

A Guide to Personal Emergency Preparedness

Image: www.lafd.org

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The **Montpelier Commission** for **Recovery** & **Resilience**

Introduction
- Who and what is this for?
- What is preparedness?
- How do I use this guide?

Gathering Information
- Assess Your Risks
- Types of Emergencies
- HOW are you getting your information?
- Understanding the Information

Planning for Action
- WHEN do you take action?
- WHO takes which actions?
- WHERE do you go?
  - Considerations for evacuation: Should you stay or should you go?
  - Where can you go?

Emergency Preparedness Kits
- Household Emergency Supplies
- The "Go Bag"
- Special Kit Considerations
- Emergency Kit Maintenance

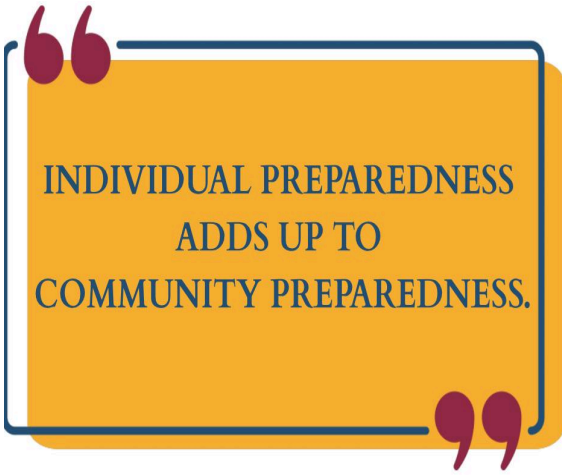
Communications and Contacts
- Emergency Contacts
- Emergency Meeting Places
- Connecting with Community

Recovery

Goals:
- Worksheet: Planned Actions
- Worksheet: Decision Tree (Template 1)
- Worksheet: Contacts



Introduction



Who and what is this for?

Everyone deserves to feel safe in their home. Always. Even during extreme weather events, even during emergencies. Preparedness often leads to decreased stress, increased resilience, and greater confidence in one's ability to navigate emergent situations, all of which contribute to safety and security. Further, individual preparedness adds up to community preparedness and can benefit the resilience and safety of all.

This Guide was created with Montpelier, Vermont and its residents in mind. The city-specific reference materials and focus on flooding and heavy rain are a reflection of this. However, most, if not all, of the planning materials are useful and adaptable to those in other towns and states, preparing for a variety of emergencies.

What is preparedness?

Preparedness is knowledge of action, planning, and thought exercises that when performed prior to threatening situations create a sense of readiness and reassurance. To be prepared is to not only anticipate needs and required actions, but also to implement a plan now to fulfill those needs of the future.

How do I use this guide?

This guide is intended to be a robust starting point, on which you can build a foundation of preparedness. It is a place to begin to think through and plan for some emergencies and associated actions.

Walk through each exercise in order, as they are relevant to you. You might do this alone, with the members of your household, or perhaps you and a household member complete it separately and compare.

Gathering Information

Assess Your Risks

Your risks may be different from your neighbors'. Personal factors, such as age, ability, socioeconomic status, etc. can impact your risks greatly. Environmental factors such as location, elevation, cardinal direction, age of home, etc. can as well. Additionally, the same emergency can affect households in different ways; In the event of flooding, someone near a river might prepare for inundation and evacuation, while someone on a hill might prepare to shelter in place if they lose access to a road. It's important to consider factors that pertain to your particular household. The hazard maps and websites below are a good place to start. Local knowledge is also very valuable.



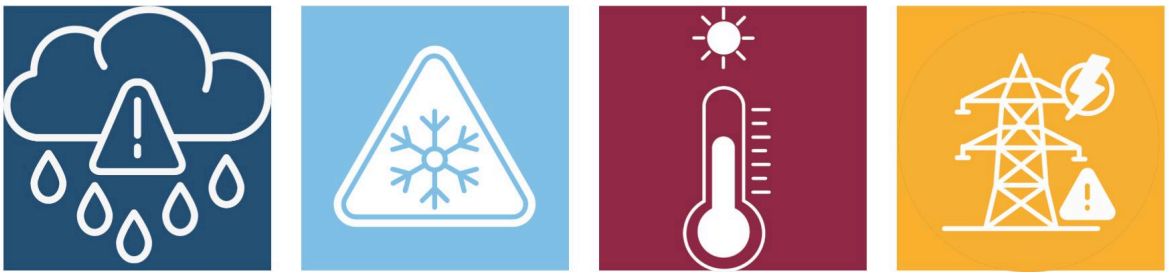
Use these resources to help identify some of your risks...

