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COPING WITH MAN-MADE EMERGENCIES

Natural disasters are to some extent predictable. Earthquakes and floods are often regional, seasonal occurrences, and preparing ahead of time can save lives and limit property damage. A crisis caused by human error or ill intent, however, is more likely to be unpredictable and chaotic. These situations will require you to think and respond quickly and decisively. Knowing what to do ahead of time might save your life.

TERRORISM: FIGHT THE FEAR

A terrorist's primary objective is to create fear. The best way to defy this and to cope with the situation is to stay calm and refuse to give in to panic during what can be an emotionally arduous situation.

Here are some strategies:

- Be aware of your surroundings and calmly assess the situation. If you can call authorities, be prepared to give a full detailed assessment of the situation. They are trained to respond accordingly.
- Note the location of emergency exits, fire alarms and fire extinguishers. Whatever your location, consider the best means of evacuation.
- Do not act alone if possible. Report any suspicious objects, vehicles or persons to police or security personnel. If you come across a suspicious package or product, do not touch it. Cover it and alert authorities. I possible, shut off all ventilation systems to prevent dispersion of the substance and evacuate the premises.
- Look out for secondary hazards, including falling debris or small fires, as well as additional suspicious packages or people. Report any concerns to public safety authorities.
- For your own protection, follow the instructions of emergency service personnel. Always give the right of way to emergency vehicles.

- It is fair to warn others of imminent danger, but avoid spreading rumors – confirm information with a credible source.
- Consider changing the voicemail message on your phones to include your family's status. Your friends and loved ones may not be able to get a call through to you, but they may still be able to hear your outgoing message. This will also keep any work colleagues informed.

BIOLOGICAL THREATS

A biological attack is the intentional release of a pathogen (disease causing agent) or biotoxin (poisonous substance produced by a living organism) against humans, plants, or animals. Unlike a chemical or nuclear attack, a biological attack may go undetected for hours, days, or potentially weeks before symptoms arise. An outbreak will probably be detected by local health care workers observing a pattern of unusual illness or by early warning monitoring systems that detect airborne pathogens. Evidence of an attack may appear in animals before humans. If you see a suspicious package or fear you have been exposed to a dangerous substance, cover your mouth and nose with layers of fabric that will filter the air but still allow breathing. Shut off all ventilation systems to prevent dispersion of the substance, and evacuate the premises. If you fear you have been exposed to something, take a shower, change and bag your clothes, and seek emergency medical attention. If you are worried about a biological attack, you might consider stocking your go-bag or emergency kit with a gas mask and hazmat (antibacterial) suit. But before you run, tune in to the news for information and to determine if it is better to stay where you are or go to a meeting point elsewhere.

For more information about biological threats, contact http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ep-mu/faq-eng.php

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MASS TRANSIT DISASTERS

Mass transit systems can be vulnerable to accidents and terrorist incidents. Take a moment the next time you are riding on public transit to review your surroundings and consider possible escape routes. If you are on a train, make a note of whether or not there is an intercom somewhere in your car. If you see a suspicious person or package, you can use the intercom to report it to transit personnel. Never touch a suspicious object.

If you have been instructed to evacuate and have determined that it is safe to do so, take your belongings, but leave your bicycle behind. Lugging a bike during an emergency situation could endanger you or other passengers. If you're on an underground streetcar, do not evacuate unless instructed or assisted by transit employees or rescue personnel. High voltage electrical systems that power the cars can be extremely dangerous.

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