



SURVIVING THE STORM: THE DISASTER DEFENSE DIGEST

Monthly Safety Message:

Ready for Anything: Back-to-School Emergency Prep

As the school year begins, it is the perfect time for families and school staff to talk about emergency safety planning. Back-to-school season is not just about supplies and schedules; it is also about making sure children feel safe and prepared. Parents and caregivers can ask schools about their emergency procedures, such as evacuation routes, lockdown drills, and reunification plans.

It is important for students to know what to do if something unexpected happens. Practice at home by discussing different scenarios and making sure kids memorize key phone numbers. Teachers and staff should revisit safety plans and ensure everyone understands their role during an emergency.

Communities can also support schools by participating in drills or offering resources. A little preparation now can make a big difference when it matters most. Being informed, calm, and ready helps everyone feel more confident and secure as the school year kicks off.



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From Combat to Catastrophe: Veterans Leading the Way in Disaster Relief

When disaster strikes; wildfires, hurricanes, floods, or earthquakes; there's a group of individuals who often rise to the occasion without hesitation: military veterans. These men and women, trained in high-stress environments and conditioned to lead in times of chaos, bring not only skill but a deep-rooted sense of service that extends far beyond their time in uniform.

Disaster relief work provides veterans with something many crave after their transition to civilian life: a mission. For some, leaving the military can feel like losing a sense of identity or purpose. The camaraderie, discipline, and structure of service life are difficult to replace. But in disaster zones, where conditions are unpredictable and communities are desperate for help, veterans rediscover that purpose. They step in with a unique blend of tactical know-how and emotional resilience, offering both leadership and empathy in equal measure.

Veterans excel in disaster response because they are mission-driven. They know how to organize teams, assess danger quickly, communicate under pressure, and work efficiently in austere environments. But what sets them apart isn't just their skill, it's their heart. Many veterans lead with compassion. They have experienced hardship and loss, and they bring a deep understanding of human struggle into every recovery effort. Whether helping a family

sift through the ashes of a burned home or delivering supplies to a flooded neighborhood, veterans offer more than aid, they offer stability and strength.

Organizations like Team Rubicon based out of Los Angeles, California have demonstrated the powerful connection between military service and disaster relief. By mobilizing veterans alongside first responders and civilian volunteers, these groups create dynamic, disciplined teams that can deploy quickly and effectively. Veterans not only take on physical tasks such as debris removal and logistical coordination but also serve as mentors to younger volunteers and liaisons with government agencies. Their presence inspires confidence and builds trust within impacted communities. The benefits go both ways. Veterans gain more than a paycheck or volunteer hours, they gain renewed purpose, community, and pride.

As climate-related disasters become more frequent, the need for experienced, capable leaders grows. Veterans should be seen not only as helpers but as essential partners in emergency management. Investing in veteran-led disaster programs, training, and leadership roles is both smart and necessary. It honors their service, strengthens our response capacity, and reminds us all that leadership rooted in service never really ends, it just finds new ground.

Quick Tip:

Beat the Heat: Staying Safe in August's Sizzle

August is one of the hottest months of the year, and with rising temperatures comes the real risk of heat illness. Whether you're working outdoors, running errands, or enjoying a weekend adventure, it is important to take care of yourself and those around you.

Start by drinking water regularly throughout the day, even if you don't feel thirsty. Dehydration can sneak up on you. Wear light-colored, breathable clothing and take breaks in the shade or indoors whenever possible. If you are working in the sun, try to schedule the heaviest tasks for the early morning or late afternoon when it is cooler.

Check in on your elders, kids, and pets. They are especially vulnerable to the heat. Never leave anyone in a parked car. Even a few minutes can be dangerous.

Heat illness can show up as dizziness, headaches, muscle cramps, or nausea. If you notice these signs in yourself or someone else, act fast. Move to a cooler place, sip water, and seek help if symptoms worsen.

Staying safe during extreme heat is not about fear. It is about being smart, listening to your body, and looking out for your community. Let's take care of each other this August.

Beyond the Brush: The Rise of Cross-Trained Emergency Crews

The sharp buzz of a chainsaw clearing brush in the backcountry might seem a world away from the calm coordination of a command post during an emergency, but for many vegetation management crews, that gap is shrinking. As wildfires become more frequent and severe, the line between fieldwork and emergency response is blurring. Cross-training vegetation workers to serve as responders is not just innovative, it is essential.

Across the country, especially in fire-prone states like California, crews responsible for vegetation clearance are already deeply embedded in the landscape. They know the terrain, understand fire behavior, and have the physical endurance to operate in rugged conditions. Many of these workers are Indigenous, local, or rural residents who bring generations of traditional ecological knowledge to their daily work. When disaster strikes, they are often the first on scene, long before state or federal teams arrive.

