



Office of Emergency Planning

PREPARING FOR MAJOR EMERGENCIES

AN INTRODUCTION



This handbook gives an introduction to the comprehensive information on the Government's emergency planning, which is available on the website **www.emergencyplanning.ie**. The website provides information on emergency plans, as well as links to other sites where more detailed information can be found.

The Government Task Force on Emergency Planning promotes best practice among government departments and agencies. The Office of Emergency Planning in the Department of Defence provides support for this work and has produced this handbook.



Office of Emergency Planning

Introduction

By sending this handbook to every home in the country, the Government seeks to provide reassurance that there are well thought out plans in place to be used in the event of a major emergency.

There is no reason to think that a major emergency is likely in the immediate future. However no matter how unlikely some of the scenarios outlined in this handbook may be, knowing that they have been planned for will make it easier to remain calm and confident if one does happen.

Behind the scenes, many public servants including members of An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces are constantly preparing and updating the actions necessary in the event of an emergency.

I would like to thank those who work on preparing these plans and to pay tribute to all those involved in emergency planning for their continued commitment to protecting the public.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bertie Ahern".

Bertie Ahern TD
Taoiseach

As Chairman of the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, I would encourage you to read this handbook and to keep it in a safe place. The handbook provides information on different aspects of emergency planning and gives guidance on where more detailed information can be obtained.

The handbook draws on advice received from government departments and agencies with an emergency planning function and provides an introduction to their plans.

For those who wish to read these plans in detail, the Government website www.emergencyplanning.ie provides additional information.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Willie O'Dea".

Willie O'Dea TD
Minister for Defence



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CAUTION



What is a major emergency?

A major emergency is an event which, usually with little or no warning, causes or threatens injury or death, or serious disruption of essential services. It may also cause damage to property, the environment or infrastructure beyond the normal capabilities of the principal emergency services in the area in which the event occurs. It requires the use of additional procedures and the use of additional resources to ensure an efficient and effective response.

Some examples:

- Flooding
- Hazardous chemical spills
- Accidents at sea
- Explosions and suspicious packages
- Nuclear incidents
- Pandemic influenza
- Animal diseases
- Fire

The Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive, local authorities, the Coast Guard and other agencies have prepared major emergency plans setting out how they will respond to such incidents.



“Plan, prepare, protect”

Flooding

Floods are usually caused by a combination of events, including overflowing river banks, coastal storms, or blocked or overloaded drains. Climate change may lead to more frequent and severe flooding incidents in the future.

The Office of Public Works has produced an information handbook on the preparations you can take: what should be in a Family Flood Plan, insurance issues, and advice for older people or people with mobility difficulties.

Local authorities are responsible for emergency response in the event of flooding occurring.

If a flood threatens your area, there are a number of steps you can take to minimise damage to your property, but remember, safety should always be your first concern.

Contact for emergency response:

Your local authority or the emergency services (112 or 999)

Further information:

DEPARTMENT / AGENCY:

The Office of Public Works

ADDRESS: 17-19 Lower Hatch St,
Dublin 2

PHONE: 1890 213414

E MAIL: info@opw.ie

WEBSITE: www.flooding.ie or
www.floodmaps.ie

The OPW handbook on flooding can be downloaded at www.flooding.ie and is also available on request from your local authority.

What to do

- Call 112 or 999 and inform the emergency services
- Don't try to walk or drive through floodwater
- Avoid contact with floodwater if possible as it may be contaminated or polluted
- Never try to swim through fast flowing water – you may get swept away or struck by an object in the water
- Always wear suitable clothing when working in or near floodwater



*“Follow the advice of the
emergency services”*

Hazardous Chemical Spills

Exposure to hazardous chemicals that have been spilled or released can cause serious or even fatal injury. In the event of such an incident, the emergency services will identify the nature and level of danger and tell the public what to do.

You may be asked either to remain in the protection of your home or workplace and seal windows and doors, or to evacuate the area. For your safety, in all circumstances follow the advice of the emergency services.

