

Sanitation and Hygiene In An Emergency

The lack of sanitation facilities following major disaster can quickly create secondary problems unless basic guidelines are followed.

If water lines are damaged or if damage is suspected, do not flush the toilet. Avoid digging holes in the ground and using these. Untreated raw sewage can pollute fresh ground water supplies. It also attracts flies and promotes the spread of diseases.

- Store a large supply of heavy-duty plastic bags, twist ties, disinfectant, and toilet paper
- A good disinfectant that is easy to use is a solution of 1 part liquid bleach to 10 parts water. Dry bleach is caustic and not safe for this type of use.
- If the toilet is NOT able to be flushed, it can still be used. This is less stressful for most people than using some other container. Remove all the bowl water. Line it with a heavy-duty plastic bag. When finished, add a small amount of deodorant or disinfectant, securely tie the bag, and dispose of it in a large trash can with a tight fitting lid. This large trash can should also be lined with a sturdy trash bag. Eventually, the city will provide a means to dispose of these bags.
- Portable camp toilets, small trash cans or sturdy buckets lined with heavy-duty plastic bags can also be used. Those with tight fitting lids are best.

Tips for Staying Clean in an Emergency Situation

As much as possible, continue regular hygiene habits such as brushing your teeth, washing your face, combing your hair and even washing your body with a wet washcloth. This will help prevent the spread of disease and irritation as well as help relieve stress.

- Keep your fingers out of your mouth. Avoid handling food with your hands.
- Purify your drinking water. Use chlorine bleach, purification tablets (check bottle for expiration dates), or by boiling for 10 minutes.
- Sterilize your eating utensils by heat. You can also rinse dishes in purified water that has additional chlorine bleach added to it. (Use 2 1/2 teaspoons bleach per gallon of purified water.)
- Keep your clothing as clean and dry as possible, especially under-clothing and socks.

If, during an emergency situation, you develop vomiting or diarrhea, rest and stop eating solid foods until the symptoms ease up. Take fluids, particularly water, in small amounts at frequent intervals. As soon as can be tolerated, resume eating semi-solid foods. Normal salt intake should be maintained.

Keep Basic Hygiene Supplies Handy

These basic supplies should be kept in your Safe Room, Go Pack and Car.

- Cornstarch
- Sanitary napkins
- Toilet paper
- A few bath towels
- Liquid all-purpose soap
- Liquid Chlorine Bleach
- Fingernail clippers and files
- Insect repellent
- Moistened Towelettes or Baby Wipes
- Small hand-held mirror
- Vaseline Petroleum Jelly
- Ammonia (disinfecting aid)

Emergency Sewage Disposal

Water flush toilets cannot be used when water service is interrupted. The water remaining in the fixture is not sufficient to flush the wastes down the sewer. Clogging may result and your living conditions then become just that much more uncomfortable.

Even if water is available, local authorities may ask you not to use flush toilets, wash basins, and other fixtures connected with soil pipes. The sewer mains may be broken or clogged, which would make it impossible to carry off such waste; or water may be needed for fire fighting or other emergencies. It is necessary for every family to know emergency methods of waste disposal in case such conditions arise.

Failure to properly dispose of human wastes can lead to epidemics of such diseases as typhoid, dysentery, and diarrhea. At the same time, sewage must be disposed of in ways that will prevent contamination of water supplies used for drinking, cooking, bathing, laundering, and other domestic purposes. Here are simple steps that any family can take to prevent such dangers and discomforts.

Temporary Toilet Provisions

Right after an emergency, or during one, you will probably not have the time and tools to prepare a complex emergency sanitation system. If there is a delay of several days in restoring sewage service to your neighborhood, you may find that disposal is a big problem. Your first task is to make some temporary toilet provision for your family, especially the children. Almost any covered metal or plastic container will do. You can use a covered pail, a 5-gallon bucket, or a small kitchen garbage container with a foot operated cover for an emergency toilet. Anything that has a cover and will hold the contents until you can dispose of them will serve for sanitary purposes at first.

Emergency Sewage Storage

Have at least one extra 10-gallon garbage can or other waterproof container with a tight fitting cover. This should be lined with paper and/or a plastic bag. And the lid should be fastened to the can to prevent its loss. Such a can may be used for the emergency storage of body wastes until the public sewage system can be put back into action, or until other arrangements can be made. Empty your emergency toilet into this storage can as often as necessary. A small amount of household disinfectant should be added after each use. If you live in an apartment, you may not have a large garbage can or room to keep one. In that case, two smaller covered pails or other containers will do just as well.

Solutions for Apartment Dwellers

Persons in city apartments, office buildings, or homes without yards should keep a supply of waterproof paper containers on hand for emergency waste disposal. Where flush toilets cannot be used and open ground is not available for the construction of privies, such disposable containers offer a practical method of emergency waste collection and disposal. Building managers should plan for the collection of such containers and for their final disposal. Before collection, the used containers may be stored in tightly covered garbage cans or other water tight containers fitted with lids. Homemade soil bags for this purpose can be prepared very easily by putting one large grocery bag inside another, and a layer of shredded newspaper or other absorbent material between. You should have sufficient grocery bags on hand for possible emergencies. A supply of old newspapers will come in handy for other sanitary uses also, such as wrapping garbage and lining larger containers.

Controlling Odors and Insects

Insecticides and deodorants should be used when necessary to control odors and insects breeding in containers that cannot be emptied immediately. At least 2 pints of household bleach solution should be kept on hand for disinfecting purposes.

Other Supplies

Keep on hand an extra supply of toilet tissue, plus a supply of sanitary napkins. If there is illness in the house that requires rubber sheeting or other special sanitary equipment, make sure that adequate supplies are available. At least a week's accumulation of daily newspapers will come in handy for insulating bedding from floors, and lining clothes against cold, as well as for the sanitary uses already mentioned.

Babies

If you have a baby in your home, you may find diaper laundering a problem under emergency conditions. It is best to keep an ample supply of disposable diapers on hand for emergency use. Or, any moisture resistant material can be cut and folded to diaper size and lined with absorbent material.