- FEMA Flood Map Service Center
- Earthquake Hazards Program
- Landslide Hazards Program
- Drought Maps
- Realtor.com-Search your home address, click or scroll to "Environmental Risks."
- **Talk to your neighbors. Utilize local knowledge.**

Types of Emergencies

According to the State Hazard Mitigation Plan, flooding is the number one recurring hazard in Vermont.[1] And in Montpelier, fluvian erosion and inundation flooding are numbers one and two.[2] This guide was created with Montpelier, Vermont in mind. As a result, natural disasters– especially flooding and heavy rain–are emphasized throughout this planning process.

Security and human-caused emergencies (i.e. cyber attacks, active shooter events, etc.) are not a focus of this guide. However, preparedness for them has some overlap with the preparedness strategies explored here. An ice storm as well as a cyber attack could lead to a loss of communication, for example, so preparedness for one could lead to preparedness for the other. **Preparedness for any emergency is a step in the right direction.**



Identify the emergencies you are most likely to be impacted by...

• Winter Storm	• Heavy Rain	• Fluvial Erosion
• Power Outage	• Inundation Flooding	• Tornado
• Earthquake	• Flash Flooding	• Other(s):
• Drought	• Ice Jam	•
• Dam Failure/Release	• Heatwave	•

As you continue, keep these possible emergencies you've identified in mind. They will help to inform your plan.

[1] Vermont Emergency Management, State Hazard Mitigation Plan; https://vem.vermont.gov/plans/SHMP
[2] City of Montpelier, Local Hazard Mitigation Plan; https://www.montpelier-vt.org/529/Other-Plans-and-Studies

HOW are you getting your information?

Vermont Emergency Management's "Vermont Alert"- https://vem.vermont.gov/vtalert

City of Montpelier's "NotifyMe" system- https://www.montpelier-vt.org/list.aspx

Vermont Public's "Eye on the Sky: Vermont Weather" weekly newsletter- https://www.vermontpublic.org/weather

Roger Hill's *Weathering Heights* forecast: https://weatheringheights.com/

VT Weather Radio Stations - National Weather Service: "Vermont Station Listening"	
Burlington —	**Castleton** —
KIG60 162.400	WNG671 162.500
St. Johnsbury —	**Windsor** —
WWG50 162.425	WXM44 162.475

River Gauges	
North Branch at Wrightsville	https://water.noaa.gov/gauges/WRTV1
North Branch at Langdon St.	https://water.noaa.gov/gauges/LNGV1
Winooski River at Cemetery Curve, Montp.	https://water.noaa.gov/gauges/MONV1
Winooski River at Waterbury	https://water.noaa.gov/gauges/WATV1
Winooski River at Essex Junction	https://water.noaa.gov/gauges/ESSV1

Understanding the Information

Emergency	A serious, unexpected, and often dangerous situation requiring immediate action.
Disaster	A large-scale calamity that requires immediate action. May result in significant loss, damage, or destruction. An emergency that has gotten out of control.
Warning	A warning is issued when a hazardous weather or hydrologic event is occurring, imminent or likely. Weather conditions pose a threat to life or property. Take protective action.
Advisory	issued when a hazardous weather or hydrologic event is occurring, imminent or likely. Advisories are for less serious conditions than warnings, that cause significant inconvenience and if caution is not exercised, could lead to situations that may threaten life or property.
Watch	used when the risk of a hazardous weather or hydrologic event has increased significantly, but its occurrence, location or timing is still uncertain. It is intended to provide enough lead time so those who need to set their plans in motion can do so.
Observed	real, measurable values that exist in current or recorded time.
Forecast	expected values for the future based on current and historic values.

Flood stages- City of Montpelier Flood Stages Graphic

Major Flood Stage	Widespread, catastrophic, life-threatening flooding. Low-laying areas completely inundated, structures partially to completely submerged. Large-scale evacuations likely.
Moderate Flood Stage	Inundation of buildings usually begins at this stage. Prepare for water in basements, road closures, and some areas cut off by water. Evacuations may be necessary.
Minor Flood Stage	some roads, lawns, and low-laying fields will likely be inundated.
Action Stage	Water surface is near the top of its banks. Flooding is possible. Prepare to minimize flood damages.



