

## Emergency Preparedness: Shelter-in-Place

It's difficult to know exactly what to do in every emergency. Protocol for winter storms are very different from the steps one would take in case of an earthquake. However, when it comes to biological, chemical, or radioactive emergencies, it's best to listen to the emergency broadcast announcements and follow the instructions given. In the case of a severe emergency, particularly one that falls under the categories mentioned above, authorities will announce that people should "shelter-in-place".

Shelter-in-place means basically what it sounds like: when authorities announce this, people should drop what they are doing and take shelter in the nearest indoor location. Much of the time, that location will be the home, school, or office, but there are a few other places, like the car, which also need to be addressed.

Before any of these can be addressed, however, people must understand that staying informed and educated is imperative. Don't just wait until a disaster happens--call local authorities and police departments and find out what disasters the area is susceptible to. And don't be the last one to know about an emergency, either, since that could hinder the chances of escaping a disaster without injury. Be sure to know where and how the "shelter-in-place" warning will be given. It will almost always be announced on televisions or radios, but there will often also be an emergency alarm or flashing lights that announce that people should take shelter.

The most common place people will need to shelter-in-place is the home. In order to shelter in place, people will have to do more than just run inside the house and lock the doors. Sheltering also means sealing the house in order to keep out the dangerous chemicals, radiation, or other pathogens that could invade the home and cause disease, injury, or even death.

First, as soon as they hear the announcement, people should get indoors if they are not already in there. Do lock all the windows and doors, and go to the household's designated "safe room." This room should have the following qualities in order to be the most secure place possible for sheltering in place: it should be an above-ground interior room with as few windows and doors as possible, and as a perk, it could have a water source and a landline.

It is also imperative that the room contains a [radio](#) (preferably one that is not powered by electricity in case of power outages), so that people can stay in contact with the outside world and know what steps to take and when the disaster is over. Next, close off vents and openings, using duct tape if necessary. Remember, sheltering-in-place is a precaution that is only meant to last a few hours at most, so people don't have to worry about the sealed room running out of oxygen.

People should also remember to shelter their pets. Bring animals indoors and into the safe room with the rest of the household. Keep newspaper, food, and water with them just in case the shelter-in-place takes longer than predicted.

Finally, when it comes to sheltering-in-place in the home, it is important that people don't just assume that they will only need a safe room and nothing else. Families and individuals should have an emergency plan that everyone understands and can follow. Kids at school or work should know who to call and where to meet once the shelter alert is over. It's also a good idea to have an out-of-state contact, just in case communications are down in the area around the disaster.

Besides having a secure room and a means to communicate, people should also assemble an [emergency supplies kit](#). Even if people are only shut in for a few hours, they should still make sure they have all the necessities. It's better to be prepared and to not have to use those preparations than to be caught off guard.

A family emergency supplies kit should contain a [3-day supply](#) of [nonperishable food](#). Although this will likely be more than one would eat in a "shelter-in-place" emergency, these kits are standard and will work for any disaster. Food storage can be as boring or as exciting as people want to make it. On the one hand, it is important to have staples like

[wheat](#) and [instant milk](#); but on the other, there really isn't much that people can make with such basic ingredients.

However, there is an alternative to bland food storage. Stores offer a wide variety of [freeze-dried foods](#) that keep their flavor and nutrition content and will keep for as many as 20 years. And people can have fun mixing and matching [dehydrated foods](#) or [pouches](#) of food that are usually designed for hikers. Some stores even carry [dehydrated desserts](#), so people can eat as normally as possible in a disaster.

Besides this food, disaster kits should also have a three day [supply of water](#), and special tools. These should include [flashlights](#) and other light sources, a [multipurpose tool](#) (think Swiss army knife), [rope](#), and a [wrench](#). This may seem like a lot to remember, but emergency preparedness businesses like [The Ready Store](#) offer a wide variety of supplies that are inexpensive and easy to find.

Finally, every disaster preparedness kit should have a comprehensive [first aid kit](#). While the supplies for these kits can be bought separately, it's easier and generally less expensive to just buy one. Not to mention the fact that some of the supplies--like triangular bandages or a breathing barrier with a one-way valve--could be difficult to find. They almost certainly won't be located next to each other in a single store.

Once all the preparations are in place and the room has been sealed off with everyone inside, the last thing to do is wait. Emergency officials will keep everyone posted as much as possible about the severity of the threat. This is where a battery-powered radio comes in handy, since electricity may very well be out. Finally, don't leave until officials have announced the threat is over, unless the safe room has become detrimental to the health of those inside.

Shelter-in-Place for businesses isn't much different than for houses. Businesses should close all doors and ask customers to stay, rather than leave. Turn off all air conditioning units and have everyone wait in a room similar to the household safe room: interior location, fewest windows possible, but large enough to comfortably accommodate everyone. Employees of the business should write down the names of everyone in the room for security and safety reasons.

Finally, safety-in-place is very different for people who are stuck in their cars when the emergency is announced. If at all possible, people should get out of their car and run into the nearest building. For those on the freeway with no close exits, however, they should pull over, in the shade if possible, and turn off the engine. Close all the car's vents and seal with duct tape if it is available. This will help prevent any hazardous materials from entering the car. And lastly, keep the radio on in order to stay updated on the emergency situation. The radio could be the only way to find out if it's safe to start moving again or not.

Hopefully, people will not have to follow all these instructions to shelter in place; however, it is better to be prepared than to be caught unawares by a disaster. If people will make a plan, have a kit, and stay informed, then there is not reason they shouldn't come out of the emergency unscathed.