light loose fitting clothing are better than one thick layer. The outer layer should be water repellent. Mittens are warmer than gloves. Always wear a hat as most body heat is lost through the head.
- Don't over-exert yourself when shovelling snow as it can bring on a heart attack.
- Watch out for signs of frostbite: loss of feeling in extremities with a white or pale appearance. If symptoms are detected, get medical help immediately.
- Watch out for signs of hypothermia: uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness and apparent exhaustion. If symptoms are detected, move the person to a warm location,

remove any wet clothing, warm the body from inside first by giving them a warm non-alcoholic drink (if conscious). Get medical help immediately.

- Regularly check up on family and friends who are vulnerable, such as the elderly.

### 3. HEATWAVE

The elderly, young children and those who are sick or overweight are more likely to succumb to extremes of heat.

Advice on what to do:

- Stay indoors or in the shade as much as possible.
- Keep to the lowest floor of your home away from the sunshine.
- Remember that electric fans do not cool, they just blow hot air around.
- Eat well-balanced, light and regular meals. Avoid using salt tablets unless directed to do so by your doctor.
- Drink regularly (no alcohol). If you have epilepsy or heart, kidney or liver disease, are on fluid-restrictive diets or have a problem with fluid retention, you should consult a doctor before increasing your fluid intake.
- Never leave children or pets alone in closed vehicles.
- Wear loose fitting, light clothes that cover as much skin as possible.
- Protect your face and head by wearing a wide-brimmed hat.
- Use sunscreen SPF 15 or higher.
- Avoid strenuous work during the warmest part of the day. Try not to work alone when working in extreme heat and take frequent breaks.
- Check on family and friends who are vulnerable, such as the elderly.

## 4. FIRE

Fire is the greatest risk to your home.

[North Wales Fire and Rescue Service's](#) community fire safety team offers free advice and information helping you minimise the risk of a fire. They also offer a free smoke alarm and installation service to all homes in Gwynedd. Contact North Wales Fire and Rescue Service to [claim your free smoke alarm](#).

Here are some tips to keep you and your family safe:

- Install smoke alarms - at least one on each floor of the house. The hallway and the landing are ideal locations. Test your alarm once a week and change the battery once a year. Replace your smoke alarm every 10 years.
- Identify two routes out of every room and keep your escape routes clear of obstacles. Go through the routes with your family.
- Make sure everyone knows where door and window keys are kept.
- Never leave a burning candle and switch off all electrical items after use.
- Don't smoke in bed!
- Shut all doors at night - it will slow down a spreading fire.
- Clean out storage areas. Don't let newspapers and magazines accumulate.

### **In the event of a fire:**

- Make sure everyone in the house knows there's a fire, don't look for it. Check doors with the back of your hand before opening. If the door feels warm, don't open it.
- Get Out. If there is a lot of smoke crawl along the floor.
- Stay Out. Don't go back in to your house, not even to collect valuables or pets.
- Call Out. Dial 999 and ask for the Fire Service.
- Do not use a lift during a fire.
- Stop-Drop-Roll: If your clothes catch fire, running will only fuel the flames and allow the blaze to spread over your body and cause worse burns. If your clothes are on fire, stop where you are, drop to the ground, cover your face with your hands and roll back and forth until the flames are extinguished.

### **If your escape way is blocked:**

- Get everyone into one room.
- Close the door and put bedding or towels along the bottom to seal the gap.
- Open the window for fresh air.
- Phone the Fire Service.

- Don't **jump** out of a window. Throw some bedding, clothing or soft furnishings out onto the ground below and lower yourself down carefully.
- Think about the best order to go down if you have children or older people with you.
- If you have to break a window, cover the jagged edges with any available soft materials.

## 5. HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Hazardous materials are substances that, because of their chemical nature, pose a potential risk to life, health or property if they are released.

Hazards can exist during production, storage, transportation, use or disposal.

Usually, there is nothing to worry about but you should know what to do if a hazardous incident occurs.

- Always follow the advice of the Emergency Services. There is a possibility that you will need to [shelter](#) or [evacuate](#).
- If you witness (or smell) a hazardous materials accident, call 999 at once. DON'T switch on your mobile phone if you think you are standing near flammable gas.
- Stay away from the incident.
- If you are in a car, stop and seek shelter in a building if possible. If you must remain in your car, keep car windows and vents closed and shut off the air conditioning and heating.
- If you live in the public information zone around a regulated site read the information provided to you. If the site has a 24hr Automated Voice Messaging Service, sign up to it. It will inform you if there is an emergency.