Planning for Action

WHEN do you take action?

Think about the actions you might need to take to protect yourself, your family, and your home. During an emergency, making decisions about *when* to do these actions can add unnecessary stress. Take some time in calm, blue skies to brainstorm actions and the circumstances that might activate them. See some examples below.

Activator (When *this* happens,)	**Action** (I will…)
The river gauge at the Cemetery Curve forecasts 18 ft.	begin moving items off my basement floor.
A large snowstorm is predicted	check/restock my emergency food supply
a heatwave is coming and temperatures are expected to reach 90 degrees,	draw my curtains to help keep my living spaces cool.

*Note: these are examples. Your activators for action might differ. Fill in your own action items on the attached worksheet.

Avoid making decisions in times of heightened stress.
Decide now, not later!

In the event of possible flooding, when do you act?

When a particular alert goes out? Based on river gauge levels? What do various water levels mean to your location specifically? When Winooski River Gauge (MONV1) says 15 ft, that means flooding around Bailey Bridge, but what does that look like at your location?

Consider these recent historical levels:

Date	Winooski River Gauge (MONV1)	Langdon Street Bridge (LNGV1)
07-11-2024	14.45 ft	519.12 ft
12-18-2023	16.15 ft	519.12 ft
07-11-2023	21.29 ft	526.20 ft
01-13-2018	—	520.28 ft
08-29-2011	19.05 ft	520.89 ft
05-27-2011	17.59 ft	521.60 ft
03-11-1992	27.10 ft	525.10 ft

Identify the readings that are significant for you. Consider these numbers when filling out your *Decision Tree* later.

Action Stage 1 MONV1 _____ LNGV1 _____
Action Stage 2 MONV1 _____ LNGV1 _____
Action Stage 3 MONV1 _____ LNGV1 _____

WHO takes which actions?

Assign actions and tasks with members of your household. Divide and conquer!
Tasks to consider:

- Monitoring weather and alerts
- Placing sandbags
- Gathering supplies and documents
- Moving belongings
- Preparing to evacuate



WHERE do you go?

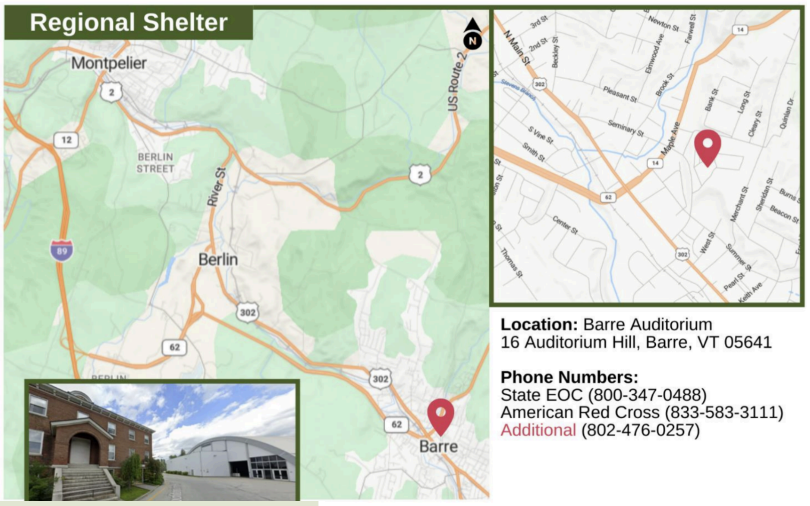
Considerations for evacuation: Should you stay or should you go?

