



Emergency Communications Activity Guide

In an emergency, communication with friends, family, and responders will be crucial. Your usual methods of communication may not work. The activities in this guide will help you stay informed about the disaster and connected with the people you love. Choose the activities here that work for you or your group.

5-Minute Activities

1. Get in Touch with Your Out-of-Area Contact – Individual/Family Activity

After a major disaster, local phone lines may be overloaded. The Out-of-Area Contact for your family will receive and relay information among loved ones.

Using an Out-of-Area Contact, you can find out where your family is and how they are doing, and plan when and where to meet.

Calls may get through to someone out-of-state when local lines are blocked. Texting may be possible even when phone systems are unable to handle voice calls. Texting also keeps phone lines open for emergency responders.

Everyone in the family should know who the Out-of-Area Contact is (and that person should know their role in an emergency) and be prepared to call or text the contact with brief messages including:

- Where you are
- How you are
- What you plan to do next



Spend a few minutes setting up an Out-of-Area Contact now to gain peace of mind in a real emergency!

TO DO NOW:

Contact your Out-of-Area Contact with a brief message, preferably a text message if you are able to send texts. Be sure to clearly state that this is an exercise. Here is an example:

THIS IS AN EXERCISE. All four of us are OK and at home. We are staying home tonight.



If you do not have an Out-of-Area contact, now is the time to choose one! Call and/or email the person you think will be best to relay information about you to other people that care about you. Explain to them their role in an emergency, and get their agreement. Now send a test message.

2. Berkeley Emergency Notification System (BENS) – Individual Activity

During the exercise, the City of Berkeley will use BENS to send an exercise alert to community member phones and email addresses. This message will **only** be sent to people who sign up for the service on the BENS website before October 18. If you do not sign up on the BENS website before October 18, the City will **not** send you an exercise alert.

TO DO NOW:

If you enrolled on the BENS website before October 18, check for your exercise alert on the phone(s) and email(s) that you registered on the website. If you have not yet signed up for BENS, visit the website to enroll in the service.

To sign up for emergency alerts, visit:
<http://www.cityofberkeley.info/BENS>

3. Emergency Radio Stations – Individual or Group Activity

The City may use 1610 AM radio to share emergency information and instructions with the Berkeley community. Many other non-Berkeley radio stations may also carry Emergency Alert System messages.

Learn more about emergency alerting systems at:
<http://www.cityofberkeley.info/EmergencyAlerting>

During the exercise, the City of Berkeley will post an exercise alert on 1610 AM.

TO DO NOW:

First, tune your home radio, car radio, or emergency radio to 1610 AM. Can you hear the message? If you cannot hear the message, try moving to a different part of the house or neighborhood, or try using a different radio. If you still cannot hear the message, please make a note of this in your Exercise Feedback Form.

Next, program your radio to save the other Bay Area emergency alerting stations. These stations have a stronger signal than 1610 AM, and they may carry additional information in an emergency:

- KPFB 89.3 FM (may rebroadcast 1610 AM with a stronger signal)
- KCBS 740 AM and 106.9 FM
- KQED 88.5 FM
- KSOL 98.9 FM (Spanish)



4. Map Your Fire Station – Individual Activity

After a disaster, 9-1-1 may not work. If you need to get a message to responders, one communication option is to bring a written message to the fire station nearest you.

TO DO NOW:

Look on a map of Berkeley or Albany and identify the fire station nearest you. FYI, Albany only has one fire station. A map of fire stations in Berkeley can be found at:

[http://www.cityofberkeley.info/Fire/Home/Fire Stations and Fire Districts.aspx](http://www.cityofberkeley.info/Fire/Home/Fire%20Stations%20and%20Fire%20Districts.aspx)

Identify two routes from your home and /or work to your nearest fire station.



30-Minute Activities

5. Basic Handheld Radio Practice – Group Activity

Most neighborhood group caches have two-way handheld radios (known as Family Radio System, or FRS, radios) available for use during disaster response. Many individuals own these radios, too. Basic practice ensures that group members know the basics of how to use the radios.

TO DO NOW:

Turn on your radios and ensure that batteries are charged. All new radios must be charged before use. Replace batteries as needed.

Distribute radios to neighborhood group members and have them walk to far ends of the block to practice speaking into and listening to the radios.

Teach each member of the group basic radio skills:

- The standard radio call includes (in this order): Who you are calling, who you are, and what you need.
- Use plain language (without codes or acronyms). Some common radio terms, such as “Copy,” “Over” and “Out”, are easy to remember and will help keep your radio transmissions clear, organized and brief.



6. Emergency Communication Cards – Individual Activity

If an earthquake took place on a Thursday at 6 pm, where would you be? Where would your children be? What about a Tuesday at 10 am?

An emergency communication card provides important phone numbers and meeting place information for loved ones to stay connected and be reunited.

TO DO NOW:

Download the emergency communication card template from:

http://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/Family_Emergency_Plan.pdf

and fill it out. Print a copy for each family member and laminate it with clear packing tape. Put a copy in every household member’s purse, backpack, or briefcase as well as in the car and in a place accessible by caregivers. If you have pets, tape the emergency cards to all of your pet carriers and emergency leashes now.



7. Social Media Update – Individual Activity

If the internet is available after a disaster, you can use email and social media tools to update your friends and family on your status.