### **Toxic chemical or radiation release**

If you think you may have been contaminated by radiation or toxic chemicals wait for specialist advice from the Emergency Services. Don't leave the scene or go to hospital.

The Emergency Services will take the necessary steps to safeguard you.

### **Household Chemical Emergencies**

Nearly all households use products containing hazardous materials. Although the risk of a chemical accident is slight, knowing how to handle these products and how to react during an emergency can reduce the risk of injury.

- Follow the instructions on the product label for proper disposal of chemicals.
- Take out of date or unused medicines back to the pharmacy for disposal.
- Read the instructions before using new chemical products and store household chemicals in accordance with the instructions on the label.
- Store chemicals in a safe location, out of reach of children.
- Avoid mixing household chemical products.
- Never smoke while using chemicals.

- If you spill chemicals, clean them up immediately with rags whilst wearing gloves and eye protection. Dispose of the rags in accordance with the instructions on disposal of the chemical itself.

**Learn to recognise symptoms of toxic poisoning:**

There are numerous side effects including breathing difficulty, irritation of the eyes, skin, throat or respiratory tract, changes in skin colour, headache or blurred vision, dizziness, clumsiness or lack of co-ordination, cramps or diarrhoea.

If your child eats or drinks a non-food substance, find the container immediately, take it with you to the phone and call 999. Medical professionals may need specific information from the container to give you the best emergency advice.

Follow the professional advice carefully. Do not give anything by mouth without being told to do so by a medical professional.

Take immediate action if the chemical gets into the eyes. Flush the eye out with clean water for at least 15 minutes. Continue cleansing even if the patient indicates they are no longer feeling pain.

## 6. SHELTER

Sheltering is often a critical element in protecting yourself and your household in times of emergency. You will be advised to:

### **Go In - Stay In - Tune In!**

You should **go** indoors and **stay** there until the authorities tell you it is safe to go outside again. **Listen** to your local radio stations for news and advice about the emergency.

Here are some points to remember:

- Close and lock all windows and doors, switch off any fans, air conditioning units, or vents that draw air in from outside. Go to a room as far away from the hazard as possible with the least openings and downwind if possible.
- Avoid eating uncovered food that may have been exposed to any contaminated air during the emergency.
- Don't use the telephone, especially your mobile phone, unless it is essential.
- The Police and the education authorities will ensure that children attending any schools affected by the emergency are properly looked after. Do not try to fetch the children. They will be safe at the school, nursery or with the childminder.
- If you are out when you hear sheltering advice go into a shop or other public building and wait for further instructions. When it is practical to do so, change your clothes and shower. Place the discarded clothes inside a bin liner, tie the bag before placing it in another bin liner.
- Do not call 999 for information only; you may be compromising a genuine emergency call.
- If you rely on a Home Care Assistant, they will not be able to come to you. Your local authority will inform Adult Social Care who will try to contact you by phone. It might be necessary to move you from your shelter area. Only if you are in immediate danger should you call the Emergency Services on 999.

### **Pets**

- If your pet was outside at the time of the emergency, do not go outside to look for it. Wait until it comes to the door, let it in but keep it in a room separate from everyone else.
- Be sure your pet has a proper identification tag securely fastened to the collar or, ideally, that it already has a microchip tag.



## 7. EVACUATION

While evacuation is generally considered as a last resort, evacuations are more common than you may think. A gas leak may cause the emergency services to evacuate a whole street.

Not all evacuations are long term. You sometimes can return after a few hours but in a chemical incident, your house may not be habitable and you would have to be re-housed while decontamination is carried out.

It is worth being prepared for an evacuation.

- Always listen to the advice of the emergency services. They will inform you and tell you what to do and where to go.
- Discuss with your family what you would do in the event of an evacuation. Plan where you would go if you had to leave your home / village / town. Remember to allow for traffic congestion as you are unlikely to be the only person being evacuated.
- Plan a place to meet your family in case you are separated during a disaster.
- Find out where children will be sent if schools are evacuated. Remember that this can change at a moment's notice if the allocated evacuation point cannot be used.
- Assemble an emergency supply kit including essential items like prescription medicine, baby items (if applicable), toiletries, phone numbers, radio etc.
- Know how to shut off your home's electricity, gas and water supplies at main switches and valves and have the necessary tools to hand.
- If a hard freeze is likely during your absence, take action to prevent damage to water pipes.
- Close and lock windows and doors when you leave.

