

# Disaster! – Are You Prepared?

Disaster can strike anywhere, often with little or no warning. South Carolina is vulnerable to tornadoes, hurricanes, ice storms and even earthquakes. In addition, chemical spills, fires or other disasters may occur at any time. These can be frightening experiences for both children and adults.

With planning and preparation, churches can improve safety and decrease the fear and panic of emergencies. All churches, large and small, should have a written emergency plan. The plan should include policies and procedures for emergency situations, so that leaders and teachers know what to do if a disaster occurs.

## Developing an Emergency Plan

- Step 1            **Elect** a church emergency team or committee to formulate, evaluate, and implement good policies and procedures. Include health, legal, and disaster professionals from within your church, if possible. Elect an Emergency Coordinator (staff or church leader) to lead this team.
- Step 2            **Research** information and recommendations for emergency procedures. Consult local, state, and national sources such as fire departments and associations, storm centers, child care licensing agencies, insurance agencies, and attorneys.
- Step 3            **Formulate** policies and procedures that fit the needs of your church. Develop an evacuation plan and a shelter-in-place plan.
- Step 4            **Adopt** the emergency plan by church vote. To do this, provide copies for the church body to review. Discuss the content and answer questions. This may be done in an information session several weeks before the scheduled vote, so that revisions or clarifications can be made. Then present the policies for adoption at a church business session.

## Implementing an Emergency Plan

After the plan has been adopted, it is the responsibility of the Emergency Coordinator and church-elected Emergency Team to:

- Post written procedures in each classroom and hallway.
- Educate the church body on emergency procedures.
- Train volunteers, teachers, and staff to follow the plan.
- Conduct emergency evacuation drills as specified in the plan.

## Resources for Emergency Information

1. American Red Cross, 2025 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20006; (202)303-4498; [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)
2. American Red Cross of Central South Carolina, 2751 Bull St., Columbia SC 29202; (803)540-1215; [www.centalscredcross.org](http://www.centalscredcross.org)
3. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), 500 C St. SW, Washington, DC 20472; (202)566-1600; [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)
4. National Weather Service, NOAA, 1325 East-West Hwy., Silver Springs MD 20910; [www.nws.noaa.gov](http://www.nws.noaa.gov)
5. National Fire Protection Association, 1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy MA 02169-7471; (617)770-3000; [www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org)
6. Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA), Office of Public Affairs, Room N3647, 200 Constitution Avenue, Washington DC 20210; 1-800-321-OSHA (6742); [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)
7. American Academy of Pediatrics, 141 Northwest Point Blvd., Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098, (847)434-4000; [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)
8. Department of Homeland Security, 1-800-BE-READY; [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)

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Material adapted from *Oklahoma Baptists Protecting Children* by Sheri Babb and *Steps to Take to Protect Mississippi's Children* by Don Hicks, Robin Keels and Linda Reeves.

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