Contact for emergency response:

The emergency services (112 or 999)

Further information:

DEPARTMENT / AGENCY: The Health and Safety Authority provides information on the storage of hazardous substances in the workplace.

ADDRESS: The Metropolitan Building, James Joyce Street, Dublin 1

PHONE: 1890 289389

E MAIL: wcu@hsa.ie

WEBSITE: www.hsa.ie

What to do

- Call 112 or 999 and inform the emergency services
- Stay away from the scene
- If it is safe to do so try to get upwind of the contaminated area
- Follow the advice of the emergency services



*“Don’t leave it to others to
call the emergency services”*

Accidents at Sea

In the event of vessels or individuals getting into difficulties in Irish waters, the Irish Coast Guard is the service responsible for initiating and co-ordinating search and rescue operations. The Coast Guard also co-ordinates the response to persons at risk of death or injury on inland waters, cliffs, the shoreline and offshore islands.

Depending on the gravity of the situation, the Coast Guard will deploy Coast Guard helicopters, RNLI lifeboats, Coast Guard Units and other agencies. If required, additional resources will be requested from the emergency services or the Defence Forces.

Contact for emergency response:

The Coast Guard Service (112 or 999)

Further information:

DEPARTMENT / AGENCY: Coast Guard Administration, Department of Transport

ADDRESS: Leeson Lane, Dublin 2

PHONE: 01 6783454 / 6782000

E MAIL: admin@irishcoastguard.ie

WEBSITE: www.safetyonthewater.ie

What to do

- If you notice that somebody is in difficulty in the sea, river, lake or on cliffs, call 112 or 999 and ask for the Coast Guard
- Please do not leave it for another person to call



*“Keep calm, think
before you act”*

Explosions and Suspicious Packages

If you find yourself near an explosion:

- Get out of the vicinity / building as quickly and calmly as possible
- In the event of internal falling debris, shelter under a sturdy table or desk until the situation has stabilised enough for your safe passage. When safe, leave quickly, watching out for weakened floors and stairs
- Ensure that you are safe before trying to help others

Some reasons that may cause, or combine to cause suspicion in relation to a package:

- Discolouration, crystals, strange odours or oily stains
- Envelope has signs of powder or powder-like residue
- Unusual size, weight or shape
- Visible wiring or batteries

Contact for emergency response:

An Garda Síochána (112 or 999)

What to do

- Leave the package where it is
- Get yourself and others out of the vicinity / building
- Call 112 or 999 and ask for the Gardaí
- If applicable, alert the building security staff
- If you have opened a package containing suspect material, wash your hands or shower with soap and water and do not touch your mouth or eyes with your hands



“Go in, stay in, tune in”

Nuclear Incidents

There is a plan – the National Emergency Plan for Nuclear Accidents – in place to deal with any radiation incident that could affect Ireland. An example would be an accident at a nuclear plant abroad.

The impact of such an incident on Ireland depends on the nature of the incident and on weather conditions. Ireland's prevailing westerly winds mean the chances of such an incident affecting Ireland are considerably lower than if the winds were easterly. In addition, Ireland's distance from nuclear sites means that any radioactivity from an incident would be diluted before

reaching Ireland. The radiation doses would not be high enough to cause any immediate health effects. Any increase in radioactivity levels (over normal background levels) would be relatively small, but could expose people to a very small risk of developing cancer over their lifetime. It is unlikely that the increase in cancer rates over current rates would be detectable.

The most significant potential source of a radiation dose would be from eating contaminated food. This exposure can be avoided and the authorities will introduce appropriate controls on

the distribution of food if necessary. These controls are an important part of the National Emergency Plan for Nuclear Accidents and will ensure that foods available for sale are safe to eat.

The Irish Authorities will have up-to-the-minute information on the accident from international bodies such as the European Commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency. They will use this information to give appropriate advice and keep the public informed as the situation develops.



