

## Preparing For Disasters

What has Hanover County done to prepare for a disaster? What do we need to do to prepare for a disaster? These are questions you should know the answers to. You may think, "I don't have to worry, because nothing ever happens in Virginia." While we may not get a Hurricane Katrina-like event in the Richmond area, we are occasionally struck by severe weather. Remember Hurricane Isabel, Tropical Storm Gaston, or the ice storms in the 90's? Preparing the County and its residents for these events is the responsibility of emergency management.

Hanover County Fire-EMS focuses on coordinating the pre-disaster planning and preparation among the County departments and our private sector partners. We make sure that our emergency planning efforts follow the guidelines set by the state and federal governments. Hanover also takes part in planning with our neighboring counties and cities to make sure we work well together, during an event, to better serve all of our citizens.

During and after a disaster, County departments take on additional roles to help the public get back to a normal life. While the Fire/EMS, the Sheriff's Office and the Emergency Communications Center is busy responding to emergencies during a disaster, we rely on several County departments to help with other aspects of the disaster response. For example, the Department of Social Services assumes the duty of sheltering the public during and after a disaster. The Community Resources Department manages volunteers who wish to help during a disaster. During emergencies the school system allows us to use their buildings, buses and personnel to help with the needs of people affected by the disaster. Many other departments have a role in disaster response, too.

We also work closely with private companies and organizations that manage active roles during a disaster. Hanover County has a great relationship with the Richmond Chapter of the American Red Cross. The Red Cross helps our citizens when they are affected by a fire or any small-scale personal disaster. The Red Cross coordinates a large part of our emergency sheltering operations. If a shelter is opened they work with the Department of Social Services to equip and run the shelter. We have agreements and contracts with private businesses in Hanover to supply equipment and supplies if needed during an emergency. Every two years the County participates in emergency response drills with Dominion Resources North Anna Power station. This exercise is evaluated by the Department of Homeland Security, Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Department of Energy, and for eight years Hanover has had a perfect score on each of these drills.

These are a few examples of what the County is doing to prepare for disasters. Now, what can you do to prepare you and your family for a disaster? First, know where your shelters are. In Hanover County the shelters are located at Hanover High School and Patrick Henry High School. If you are reporting to an emergency shelter you need to bring a few things. Bring blankets for each member of your group. If anyone needs medications, bring enough for at least a week. Consider games, books and toys to entertain any children you bring with you. If you bring an animal to a shelter bring food and a cage and then be prepared to take care of the animal yourself. Be prepared to care for any elderly family members or people who require special assistance. In the early hours or days of a disaster we may only be able to provide a safe place to stay and some food. The rest will be up to you until the emergency passes.

Make a personal or family disaster kit, and keep it where it is easy to "grab and go". The kit should include things like extra clothes, medicine, cash, emergency phone numbers, non-perishable food, and water (a gallon a day per person is recommended). Have a disaster pre-plan informing everyone where to go in case you can't communicate. Also have a contact out of the area that everyone may call to check in with (out of state relatives or friends are great for this). If you decide "ride out" the event at home have enough supplies for at least a week.

For more information on personal preparedness, go to the following websites - Virginia Department of Emergency Management at [www.vaemergency.com](http://www.vaemergency.com); the American Red Cross at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org); or the Federal Emergency Management Agency at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) or [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov). These websites have a lot of information on disaster supply kits, preparedness plans and detailed updates on specific weather events. For information aimed at kids log onto [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) or contact the Red Cross. If you do not have access to the internet, please contact [Hanover Fire-EMS](mailto:Hanover Fire-EMS) at 804-365-6195 and we can get the information to you.