TO DO NOW:

First, post a message on Facebook, Twitter, or the social media site of your choice. Include the #BerkeleyCERT hashtag to connect with other people posting about the exercise. Here is an example:

Facebook: I'm practicing in the Berkeley CERT exercise today, and I am updating my household's disaster supplies and preparations. For more information, visit www.cityofberkeley.info/prepare #BerkeleyCERT

Twitter: Berkeley Citywide Exercise today! Get in touch w/ friends after a disaster via social media.
<http://www.cityofberkeley.info/prepare> #BerkeleyCERT

Second, check your computer(s) and smartphone to ensure that you have bookmarked the Red Cross Safe & Well website: <https://safeandwell.communityos.org>. This website allows you to share your status after a disaster with people who know your contact information. You can then use the site to post a message on your social media accounts.

8. Identify Alternate Phones – Individual Activity

After a major event such as an earthquake, phone service may be impacted in several different ways:

- Phone lines overloaded
- Cell towers down/broken
- Phone wires down/broken
- Power outage

Having more phone options available to you will give you the best chance of being able to communicate with loved ones.

TO DO NOW:

Try to identify two or more phone options other than your normal phone. Here are some possible alternatives:

- If you have a landline, you should have at least one phone at home that does not require electricity to function. Phones that plug into **only** a phone outlet (not a power outlet) will still work in a power outage.



- If you do not have a landline, speak with neighbors until you identify at least one neighbor with a landline. Discuss the possibility of using their phone in an emergency.
- A disconnected phone line could still work for 911 calls. If you do not have a landline but still have jacks, try plugging a phone into your line and see if you can hear a dial tone. DO NOT test the phone by calling 911.
- Pay phones can be a backup if you do not have a landline, or if there's a localized or carrier-based issue causing a problem with your home phone. Locate the nearest working pay phone to your home and/or office. Add a supply of coins to your emergency kit in order to pay for the pay phone in an emergency.

Here are a few other important phone tips to remember:

- Texting is best in a disaster. A text uses much less bandwidth than a phone call, and a text can sometimes get through when a phone call can't.
- When attempting to make a call, allow up to 2 minutes for a dial tone to begin. If a dial tone does not start in 2 minutes, try again later.
- If you can set your voicemail or answering machine's outgoing message to tell callers that you are OK and direct them to your out-of-state contact for any further calls. If you are evacuated, try forwarding calls to your new location. Systems vary so not everyone will be able to do the same things.
- Only make urgent calls and keep them short. Use the Red Cross Safe and Well website (described in Activity #7) or other communication options when possible, to keep phone lines open. Remember that 911 and other emergency responders are sharing the same lines you are using.

9. Preparedness Apps for Mobile Devices – Individual Activity

Internet access may or may not work after a disaster. If access is possible, several apps can be helpful both immediately after an emergency and days to weeks after:

- The free Red Cross Earthquake App provides earthquake alerts and real-time information about disaster shelters.
- The free Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) app provides preparedness information and an interactive checklist for your disaster prep kit.
- In Case of Emergency (ICE) apps help you add your name and emergency contact info to your device's wallpaper so that responders can see this information if your device is locked. Several free and paid app options are available.
- Waze is a free app that shows crowdsourced road information. Members of the community can report traffic delays, fuel availability, and hazards, which is information that may be useful in an evacuation.

TO DO NOW:

If you have a mobile device that can run apps, download and install the Red Cross Earthquake App, and any other choices you like from the list above.



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Under the “EARTHQUAKES” tab in the Red Cross Earthquake App, click on “Locations Monitored” to receive earthquake alerts for the counties of your choice.

Finally, complete a challenge in the TEST section of the Red Cross Earthquake App and share your results online!



2-Hour Activities

9. Handheld Radio Practice with Scenarios – Group Activity

When teams walk throughout the neighborhood performing damage assessment or scenario response activities, they will need a way to communicate with each other and with Incident Command. Using handheld two-way radios is a very good way to do this.

TO DO NOW:

Practice using your two-way radios when performing damage assessment or handling scenarios of your choice. A list of possible scenarios can be downloaded from the Exercise website.

Find sample scenarios and written forms for download at
CityofBerkeley.info/prepare/group-leaders

When using two-way radios within your neighborhood:

- Choose an open frequency that doesn't overlap with neighboring Groups. Set it on all radios at the start of the Exercise.
- Start all radio transmissions with the phrase "THIS IS AN EXERCISE"
- Include your neighborhood group name in all transmissions. Pick something short and descriptive of your location (such as "Shattuck and University", or "1900 Stuart"). There may be hundreds of radios in use during a disaster competing for an open frequency.
- Tape important reminders on the back of your radios (e.g., radio channel and official group name)
- Be aware of dead zones in your neighborhood where radios do not work. Plan for message relay points to cover dead zones. A second person with a radio located between the Command Center and the dead zone can relay messages.



10. Practice Neighborhood Communications with Runners - Group Activity

Runners - people physically carrying written messages - take more time than handheld radios, but do not depend on technology or electrical or battery power. Using runners is a possible use of untrained participants.



TO DO NOW:

Practice using a runner for communications during damage assessment or while handling other scenarios of your choice.

When using runners for communication in your neighborhood:

Find sample scenarios and written forms for download at CityofBerkeley.info/prepare/group-leaders

- When a response team is sent on assignment without a two-way radio, send an extra person on the team as a runner to convey information back to the Neighborhood Incident Command Center
- Runners must carry a pad and pen. Duplicate paper, such as telephone message pads, can preserve a record of messages. Runners can also use the written message forms available for download at the link above.
- Write messages legibly.
- Make sure runners have instructions about where to go, when and where to report back, and safety precautions along the way
- Runners can be even more effective if they use bicycles or other human-powered transport. Use caution for debris, especially sharp objects that can puncture tires.
- **Runners don't have to actually *run* to deliver messages.**