That is why programs aimed at cross-training these workers in incident command, emergency response, and communications are gaining traction. By equipping vegetation crews with skills in first aid, chainsaw safety, basic firefighting, radio operations, and situation assessment, communities are creating a more resilient frontline. These cross-trained teams can quickly transition from fuel reduction work to emergency support, helping clear evacuation routes, protect infrastructure, and even provide real-time intelligence to incident command teams.

The benefits are clear. Emergency response is often hindered by delays in



situational awareness or the lack of qualified personnel available in remote areas. Vegetation crews already on-site can step in immediately, saving valuable time and lives. In turn, they gain access to new career paths and certifications, increasing job security and personal pride.

There is also a human element that cannot be overlooked. Many vegetation workers feel a deep sense of stewardship for the land. Being asked to play a role in protecting their communities during a wildfire or flood is not just a duty, it is an honor. Cross-training programs give these individuals the structure and support they need to formalize that role.

Organizations like CAL TERRA, Tribal Emergency Response Training, and other regional partnerships are leading the way by building innovative models that combine field expertise with structured emergency preparedness. These programs recognize that true safety requires more than just cutting firebreaks or clearing defensible space. They demonstrate that the tools of safety do not stop at the edge of the fireline. They continue into classrooms where workers learn incident command and emergency protocols, into tabletop simulations where real-world scenarios are practiced and refined, and ultimately into the heart of emergency response, where trained crews step up to protect lives, property, and cultural resources when disaster strikes.

From chainsaws to command posts, cross-training vegetation crews empowers everyday workers to become everyday heroes. And in an age of compounding disasters, that kind of transformation is exactly what our communities need.

Echoes in the Earth: Protecting Indigenous Cultural Resources Through Preparedness



Across the country, sacred cultural sites hold stories, traditions, and memories that are essential to the identity of First Citizen peoples and other Indigenous communities. These places are more than just landmarks. They are living spaces of ceremony, reflection, and connection to ancestors and the natural world. Yet many of these sacred sites remain vulnerable to wildfires, floods, climate change, vandalism, and unchecked development.

Emergency planning for sacred places is not only a cultural necessity, but also a moral and legal responsibility. When disaster strikes, the loss of a cultural site is irreversible. Unlike infrastructure or property, you cannot rebuild the spirit of a sacred site or replace generations of stories and prayers embedded in the land.

Too often, cultural sites are overlooked in emergency plans. Emergency managers may focus on population centers, critical infrastructure, and economic assets. While those are important, they must be balanced with the protection of spiritual and cultural heritage. This begins with acknowledging the presence and significance of sacred places in emergency planning frameworks and engaging tribal nations and traditional leaders as equal partners in the planning process.

Real progress happens when relationships are built before disaster hits. Tribes must be included at the table when developing hazard mitigation plans, wildfire protection strategies, and evacuation protocols. In return, tribal representatives can offer deep insight into the landscape, weather patterns, historical burns, plant knowledge, and the cultural context of each site.

Mapping sacred sites is sensitive and must be handled with care. Many tribes are hesitant to share exact locations due to fear of looting, desecration, or mismanagement. However, confidential mapping protocols can be developed to ensure emergency responders are informed without compromising cultural resources. Using reverse mapping or buffer zones is one way to alert crews that they are near an area of cultural importance without disclosing the precise spot.

In California, some tribal entities have built fire pre-plans that include protection measures for ceremonial areas, ancestral burial grounds, and water sources. These plans involve creating defensible space, training fire crews in cultural sensitivity, and ensuring access routes are cleared for elders and spiritual leaders to visit the site after an event.

Federal and state agencies also have a role. Agencies like FEMA and the National Park Service should provide technical assistance for tribes to develop cultural site emergency plans, and they should uphold tribal consultation policies throughout the disaster lifecycle.

Ultimately, this is about respect. Protecting cultural resources is not an added burden or optional step in emergency planning; it's a fundamental part of honoring cultural diversity, and environmental stewardship. When we plan to protect sacred places, we protect the soul of a people and ensure that future generations can still hear the songs of their ancestors in the wind.

FREE CERTS...!

Get Them While You Still Can!

FEMA offers a range of free certifications through the Emergency Management Institute's Independent Study (IS) website. These certifications cover various aspects of emergency management, disaster response, and preparedness, providing valuable training and credentials to individuals involved in emergency services, community planning, and public safety. From courses on incident command systems and disaster response operations to specialized training in areas like hazardous materials management and crisis communications, FEMA's IS certifications offer comprehensive learning opportunities accessible to anyone with internet access. Whether you're a seasoned emergency responder or a concerned citizen looking to enhance your knowledge and skills, these certifications equip you with the tools and expertise needed to effectively respond to emergencies and contribute to resilient communities. Take advantage of FEMA's free certifications through the IS website to strengthen your preparedness and make a difference in emergency management efforts.

Register for your FEMA Student Identification (SID) at the following address:

<https://cdp.dhs.gov/femasid/register>

Take a look at the courses they offer:

<https://training.fema.gov/is/crslist.aspx?lang=en>