

Ask an Expert: September Is National Preparedness Month: "Americans Stand Ready"

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September is National Preparedness Month, a time to reflect on how ready we are when life takes an unexpected turn. This year's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) theme, "Americans Stand Ready," highlights the key role individuals and families play in preparing for emergencies before they happen.

For many Utahns, emergency preparedness has become a hard reality. This year alone, communities across the state have experienced devastating wildfires, flash floods, damaging hailstorms, extended power outages, and evacuations that have affected families, communities, first responders, farmers, and ranchers. These events remind us that emergencies can happen anywhere, often with little warning.

During one of the most difficult periods in our nation's history, as Americans faced the hardships of the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt reminded the country that fear itself can become an obstacle to progress and action. In his First Inaugural Address in March 1933, he declared, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself," encouraging Americans to move forward with courage and determination.

Roosevelt's message reminds us that preparation begins with action. Most of us cannot control wildfires, floods, or power outages, but we can take steps to be ready. A little stored water, a family communication plan, an emergency kit, or even better health habits can go a long way when challenges arise. **Preparedness is not about living in fear of what might happen. It is about replacing uncertainty with action.** As we commemorate 250 years of American independence, preparedness helps us build community resilience, making families and neighborhoods stronger and more connected for the future.

When people hear the term emergency preparedness, they often think of flashlights, generators, emergency kits, or food storage. These supplies are important, especially in rural communities where wildfires, severe weather, and other emergencies can disrupt normal services. FEMA recommends that households plan, stay informed about local hazards, and build emergency supply kits with water, food, medications, and important documents. However, one critical aspect of preparedness that can significantly affect response and recovery is our health.

Healthy living plays a vital role in emergency preparedness, and taking proactive steps can improve our ability to respond effectively during disasters and recover more quickly afterward. Simple health habits can empower individuals to feel capable and confident in their preparedness. Eating nutritious foods, staying physically active, maintaining hydration, prioritizing sleep, and managing stress can improve overall health and increase our ability to cope with challenging situations.

Preparedness also includes managing personal health needs. Keep an updated list of medications, maintain adequate supplies of prescription medications when possible, and store copies of important medical information in a secure location. Many of us know where our flashlights and extra batteries are stored, but would we have enough medication if roads were closed, evacuations were ordered, or local services were interrupted for several days? Families should consider keeping an updated medication list and, when possible, at least a one-week supply of essential prescription medications. Individuals who rely on medical equipment, specialty supplies, or routine treatments should also include those needs in their emergency plans.

Families should also develop an emergency communication plan. Determine how family members will contact one another, where you will meet if separated, and how you will receive emergency alerts. FEMA recommends including

pets and individuals with specific medical or mobility needs in emergency planning efforts. USU Extension offers this [Emergency Action Plan](#) for free download that walks you through every step.

This September, take one small step toward readiness:

- Check your emergency supplies.
- Store extra water.
- Review your family communication plan.
- Schedule a preventive healthcare appointment.
- Go for a walk or lift something heavy.
- Prepare a healthy meal.

These simple actions may seem small, but they build self-reliance and resilient habits that will help your family during tough times. For 250 years, Americans have faced challenges by preparing, adapting, and helping one another. Americans stand ready when we prepare before disaster strikes. We stand ready when we invest in our health. We stand ready when we support our neighbors, and we stand ready when we take responsibility for our own preparedness.

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