Stay if…	Go if…
• you are advised to "shelter in place" by an official government source • leaving poses more risk than staying • your emergency routes/exits are obstructed • you don't have a secondary location to go to	• you are advised to evacuate by an official government source • there's an evacuation notice for your area • the safety of yourself or others is at risk • the integrity of your home/school/workplace is at risk

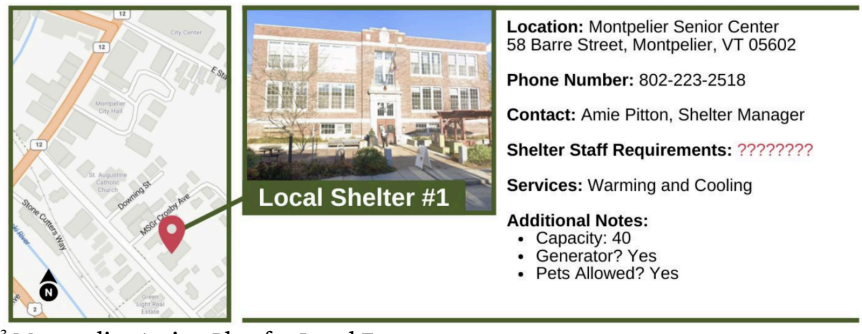
Where can you go?

- Family/Friend
- Emergency meeting place (work, school, hospital)
- Regional and Local Shelters from the Montpelier Action Plan for Local Emergency (MAPLE)[3]

REGIONAL SHELTER



LOCAL SHELTER



[3] Montpelier Action Plan for Local Emergency; https://www.montpelier-vt.org/DocumentCenter/View/12090/MAPLE-Plan-2025?bidId=

Emergency Preparedness Kits

Based on the emergencies and actions you've identified, what supplies might you actually need? Below are some considerations and suggestions, but there is not a one-size-fits-all kit. Every household has different needs and every situation is different. There are two main categories of emergency supplies kits: Household Emergency Supplies and "Go Bags."

Household Emergency Supplies



*No matter the kit, starting small, adding a few items at a time is recommended to decrease financial burden and stress.

[4] Image: lafs.org

The "Go Bag"

A Go-Bag should be more compact and movable than a household emergency kit. Think lighter and less. The foundation is the same, but the Go-Bag includes a few more items that are often needed away from home. Keep these kits somewhere easily accessible (i.e. a hall closet near an exit). Some people have Go-Bags in multiple locations. At home, in the car, at school/work, etc.

• A bag or backpack that's easy to carry	• Toiletries, sanitation/personal hygiene items	• Important documents (ID, insurance policies, emergency contacts)
• Food- Lightweight, nonperishable (for 2-3 days per person)	• Complete change of clothes per person	• Emergency blanket, rain poncho, reflective gear
• Water (for 2-3 days per person)	• Cash	• Phone charger/ battery pack
• First Aid Kit	• Medications, medical items, eye glasses	• Work gloves, dust mask, hardhat, tarp
• Flashlight, batteries	• Whistle	• Chocolate

Special Kit Considerations

Pets:
Prepare Your Pets for Disasters
ASPCA Disaster Preparedness Checklist for Your Pets

Kids:
a comfort item
game, book or source of entertainment
snacks
diapers, wipes, etc.

People with Disabilities or Medical Needs:
Preparing Makes Sense for People with Disabilities
Ready Tips for People with Disabilities

Other generic kit lists:
Ready.gov Emergency Supply List
American Red Cross Survival Kit Supplies List
Montpelier Commission for Recovery and Resilience Go-Bag List
British Colombia's "Build an Emergency Kit and Grab-and-Go Bag"

Emergency Kit Maintenance

Food	Rotate your food stock to ensure that it doesn't go out of date. Or, replace it once per year.
Water	Self-store water in sterilized glass, plastic, or metal and replace every 6 months, or Store-bought: replace each year. Water stored in sealed containers has a longer shelf life than that which is left exposed to open air. Unfiltered water-8 drops of pure, unscented liquid bleach per gallon of water will reduce the contaminants in the water.
First Aid Kit	Check for used, damaged, and expired items once per year. Replace and replenish as needed.
Batteries	Can be checked every 6 months to a year.
Personal Items	Make sure clothes still fit and are appropriate for the season. Rotate medication stock to avoid expiry.

Pro Tip: Stack these routine checks together to avoid confusion or accidental skipping. Checking smoke and carbon monoxide detectors pairs well with emergency kit maintenance.



Communications and Contacts

Emergency Contacts

In addition to holding the contact information of those in your household, having two or more external contacts is useful in emergencies. Ideally, one contact is local to your city or state and another is out-of-state. In the event of a state-wide emergency or loss/overload of local communication, an out-of-state contact, who is removed from the danger of the situation, can serve as a point-person for you and your household members.



