

Emergency Preparedness – Sanitation-1

Summary

Under conditions likely to follow many disasters or major emergencies, failure to maintain sanitary practices can lead to the rapid spread of potentially fatal diseases. This document addresses the basic supplies and practices needed to maintain sanitation while sheltering in place, with some advice on evacuation. Additional information and references can be found in the Sanitation-2 (in prep) document.

A few blunt words about sanitation

Any or all of the following conditions are likely after a disaster or major emergency:

- People cluster together for shelter, protection, or access to supplies
- Utilities, including water and sewer service, are inoperative
- Toilet and bathing or laundry facilities are unavailable or overloaded
- Access to medical products and care is extremely limited or unavailable

These situations can lead to the rapid spread of food- or water-borne disease that can be lethal to vulnerable and older individuals. Sanitation is a life or death matter.

Human waste management and disposal

- Urine is usually harmless, and can be safely disposed of by spreading it on the land surface, or pouring it down a functional drain.
- Fecal matter (feces) can be an avenue for transmission of many diseases; it must be stored and disposed of in ways that avoid human contact.
- It is important to separate urine from feces as much as possible, and to clean up promptly any potential fecal-contamination of your person or anything else.

What supplies do I need?

- Sturdy garbage bags to use as liners for an actual or improvised toilet
- A pail, pot, hospital urinal or some other appropriate container to use if you cannot urinate directly into a working drain, or outdoors.
- A reserve supply of toilet tissue and/or sani-wipes, and paper towels
- Plain bleach (no color, perfume or additives) – ½ - 1 gallon
- Hand sanitizers – wipes or liquid – and liquid soap
- At least one pair of reusable kitchen rubber gloves
- A packet of surgical gloves
- Anti-diarrheal medication such as Imodium

Note: Bleach is also useful for purifying water, and you will also need a pail or large container for collecting water.

What should I do for waste management?

- If you might not have water service, check before defecating. If you cannot flush the toilet more than once, immediately line your toilet with a garbage bag, making sure that it's secure against slipping in (duct tape can help)
- Start segregating urine and feces (toilet paper, etc., all goes in with feces).
- When the bag is about 1/4 full (still easy to lift and carry), replace it, twist the unoccupied part of the used bag tightly, knot it, and if you have any doubts about its security, tape it tightly.
- If you must store the used bag, keep it as far from your living (and especially eating) area as possible, and where it is unlikely to be damaged.
- **DO NOT PUT THIS BAG INTO A GARBAGE CHUTE OR ORDINARY GARBAGE CAN – THIS ENDANGERS EVERYBODY!**

What else should I do?

- Clean your hands carefully after using the toilet and before handling food
- Disinfect your food preparation and eating surfaces regularly (there are instructions on the bleach bottle).
- Wear gloves if you must clean up contaminated things or people
- Encourage—or demand—safe practices by your friends or neighbors.

What if I have to evacuate?

- Be sure to take the items that are light and compact enough to carry – liquid cleanser and wipes, liquid soap, surgical gloves, Imodium, and least some tissue.
- If you evacuate by car, build sanitation considerations into your supply plans (example - an entrenching tool for improvised latrines).
- Know, and follow sanitation guidelines as closely as possible.

ADDITIONAL ADVICE

- Non-potable water is safe to use for washing or cleaning (with soap or bleach).
- The Water-1 and Medical-1 documents have additional relevant information.
- Have N95 or surgical masks and wear them if respiratory diseases start to spread.

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