What to do

- Go in, stay in, tune in. In other words, stay indoors and listen to national radio and television for information and instructions. Follow the advice given by the authorities
- Once information is available on the accident and its consequences, specific advice will be given. This will include advice on whether it is necessary to stay indoors, to avoid consumption of locally grown foods or to take any other steps
- Do not evacuate the building. If you evacuate the building you would subject yourself to a larger radiation dose as buildings provide more protection than vehicles. In contrast, staying indoors is an effective way to reduce radiation exposure during a radiation incident. You would not need to stay indoors for more than a few hours

Further information:

DEPARTMENT / AGENCY:

*Environmental Radiation Policy,
Department of the Environment,
Heritage and Local Government*

ADDRESS: *Custom House, Dublin 1*

PHONE: *1890 443322*

WEBSITE: *www.environ.ie*

*The National Emergency Plan for
Nuclear Accidents provides the
framework for the national response
to a large scale radiological incident.*

*The plan is available from the Radiation
section of the website of the Department
of the Environment, Heritage and Local
Government, www.environ.ie. Information
on radioactivity is also available from
the Radiological Protection Institute of
Ireland, www.rpii.ie.*



*“Make plans to care for
vulnerable family members
and neighbours”*

Pandemic Influenza

What is Pandemic Influenza?

Influenza (or flu) is an acute respiratory illness caused by infection with an influenza virus. It can be a serious illness and should not be confused with a cold.

“Pandemic Influenza” means a worldwide flu epidemic. Such an epidemic would be caused by a new influenza strain which spreads easily between humans and which causes serious illness.

Influenza pandemics are naturally occurring events, three of which have occurred in the 20th century – in 1918, 1957 and 1968. Of these, the 1918 pandemic was by far the most serious. There will be more pandemics, but the time and severity of their occurrence and the age groups on which their impact will be most severe cannot be predicted.

Preparations for a pandemic

In January 2007, the Department of Health and Children and the Health Service Executive published the National Pandemic Influenza Plan, as well as Pandemic Influenza Preparedness for Ireland: Advice of the Pandemic Influenza Expert Group.

The National Pandemic Influenza Plan tells you what to do in the event of a pandemic and what the Government and the health services are doing to prepare for a possible pandemic.



What to do

- Buy enough food and other supplies in advance of the pandemic to last you and your household for at least one week
- Make sure you have a thermometer and a supply of paracetamol or ibuprofen
- Be aware of hygiene measures to prevent infection. Information is available in the National Pandemic Influenza Plan
- Listen to news updates
- Make plans to care for vulnerable family members or neighbours, especially those who are isolated or living alone
- You will be advised to begin these preparations if and when the World Health Organisation confirms that a pandemic is imminent

In the event of a pandemic

Every household in the country will receive a leaflet before the pandemic reaches Ireland, advising the measures that should be taken.

If you or members of your family have flu symptoms during a pandemic, it is essential that you stay away from others as much as possible.

This means staying at home while the symptoms are present, unless you receive other advice from the telephone hotline that will be set up or from official

Government announcements to the media. This telephone hotline will provide you with advice and support. If and when a pandemic is imminent, the hotline number will be made available to you and will be widely advertised.

Further information:

DEPARTMENT: Department of Health & Children

ADDRESS: Hawkins House, Hawkins St, Dublin 2

PHONE: Lo-call 1890 200311

E MAIL: pandemicflu@health.gov.ie

WEBSITE: www.dohc.ie

AGENCY: National Emergency Management Office,

Health Service Executive

ADDRESS: Block B, Civic Centre, Main Street, Bray, Co. Wicklow

PHONE: 01 2744224

E MAIL: pandemicflu@hse.ie

WEBSITE: www.hse.ie

The National Pandemic Influenza Plan is available from the Publications section of the websites of the Department of Health and Children www.dohc.ie and the Health Service Executive www.hse.ie. You may also contact info@health.gov.ie to receive a copy by email.

The guide Business Continuity Planning: Responding to an Influenza Pandemic is available from the Publications section of the website of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, www.entemp.ie.



