



## Emergency Communications Activity Guide

In an emergency, communication with friends, family, and responders will be crucial. Your usual methods of communication may not work. Officials may use many different tools to give information and instructions to the community. 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.



Free/  
Low-  
cost



Kid-  
friendly



Easy

After a major disaster, local phone lines may be overloaded. Calls may get through to someone out-of-state when local lines are blocked. An out-of-area family member or friend can be in touch with everyone in your household. This way, you can find each other and know that everyone is safe!

Text if possible. Texts may go through even when phone lines can't handle voice calls. Texting also keeps phone lines open for 911.

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 for your family 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



If you do not have a mobile phone to text, or if the mobile doesn't work, get in touch using a landline, pay phone, or any other way you can. Borrow a phone if you need to. There's no way to know which forms of communication will work, so think now about having a variety of options.



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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.

- Post the Out-of-Area Contact information by every phone in your home.
- Make sure all family members have the phone number programmed into their phones and printed on an Emergency Communication Card (see Activity 6) in their wallets or backpacks.
- 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 members of your family. Explain to them their role in an emergency, and get their agreement. Now send a test message.

### 2. Sign up for the Berkeley Emergency Notification System (BENS).



Free/  
Low-cost



Easy

During the October 17th Citywide Exercise, City officials will send a BENS message via **text and email only** to community members who have signed up to receive BENS alerts. In a real emergency, BENS is one of the systems that the City may use to send information and instructions to the community. That's why you want to sign up now!

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

#### TO DO NOW:

- Before the October 17 Citywide Emergency Exercise, sign up for BENS.
- On October 17, check for a message from BENS on the phone(s) and email(s) that you signed up on the website.

Every Berkeley Public Library offers internet access you can use to sign up for BENS. Or, call the Office of Emergency Services to sign up at 510-981-5544 or 510-981-5544 (TTY/TDD).

### 3. Emergency Radio Stations.



Free/  
Low-cost



Easy

Emergency officials may use radio to share emergency information and instructions with the community. In Berkeley, designated radio stations for emergency information are:

- 1610 AM (City of Berkeley station)
- KPFB 89.3 FM (may rebroadcast 1610 AM with a stronger signal)



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- KCBS 740 AM
- KQED 88.5 FM
- KSOL 98.9 FM (Spanish)

### TO DO NOW:

- Tune your home radio, car radio, or emergency radio to each radio station listed above. Can you hear the station clearly?
- For each station you *can* hear, program it into your radio so that you are ready to tune in during an emergency!

## 30-Minute Activities

### 4. Basic Handheld Radio Practice.



Neighborhood  
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 or recharge batteries as needed.
- Distribute radios to neighborhood group members and have them walk to several places in your Group's area 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.



## 5. Emergency Communication Cards.



Free/  
Low-cost



Easy

If an earthquake took place on a Thursday at 6 pm, where would you be? Where would your loved ones 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 and fill out the Emergency Communication Card template from:

[http://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/Family\\_Emergency\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/Family_Emergency_Plan.pdf)

Print a copy for each family member and laminate it with clear packing tape. Put copies:

- in every purse, backpack, or briefcase
- in the car
- in a place accessible by caregivers.
- attached to all of your pet carriers and emergency leashes

If you aren't able to print at home, you can also download and print these cards at any Berkeley Public Library, or you can pick up a copy at the Public Safety Building, 2011 Martin Luther King Jr. Way, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor.

## 6. Social Media Update.



Free/  
Low-cost



Easy

If the internet is available after a disaster, you can use 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:



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**Facebook:** I'm practicing for an emergency in the #BerkeleyCERT month of preparedness today! For more information, visit [www.cityofberkeley.info/prepare](http://www.cityofberkeley.info/prepare)

**Twitter:** October is #BerkeleyCERT Month of Preparedness! Get in touch w/ friends after a disaster via social media. <http://www.cityofberkeley.info/prepare>

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.

### 7. Identify Alternate Phones.



Free/  
Low-cost



Easy

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, such as a rotary dial phone. 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.



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- If you do not pay for landline phone service but still have jacks in your home, your land line phone could still work for 911 calls. 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 is 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.

### 8. Preparedness Apps for Mobile Devices.



Free/  
Low-cost



Easy

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 (<http://www.redcross.org/mobile-apps/earthquake-app>) and the more general Emergency App (<http://www.redcross.org/mobile-apps/emergency-app>) provide earthquake alerts and real-time information about disaster shelters.
- The free Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) app (<https://www.fema.gov/mobile-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 (<https://www.waze.com/>) is a free app that shows crowd-sourced 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.
- 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



Neighborhood  
Group Activity

### 9. Handheld Radio Practice with Scenarios.

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 the neighborhood command post. Using handheld two-way radios is a good way to do this.

Find sample scenarios and written forms for download at  
[CityofBerkeley.info/prepare/activity-guides](http://CityofBerkeley.info/prepare/activity-guides)

#### **TO DO NOW:**

Practice using your two-way radios in the scenarios your Group is using.

- 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.



Neighborhood  
Group Activity

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

#### **TO DO NOW:**

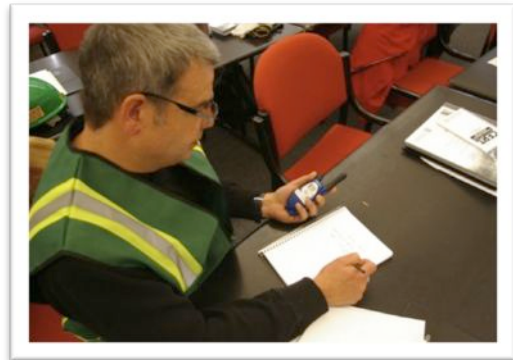
Practice using a runner for communications in the scenarios your Group is using.



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- 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.**



### More Emergency Communication Tips

1. 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.
2. When attempting to make a call on a landline, wait up to 2 minutes for a dial tone to begin. If a dial tone does not start in 2 minutes, try again later.
3. 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.
4. Only make urgent calls and keep them short. Use the Red Cross Safe and Well website 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.