### **Pets**

- If you are told to evacuate, leave pets behind. You may have to leave your pets with the RSCPA to be picked up after you are able to return home.
- If you must take your pet with you, make sure you have a secure pet carrier or leash.

## 8. RECOVERY

Once the immediate threat is over the recovery phase begins.

The Council will do everything it can to facilitate a speedy recovery, but some responsibilities remain with you as an individual, especially where your health and property are concerned.

### **Your first concern after a disaster should be your family's health and safety:**

- Be aware of new hazards created by the disaster, e.g. damaged roads, contaminated buildings and water, gas leaks, damaged wires etc.
- Be aware of exhaustion. Don't try to do too much at once. Set priorities and pace yourself.
- Drink plenty of clean water. Eat well and get enough rest.
- Wear sturdy boots and work gloves when working with debris.
- Wash your hands thoroughly, especially before eating. Diseases can be more common at times like these.
- Inform the Council or Emergency Services about health and safety hazards, such as chemical releases, power lines that are down, washed out roads, smouldering insulation, gas leaks or dead animals.

### **Returning home**

- Wear sturdy boots and work gloves and, before going into your house walk carefully around the outside of your home and check for loose power lines, gas leaks and structural damage. If you smell gas, do not enter your home and leave immediately.
- If your home was damaged by fire, do not enter until authorities say it is safe.
- Don't switch on the light until you are certain that there isn't a gas leak. A torch is the best source of light for inspecting a damaged home (switch it on outside). If you cut off your gas supply before evacuating, it should be switched on and tested by a professional before you can safely use it.
- Check electrical appliances. If they are wet, they need to be checked by a professional before use.
- Throw out food/medicines/toys that have been contaminated.
- Check with the Council or Water Supply Company before using the water - it may be contaminated.
- Call your insurance provider as soon as possible. Take pictures of damages and keep clear records of any repair work and cleaning costs. Be aware of bogus traders.
- Always get a written quotation; your insurer will require this. Make sure that it is on headed letter paper with landline contact numbers (not a mobile

number!) and an address you have verified. Never pay in advance. Only pay when the work is done to your satisfaction and obtain a receipt for the payment. If in doubt, check with the Council's Trading Standards department for advice.

### **Coping with disasters**

Any disaster is sure to leave you stressed. Returning to a damaged home can be both physically and mentally challenging. Don't feel that you have to cope alone.

Some of the symptoms may include:

- difficulty communicating thoughts and difficulty concentrating
- difficulty sleeping
- difficulty maintaining balance
- easily frustrated and easily annoyed
- increased use of alcohol/drugs
- headaches/stomach problems/colds or flu-like symptoms
- tunnel vision/muffled hearing
- disorientation or confusion and poor work performance
- reluctance to leave home and fear of crowds, strangers and being alone
- depression, sadness, overwhelming guilt and self-doubt
- feeling of hopelessness.

### **Helping children cope with disasters**

Children can suffer from the above symptoms just like adults. It is important for parents and teachers to be informed and ready to help if reactions to stress begin to occur.

- Children can be affected by seeing drama unfold on television.
- Some children may show signs of stress very soon after the event and some will be fine for weeks before they show unusual behaviour.
- Reassurance is the key to helping children with trauma. Very young children will need a lot of physical assurance and cuddling.
- Answer questions honestly, but do not dwell on frightening details or allow the subject to dominate family life.
- Encourage children to express emotions through conversation, drawing or find a way to help others affected by the same disaster.
- Contact your Council's Children Services department or your Children's teachers for advice.
- Try to keep a normal household routine.
- Encourage children to participate in recreational activities.

- Reduce your expectations temporarily about performance in school or at home.

## 9. FLU

The flu is a respiratory illness which affects the lungs and airways, and is the result of an infection caused by an influenza virus.

The characteristic symptoms of flu, which usually come on suddenly, are fever, chills, headache, cough, body aches and fatigue. The flu virus is usually spread in the small droplets of saliva coughed or sneezed into the atmosphere by an infected person. Direct contact with hands contaminated with the virus can also spread infection.

As influenza circulates each year in the UK during the winter months (October to April), it is often called **seasonal flu** and results from slight changes to the virus from the previous year which means that some people who encounter the new virus may no longer be fully immune.

A vaccine (the 'flu jab') is developed for each season which is offered free to everyone over 65 and people in certain 'at-risk' groups who are more likely to develop complications as a result of having flu.

If you develop a cough or sneeze, use a paper tissue to cover your nose and mouth, place the tissue in a bin and wash your hands.

If you do develop a fever and cough, stay at home and contact your doctor.