

By: Sonya McDaniel, Extension Educator, FCS/CED  
OSU Extension Center

## Plan your communication plan for severe weather

As we begin the height of spring storm season, now is the time to get ready and learn about some great resources at your fingertips.

Preparing ahead of a potential emergency or disaster reduces the risk of harm to you and your family, said Barbara Brown, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension food specialist.

“Here in Oklahoma, we see everything from tornadoes to drought to severe storms to earthquakes,” said Brown. “That means we have to be ready for anything.”

As part of its annual nationwide Resolve to be Ready campaign, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) places special emphasis on the way technology can help you prepare. Neilson reports shows nearly 98% 18-24 year old and 68% of people over 65 in the United States own smartphones. Making social media and smartphone apps invaluable tools for helping people in times of crisis and emergency.

It’s important for family members to work with their older members to teach them some basics about using their smart phone for texting, download useful apps and teach them how to use them way ahead of the storm.

A few of the agency’s suggestions: During a disaster use “text messaging” versus phone calls for communication. Program “In Case of Emergency” contacts in your phone. Store important personal and financial documents in a “cloud” or on a flash drive, which should be kept in a secure location outside your home.

You also can download apps, check out interesting blogs and sign up to receive crucial alerts and helpful tips on your phone. For instance, a FEMA app allows users to access preparedness tips, build an emergency kit and identify open disaster recovery centers and shelters.

Many local emergency management offices offer notification systems that send messages directly to phones of residents signed up for the service. Meanwhile, bookmark key mobile sites such as the Centers for Disease Control ([m.cdc.gov](http://m.cdc.gov)) and the American Red Cross ([www.redcross.org/mobile](http://www.redcross.org/mobile)) for easy reference.

“Social media has gone well beyond just allowing us to connect with long lost friends and relatives,” Brown said. “You can also tap into critical, potentially life saving resources using Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube and other platforms.”

Even as powerful a tool as technology can be in anticipating the worst, the most thorough preparations require us to do more than swipe a finger across our phone’s touchscreen.

Brown stressed the importance of creating at least a basic emergency kit, which should include supplies such as enough non-perishable food and water for three days, a first aid kit, flashlight and extra batteries, a battery-operated radio and a change of clothes appropriate for the current weather conditions.

You can probably find most of the needed items already in your home. Shop your house first then fill in any gaps with items on sale or from garage sales. A full list of recommended supplies is available at [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).

As you put your kit together, consider any unique needs of family members such as prescription medicines or baby formula. It also is a good idea to include copies of important documents such as passports, insurance and

banking papers and a list of key contacts such as family members and doctors. Also, develop a family communications plan.

“Family members may not be together when an emergency or disaster strikes,” Brown said. “So, take some time to plan ahead how you will reunite. Also, don’t forget to ask about emergency plans at school and work.”

A free downloadable form at [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) provides step-by-step guidance on creating an effective communications plan. Or use the website’s Family Emergency Plan template in Google Docs (viewed through Google Chrome).

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