*“Contact your Veterinary
Practitioner or your local
District Veterinary Office”*

Animal Diseases

Occasionally, outbreaks of serious animal diseases are capable of rapid spread across national boundaries, or have economic or public health implications. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has contingency plans in place to deal with outbreaks of such diseases, including foot and mouth disease, bluetongue disease and avian influenza (bird flu).

The contingency plans set out the control and eradication measures that will be applied in the event of outbreaks of such diseases.

In the event of a serious animal disease outbreak, the public will be told the nature and scale of the problem and will be kept fully informed as the situation develops.

Further information:

DEPARTMENT / AGENCY:
Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries & Food

ADDRESS: Agriculture House,
Kildare St, Dublin 2

PHONE: Lo-call 1890 200510
01 6072000

E MAIL: info@agriculture.gov.ie

WEBSITE: www.agriculture.gov.ie

What to do

- If you are a livestock or flock owner and you suspect an outbreak of a serious animal disease, you should contact your veterinary practitioner or your local District Veterinary Office
- Members of the general public seeking to report dead wild birds of high risk species should call the Avian Influenza helpline 1890 252283



*“Raise the alarm and leave
the building quickly”*

Fire

Fire is amongst the most common causes of emergencies, both on a small scale within households or on a large scale in workplaces and public buildings. In all cases, the basic advice remains the same.

Contact for emergency response:

The Emergency Services (112 or 999)

What to do

- Raise the alarm
- Evacuate the building as quickly and as safely as possible and proceed to the agreed assembly area
- Do not use lifts
- If surrounded by smoke, stay low to the floor and crawl to the exit (as the smoke, poisonous gases and heat will rise)
- If possible, cover your nose and mouth with a wet cloth and protect any exposed skin
- Before opening a door, feel it with the back of your hand. If it is hot do not open it, as there may be a fire on the other side
- If you cannot escape, stay in an unaffected room. Close the door, go to the window and attract attention so as to alert rescuers to your presence
- And remember, always have working smoke alarms in your home



**ASSEMBLY
POINT**

How can I prepare?

In any emergency, the first people you should think about are those in your immediate family and household. Bear in mind that:

- You may be separated from each other
- You may not be able to use your phone or other means of communication
- Gas and electricity supplies may be cut
- You or other members of your family may be injured or ill, possibly seriously
- You may find yourselves in a dangerous situation involving fire, flooding or other serious hazards

Planning ahead

To be properly prepared, you should speak with your family about what you would do in the event of an emergency. In these conversations you should:

- Discuss how best to stay in touch with family members in an emergency situation
- Agree how you will contact each other if you are not all at home, who will pick up children from school if appropriate, and who will check on older people or people with a disability in your family and immediate neighbourhood

- Plan for the possibility that you will be separated from other members of your family. Decide on a family member (who may live in another location) that you will all contact to ensure you know everyone is safe
- Make sure all family members know this person's address, home, mobile and work numbers
- Agree on a place where you will all meet if separated, if it is safe to do so

- Find out how to turn off electricity, gas and water supplies in your home
- Compile a list of important phone numbers and keep them near your phone. The list should include your garda station, doctor, children's schools and local council as well as Bord Gáis, the ESB and family members

Prepare an emergency kit

The following items may prove invaluable in helping you to stay safe and cope with a range of emergency situations:

- Battery-operated radio (with spare batteries)
- Essential supplies of food and water (to last for up to three days)
- Torch (with spare batteries), candles and matches
- First aid kit
- Medication, toiletry and sanitary supplies
- Appropriate items needed by infants, older people and family members with disabilities
- Spare clothes and sleeping bags for each family member
- Mobile phone, charger and spare battery
- Strong plastic bags (for clothing, valuables, documents and photographs)
- Copies of important family documents (birth certificates, passports and licences)
- Contact details for your agreed family contact
- Games for young children
- Copy of this handbook

Learn some basic first aid

Knowing the basics of first aid can be very useful in any emergency and can prevent further injury or distress.

