

How to Prepare for Basic Emergency Sanitation

Proper sanitation during a disaster is a critical component of preparedness.

Frequently, there are more deaths following a disaster due to poor sanitation, than lives lost in the initial event. Just how do you prepare for basic emergency sanitation?

Personal Sanitation

It is vitally important to maintain good hygiene during an emergency. Use high standards of cleanliness including; brushing your teeth, washing your face, combing your hair, showering/bathing, or a sponge bath if water is scarce. Remember to wash your hands! Good personal hygiene will help prevent the spread of disease and help maintain personal health and comfort.

Stock up on Basic Sanitation Supplies

We recommend a one-year supply of basic sanitation items stored in your own home. You can make it through almost any disaster situation with this amount, as well as saving money by stocking up when items are on sale. Basic Supplies:

Toilet paper is a high priority on our sanitation supply list. The average American uses 100 single rolls of toilet paper each year. We have found that 50 double rolls take up less space in storage.

We include 8" x 8" flannel cotton squares to be used as reusable toilet paper. It sounds rather disgusting but stay with us for a minute. A long-term disaster may require a little adaptation. The cloth squares are used in place of toilet paper, then washed with a disinfectant, and hung out to dry. It is important that the cloth is absorbent, but dries quickly. Flannel squares is a much nicer option than newspaper, leaves or corn cobs.

A cleansing bottle, such as Peri-Wash, can be used to spray off and then pat dry with a cloth. Similar to a bidet, only portable. Store a bottle for each member of the family so they will not have to share.

Baby wipes are a staple in our home even now that our children are older. They make cleaning up without running water much easier. We purchase baby wipes by the case and they store well. If they happen to dry out, we just add a little water to the package.

Soap can help prevent the spread of disease. Bar soap is relatively inexpensive and has an indefinite shelf life. One bar of soap per person, per month, is a safe estimate. Liquid hand soap may reduce the spread of disease better than bar soap. When several people share a bar of soap it is possible for it to harbor bacteria and dirt. Liquid soap dispenses a clean squirt of soap each time. Remember that liquid soap tends to be used up a little more quickly, so we store one 13 ounce bottle per person per month. Shower gel amounts vary individually.

Hand sanitizer is an effective way to kill germs without water. If your hands are visibly dirty, hand sanitizer may not work effectively. Most have a high alcohol content and dry out your hands. Remember it kills the germs, but it does not clean your hands. Nothing cleans and disinfects like briskly rubbing your hands together with soap and water for 20 seconds.

Dishwashing liquid has a long shelf life and many valuable uses. You may be washing dishes by hand so be sure to plan for much more than normal if you use a dishwasher.

Disinfectants are used to destroy microorganisms before they can make you sick. They do not have to cost a lot of money. Store whichever kinds of disinfectants you prefer. Disinfecting wipes are quite handy and are a staple in each of our bathrooms.

Disposable gloves are invaluable when it comes to protecting yourself against disease. They are relatively inexpensive and will store for several years.

Garbage bags are another critical basic sanitation item. Buy quality to avoid messy accidents. We keep a supply of contractor-grade black garbage bags, standard black garbage bags, kitchen garbage bags, and plastic grocery bags. Each bag has a different use and we have found all to be important. Stock a few rolls of duct tape to help hold bags in place when needed.”