

Alexandria CERT: Community Emergency Response Team

Police – Fire – Medical Emergency	911
Alexandria Non-Emergency	703-746-4444
Alexandria Animal Control	703-746-4774
National Poison Control Center	800-222-1222
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	800-273-8255

September - October
2021

Shelter in Place

Do you know where to go when there is a disaster or the warning of an emergency? In some cases, officials may tell people to evacuate homes, workplaces, or other locations. But for some situations, it is safer to remain inside. Having plans for what to do and, for some circumstances practicing how to shelter, is important. The type of building – 1- or 2-story or multistory – also affects sheltering options.

Evacuate versus Shelter in Place. Officials may recommend evacuation for emergencies such as chemical hazards, hurricanes, and flooding. Do evacuate, unless it is too late to do so safely. For active shooter attacks, your best option may be to Run.

How Long to Shelter in Place? Stay in place until authorities indicate that it is safe to leave or, for severe weather, the forecast improves.

Severe Storms include tornados, wind storms, hurricanes, thunderstorms, and winter storms (blizzards, ice storms).

Tornados and High Winds: Go inside quickly when a warning is issued. Head to the lowest level, such as a basement or the first floor if there is no basement. The space should be in the interior and away from windows. If at home, take your go bag and critical documents.

An underground parking garage is an option for some buildings. Manufactured structures and mobile homes are unsafe, and you need to evacuate to a sturdy building, storm shelter, or safe room. Wherever you are, take additional cover by surrounding yourself with furniture and blankets and protect your head and neck. If trapped, cover your mouth and nose to avoid breathing dust; do not try to shout for help. Instead, try to send a text or bang on the wall.

Hurricanes: If authorities tell people not to evacuate or it is too late to evacuate, precautions are similar to those for tornados, unless flooding or storm surge is predicted. In case of flooding, go to the highest room in the house, but not the attic; attics are dangerous in hurricane winds.

Thunderstorms: Go inside and stay inside until the storm has passed. Avoid running water from faucets, landline phones, and concrete walls and floors, all of which can transmit electricity. If outdoors, take shelter in a vehicle with a metal top. Do not touch anything metal.

Winter Storms. Stay inside and limit your time outside until local authorities provide other instructions. If trapped in your vehicle, stay in it. If power goes out, keep refrigerators and freezers closed. Avoid carbon monoxide poisoning from generators or grills.

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Go Bags and Critical Documents

A go bag or emergency kit is handy for both evacuation and for some shelter-in-place situations. Stock the bag ahead of time and put it in an easy to access place.

Useful items include:

- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Medications and copies of prescriptions; over the counter medication such as pain relievers
- Basic first aid items
- Water, non-perishable snacks
- Toiletry items; towels
- A change of clothing
- Trash bags for storing waste
- Battery-powered radio
- Extra phone charger

Refresh and replace medications, snacks, water, and batteries from time to time.

Critical Documents. Put copies of important documents in the go bag, in case originals are lost in a disaster.

- Personal identification for each household member: photo IDs, Social Security cards, birth certificates, marriage and divorce documents, child adoption and custody papers
- Health cards, list of prescriptions and allergies, physicians' names, disabilities, caregiver contacts
- Pet ID tag, photo, registration

Shelter in Place, continued

Flooding / Flash Floods. If told to evacuate, do so immediately. Do not drive around barricades. “Turn around, don’t drown.®” Avoid bridges over fast moving water. If your vehicle is trapped, stay inside, but if water is rising in your vehicle, get on the roof and call 911. If flooding threatens the building you are in, go to a higher floor or get on the roof. Do not climb into a closed attic. Call 911 for rescue. If you are safe, though, stay inside until local authorities provide other instructions.

Chemical Hazards. Highway, rail, and industrial accidents can release chemical agents: poisonous vapors, liquids, or solids that have toxic effects on people, animals, and the environment. If you are told not to evacuate or it is too late to evacuate, shelter inside. A shelter-in-place order lasts approximately 12 hours, rarely longer.

Turn off all heating and cooling systems and all fans, close the damper on fireplaces and any other place that air can come in from outside. Lock all doors and windows for a better seal. For even more protection, duct tape plastic over vents, fireplaces, and, for the room where you shelter, duct tape plastic over the windows and electrical outlets. For chemical spills or releases that affect water supplies, do not use water from the tap; use bottled water instead.

Radiological / Nuclear Event. Radioactive fallout begins to collect about 10 minutes after the explosion. Distance and shielding, plus time, are key factors to protect yourself. Get inside the nearest building. Brick and concrete structures are best. Go to the basement or the very middle of the building. Stay away from windows, outer walls, and the roof. Turn off all heating and cooling systems and all fans. Stay inside for 24 hours unless local authorities provide other instructions. Tune into any communication channel or media available for official information on when it is safe to exit and where you should go. If you think you have been contaminated, remove everything – clothing and shoes, jewelry, glasses – and bag them. Wash hands first, then flush the entire body; blot dry.

Earthquakes. If you are outside, stay outside. If you are inside, stay inside. Go under a sturdy table or desk, hold on, and cover your head and neck. In a high-rise building, do not use elevators afterwards.

Active Shooter. When you visit a building, locate at least 2 nearby exits; for example, at a restaurant, you might exit through the kitchen. Look for places to hide such as rooms without windows or heavy furniture. For your workplaces or house of worship, learn about safety plans and participate in active shooter drills.

If safe to do so, Run. Leave belongings behind. Help others if you can. Warn others to stay away. Call 911 when safe.

Hide if you cannot Run. Stay out of the shooter’s view. Lock or block doors and turn off lights. Set your phone to vibrate and text to 911. Stay in place until law enforcement gives the all-clear.

Fight if you cannot Run or are confronted by the shooter. This can slow the shooter down, giving law enforcement more time to respond and saving others. Be aggressive: throw objects, yell.

Law enforcement will not stop to help the injured. Their priority is to find and kill or capture the attacker. Rescue teams will come later.

Warming & Cooling Centers in Alexandria

Alexandria’s major Recreation Centers and some libraries are available to those without heating or cooling in their homes. During periods of extreme heat and cold, the City offers heating and cooling centers to residents at Recreation Center locations, along with expanded hours, additional resources and support for those in need. For City adults 60 years and older, the Senior Cool Care Program offers a cooling fan and other assistance to seniors who meet income and other guidelines. During the summer and early fall, the Potomac Yard Park Interactive Fountain operates from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily through Labor Day.

Emergency Shelters

Communities and the Red Cross open emergency shelters to provide people with a safe place to stay before, during, and after a disaster. Shelters must also accommodate infants and children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities and those who support them. Shelters may also provide health and mental health services.

If you go to an emergency shelter, you will be asked to register. Persons leaving even for a short time must sign out and sign in. Shelter rules include no drugs or alcohol or smoking; prohibition on loud or disruptive behavior; and quiet hours for sleeping areas. You are responsible for your personal belongings, and parents are responsible for children. Shelters include areas for sleeping, feeding, and snacks; rest rooms and showers; lounge or recreation areas; and areas for child care.