

- ✓ Get a kit
- ✓ Make a plan
- ✓ Stay informed

## Tip Sheet: How to communicate during disasters

Destructive tornadoes, a 5.8 magnitude earthquake, Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee all hit Virginia in 2011. In the minutes and hours after these disasters, it was difficult to make calls on cell phones because the mobile networks were so busy. When disaster strikes, you may need to call 9-1-1 or let loved ones know that you are okay. Follow these tips to make sure you can communicate during an emergency.

### Before a Disaster

#### Preparing Your Home and Mobile Device

1. Keep a list of emergency phone numbers in your cell phone and near your home phone.
2. Have charged batteries and car-phone chargers for back-up power for your cell phone.
3. If you have a traditional landline, keep a non-cordless phone in your home, because it will work even if you lose power.
4. Prepare a family contact sheet with at least one out-of-town contact. Often it's easier to make long-distance rather than local calls during an emergency.
5. Program "In Case of Emergency" (ICE) contacts into your cell phone so emergency personnel can contact those people for you if you can't use your phone.
6. If you are evacuated and have call-forwarding on your home phone, forward your home phone number to your cell phone number.
7. If you do not have a cell phone, keep a prepaid phone card to use.
8. Have a battery-powered radio or television available (with spare batteries).
9. Subscribe to text alert services from local or state governments and schools to receive emergency alerts.

### During and After a Disaster

#### Reaching Friends, Loved Ones & Emergency Services

1. If you have a life-threatening emergency only, call 9-1-1.
2. For non-emergencies, use text messaging, e-mail or social media instead of making calls on your cell phone. Texts and emails are less likely to experience network congestion. You also can use social media to let family and friends know you are okay.
3. Keep all phone calls brief to avoid tying up voice networks. Just share vital information.
4. Conserve your cell phone battery by reducing screen brightness, placing your phone in airplane mode and closing apps you are not using.
5. If you lose power, you can charge your cell phone in your car. Just be sure your car is in a well-ventilated place – not in a garage – but do not go to your car until danger has passed. You also can listen to local radio stations in your car for important news alerts.
6. Tune into local TV and radio stations for important news alerts.
7. Unless you have a hands-free device in your car, do not talk, text or tweet on a cell phone while driving.
8. Immediately following a disaster, resist using your mobile device to watch streaming videos, download music or videos, or play video games. Limiting use of these services can help life-saving emergency calls get through to 9-1-1.