Emergency Meeting Places



For sudden emergencies, such as a fire, a meeting place close to home can be helpful. This could be a landmark in your yard or a nearby street sign. An out-of-neighborhood meeting place is also necessary. In the event that you and your household members are not home, lose communication, need to evacuate, etc. having a predetermined meeting spot away from home can increase the likelihood that you will reconnect quickly.

Connecting with Community

Neighbors who are socially connected are more resilient in the face of disaster than those who are isolated. Additionally, vulnerable populations are often overlooked in traditional methods of emergency response and are more likely to get their needs met through hyper-local connections.[5]

Montpelier Neighbor Net is a city-wide organization that supports neighbors coming together for better communication, social connections, and emergency preparedness. By providing structure to existing neighbor-to-neighbor connection and support to new connections, MNN is increasing individual and community resilience. To learn more about MNN, or to join your Local Neighbor Net, please visit MontpelierNeighbor.Net

[5] Climate One, "Community Resilience: Knowing Your Neighbor Could Save Your Life" https://www.climateone.org/audio/community-resilience-knowing-your-neighbor-could-save-your-life

Recovery

This guide does not address recovery. However, emergencies often lead to recovery needs. Resources and tips for navigating FEMA, insurance, and many other post-emergency situations exist elsewhere. Below are a few notes and resources to get you started.

Document everything. Pictures! Pictures! Pictures!
Montpelier disaster HUB
The Federal Emergency Management Agency's Individual Assistance, Survivor's Road to Recovery, and all other FEMA programs only apply in instances of federal major disaster declaration. Not all emergencies qualify.
Montpelier Disaster Recovery Network (MoDRN) is Montpelier's long-term recovery group which manages cases of individuals and households affected by disaster.

Goals:

Identify short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals for you and/or your household's emergency preparedness.

3 weeks (__-__-____) _____
_____
_____

1 year (__-__-____) _____
_____
_____

5 years (__-__-____) _____
_____
_____



Worksheet: Planned Actions

Activator (When *this* happens,)	**Action** (I will…)

Worksheet: Decision Tree

The decision tree model can be used to navigate predetermined decisions and actions in a linear fashion. The template below is set up with flooding in mind, but can be adapted for any emergent situation. Fill in the blanks with the activating gauge readings you identified for your household on page 8, then write in the actions that you will take at each of the corresponding flood stages.

- Severe Weather Alert?
  - No? ⬆️
  - Yes? ↪️
- Monitor information channels
- Was a flood watch issued?
  - No? ⬆️
  - Yes? ↪️
- Monitor Flood Gauges
- Is the gauge predicting ACTION STAGE 1? Winooski _____ Langdon _____
  - No? ⬆️
  - Yes? ↪️
- Actions:

- Continue to monitor Flood Gauges
- Is the gauge predicting ACTION STAGE 2? Winooski _____ Langdon _____
  - No? ⬆️
  - Yes? ↪️
- Actions:

- Continue to monitor Flood Gauges
- Is the gauge predicting ACTION STAGE 3? Winooski _____ Langdon _____
  - No? ⬆️
  - Yes? ↪️
- Actions:



Worksheet: Contacts

Household Members	
Member #1 Name:	Member #2 Name:
Phone:	Phone:
Email:	Email:
Notes or specific needs:	Notes or specific needs:
Member #3 Name:	Member #4 Name:
Phone:	Phone:
Email:	Email:
Notes or specific needs:	Notes or specific needs:
Emergency Contacts	
Person #1 (local):	Person #2 (out of state):
Phone:	Phone:
Out of Town Person:	
Phone:	
Workplace Name:	Workplace #2 Name:
Workplace Address:	Workplace #2 Address:
Workplace Phone:	Workplace #2 Phone:
School Name:	School #2 Name:
School Address:	School #2 Address:
School Phone:	School #2 Phone:
Doctor #1 Name:	Doctor #2 Name:
Doctor #1 Phone:	Doctor #2 Phone



Medical Insurance Name:	Medical Insurance #2 Name:
Medical Insurance Policy #:	Medical Insurance #2 Policy #:
Veterinarian Name:	
Veterinarian Phone:	
Emergency Meeting Places	
Location #1 (near home):	Location #2 (out-of-neighborhood):
Instructions:	Instructions:
Other important information:	

Community Contacts: (for Montpelier, VT)	
Police	802-223-3445
Fire	802-229-4913
Montpelier Neighbor Net (MNN):	MontpelierNeighbor.Net

