

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL CONNECTIONS DURING DISASTERS

Vice President Hubert Humphrey once said, "The impersonal hand of government can never replace the helping hand of a neighbor." Yet in today's frenetic society, many of us are so busy that we never really get to know our neighbors. This is unfortunate because studies show that people who fare best after a disaster are typically those who have the most *social connections*. Your personal ties to the community can have a major impact on your ability to survive.

Reach out to your neighbors and get to know them. When the time is right, take a few minutes to talk to them about the importance of being prepared. As you strengthen your relationships with the community, work with your neighbors to develop an emergency response plan in case first responders are unable to reach your neighborhood right away.

Identify, for example, neighbors who have medical training or other special skills. Make provisions for those who might need extra help, such as elderly or disabled residents who live alone. Come up with a plan for communicating with your neighbors so that no one is left in need.

If you are interested in receiving disaster response training, you can sign up to become a member of your local Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). CERT members are trained to provide assistance until first responders arrive on the scene. If you live in the United States, see <http://www.citizencorps.gov/cert/> for more information. Members in Canada should check their local government's website for more information. Keep in mind that some municipalities refer to their teams as "Neighborhood Emergency Response Teams" or "Voluntary Emergency Response Teams."

Now more than ever, it is so important for us to sound the alarm and urge our fellow citizens to prepare for disasters. This is an important form of service that can help you to both protect your family and promote the welfare of your community.