Basic courses are regularly run by your local division of the St. John Ambulance Brigade, Irish Red Cross, Order of Malta, Civil Defence and in many community colleges (for some useful first aid tips turn to page 35).





**SWITCH OFF
APPLIANCES**

What should I do?

It is important to stay calm and to follow the advice and instructions of the emergency services. In a major emergency situation, it may be necessary to issue messages via the national media advising the public on what to do. Usually such messages will be broadcast on all national radio and TV channels. Remember that you may not have mains power, so it is important to keep a battery-operated radio and tune in to one of the national stations. Depending on the emergency type, your local radio station may also carry messages relating to local emergency plans.

- Check on your neighbours, especially older people and people with disabilities
- You may be advised to stay in your house or to evacuate – in either case, follow the advice given by the emergency services, as it will be tailored to the circumstances
- If advised to evacuate, make sure fires are out, switch off gas and electricity, unplug appliances and lock doors and windows. If you have time, take along essential medicines, warm clothes, personal documents, immediate valuables and your mobile phone if you have one

**SAFETY
FIRST**



First Aid

In the absence of professional assistance, it is important to know some basic first aid steps to be taken to help anyone who is injured. You should keep a basic first aid kit in your home, and consider getting some first aid training.

If someone is injured, the following steps will keep them as safe as possible until professional help arrives:

- If you suspect a serious illness or injury call 112 or 999 immediately
- Keep calm
- Make sure you and the injured person are not in danger

- Assess the injured person carefully and use the basic first aid steps outlined here as appropriate – remember, this is not a complete first aid guide
- Monitor the injured person's condition until the emergency services arrive

Assessing risk

The golden rule in dealing with an ill or injured person is “first do no harm”. You should use the treatment that is most likely to be of benefit to an injured or ill person. If you are unsure about a treatment, do not proceed with it.

Personal safety

Do not attempt heroic rescues in hazardous circumstances. If you put yourself at risk, you are unlikely to be able to help others effectively. Always assess the situation you are entering first and make sure that the action you are contemplating or attempting is safe for you.

Unconsciousness

If the person is unconscious, call 112 or 999 and ask for an ambulance. If possible, ensure that the person has an open airway. If the person has stopped breathing and/or appears lifeless, and if you have the necessary skills, you should take the appropriate steps to resuscitate him/her.

Shock

Keep the person from getting cold or overheated. If you do not suspect broken bones, raise the legs about 30cm. Do not give food or drink.

Broken bones

Try as much as possible to avoid movement and call the emergency services.

Bleeding

Control severe bleeding by applying firm pressure to the wound using a clean, dry dressing. Position the injured person's body so as to raise the wound above the level of the heart to reduce blood loss. Handle the limbs very gently if you suspect that there is a fracture. Help the person to lie down, reassure them, keep them warm and loosen tight clothing.

Burns

For all burns, cool with water for at least 10 minutes, but do not delay the person's removal to hospital. Cover the affected area with a sterile dressing to protect against infection. If this is not available, wrap the affected area with clingfilm – do not apply dry dressings. Keep the patient warm and call an ambulance.

Further information:

There are a number of publications available such as the first aid manual produced by the Irish Red Cross.

EMERGENCY
112 OR 999



Useful Numbers



Please use this page for numbers that are useful in the case of an emergency, such as those of your garda station, doctor, children's schools, local authority, as well as Bord Gáis, ESB and family members.

Service	Phone Number	Comments
Emergency services	112 or 999	
Doctor		
Local garda station		
Local authority		
Bord Gáis emergency service line	1850 205050	
ESB emergency line	1850 372999	
Avian Influenza helpline	1890 252283	

This handbook is available online at www.emergencyplanning.ie. The website has versions of the handbook in Chinese, Polish and Russian.

This handbook is also available in CD format and in Braille. An easy to read version is also available. Please phone 1890 252736 to order one of these formats or alternatively consult the website www.emergencyplanning.ie.

For further information log on to
www.emergencyplanning.ie



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