

Commentary: Ready Army takes daily preparation

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July 9, 2009 -- As we approach the peak season for hurricanes and the anniversaries of both Hurricane Katrina and the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, it is a good time to ask ourselves, "Am I as prepared as I can be for all potential hazards?"

There is no time like the present to do the right thing for your family and make sure they are prepared for all the hazards they face. To help you, the Army launched its Ready Army Campaign in September of 2008 in conjunction with National Preparedness Month. Ready Army is designed to prepare the entire Army family for all potential hazards, both natural and manmade.

"At command and installation levels we're asking that public affairs offices partner with their emergency preparedness personnel, directors of plans, training, mobilization and security, first responders and family program personnel to promote this program," said Col. Jon Dahms, chief of planning support in Army public affairs. "This program will educate our families on disaster preparedness and motivate them to 'Get a Kit, Make a Plan and Be Informed,' as the program's motto encourages."

Around the Army, garrisons are teaming with city leaders to develop emergency preparedness plans that mirror or integrate with the Ready Army concepts, said Dennis Bohannon, director of strategic communication for the Army chief of installation management.

"Fort Hood and Killeen, Texas, are prime examples," Bohannon said. "On Fort Hood there is Ready Army. Outside the gates, there is Ready Killeen. The teaming effort has benefited the installation, the city, and more importantly, the families that live both on and off the installation. Nearly one million Ready Army products have already been shipped to installations at their request. It is an important program for them. The Army is committed to improving family readiness and providing our families a strong, supportive environment where they can thrive. Ready Army is one means of fulfilling that commitment."

Everything an installation/organization needs to highlight the Ready Army program and help families prepare is available at the Ready Army website: <http://www.ready.army.mil>.

In April, the Ready Army program launched the annual "Prepared Kids Competition" as part of its ongoing effort to encourage family preparedness planning.

"To make sure families are involved, we are (providing) kids with some fun activities so that they talk to their parents," said James Platt, deputy chief of the Asymmetric Warfare Office's protection division. "It opens an avenue so they can talk to their parents and becomes the impetus for getting the program started in the family."

"These children's activities and contests are excellent," said Bohannon. "They help create awareness for the program. But, being 'ready' is serious business. It is not only the right thing to do, it is peace of mind in knowing what you and your family are going to do in an emergency," Bohannon said.

Children and teens can submit such things as a poem or song lyrics they have written, a short video, a poster, T-shirt or bookmark design, a personal story of experiencing an emergency, an essay or creative novella, a 30-second public service announcement for radio or television, a preparedness game, a drawing, sculpture or musical piece; or as children at Fort Bliss, Texas, suggested, even computer software they have written. Entries can be uploaded via the Ready Army Web site.

The Ready Army program will be the focus again this year during National Preparedness Month in September.

"We want to emphasize to organizations and installations across the Army that preparedness applies to more than just the Soldier," Dahms said. "By providing the tools and knowledge our families require to be prepared for all hazards, we are not only improving the readiness of our Soldiers and their families, we will be more prepared as a nation to face the next natural or manmade disaster."

Soldiers of all Army components, civilians and their family members should become familiar with the spectrum of possible dangers and learn how they will be notified about them.

It is also important to give special consideration to local hazards such as hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, earthquakes or other extreme weather situations.

Living abroad presents additional preparedness challenges and sometimes less familiar hazards like volcanic eruptions and tsunamis.

While the potential threats can seem overwhelming, keep in mind that most of what should be contained in family emergency plans or put in emergency kits will be useful regardless of the hazard.

Preparedness is a year-round effort that everyone can be a part of by remembering and acting on the three keys to being a Ready Army: Get a kit, make a plan and be informed.

Getting a preparedness kit together

Assemble a collection of first aid supplies, food, water, medicines and important papers to sustain your family for at least three days after an event and until a crisis passes. Consider the unique needs of your family and pets, and then assemble emergency

supply kits in the home, car and workplace. These kits will enable your family to respond to an emergency more quickly. The various emergency kits will be useful whether evacuating or sheltering-in-place.

Suggested basic items to consider for a home emergency kit:

- Water—at least one gallon per person per day for at least three days
- Food—nonperishable food for at least three days
- Formula and diapers for infants
- Food, water, other supplies and documents for pets
- Manual can opener
- Flashlight, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration battery-powered weather radio, battery-powered cell phone charger and extra batteries
- First aid kit with dust masks, antiseptic and prescription medications
- Sanitation supplies such as moist towelettes, disinfectant, toilet paper and garbage bags
- Important documents—personal, financial and insurance
- Family emergency plan, local maps and a copy of your command reporting information

Additional items can be essential for those serving abroad:

- Passports
- Birth abroad certificate for children born overseas
- Cash in local currency
- Card with local translations of basic terms
- Electrical current converter

Many other items could prove helpful:

- Fire extinguisher
- Any tools needed to turn off utilities
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Paper plates, paper cups, plastic utensils, paper towels
- Coats and rain gear
- Sleeping bags or other bedding
- Weather-appropriate change of clothes for each person
- Books, games, puzzles, toys and other activities for children

Making a plan for your family

Make and practice a family emergency plan. Consider the range of potential emergencies and all the places your family members might be. Family members may not be together when an emergency strikes. Planning ahead for various emergencies will improve the chances of keeping in touch, staying safe and quickly reuniting.

Some emergencies require different responses than others, but a family communications procedure will be helpful in any case. Knowing how to keep in touch and find one another will help your family stay safe and cope with the confusion and fear that come when emergencies strike.

Help your family be informed

Emergencies can arise from weather and other natural hazards, industrial and transportation accidents, disease epidemic and terrorist acts. Anticipate the emergencies most likely to affect your family and learn about related procedures including the Army Disaster Personnel Accountability and Assessment System. Being informed also means knowing first aid and appropriate response measures. Knowing what to do can make all the difference when seconds count.