# Pack Your Disaster Kit with Poison Help

Hurricanes, tornadoes, floods – Texas has them all. Everyone should be prepared for a disaster regardless of where you live. Most people keep disaster kits complete with food, water, medicines, important documents and supplies. What they may have forgotten is something simple but very important – the nationwide **1-800-222-1222** Poison Help phone number.

The doctors, nurses and pharmacists who staff the Texas Poison Center Network provide help 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year – even during emergencies. The TPCN has disaster plans in place so that if one center is damaged by a hurricane or other emergency, calls from that area can be routed immediately to another center for seamless coverage. In a disaster, this may be the only route to medical assistance.

## *What are the typical storm-related poisoning dangers?*

- **Gasoline-powered generators** – In 2009, nearly 12,500 people called poison centers about carbon monoxide exposures, 97 percent of whom were unintentionally exposed. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 400 Americans die each year from unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning, more than 20,000 visit emergency rooms, and more than 4,000 are hospitalized.

  Carbon monoxide poisoning is the most common poison-related cause of hospitalization and death in the wake of hurricanes. It is called a “silent killer” because there are no odors or symptoms that signal a problem. When people use generators improperly – too close to homes, in garages or outside bedroom windows – carbon monoxide can seep in and sicken or even kill.

- **Power outages** – In the dark, people often confuse their medicines and take the wrong one or too much. Many foods begin to spoil within hours of getting warm, and the “sniff test” is not foolproof in determining if food has gone bad. Sometimes people store supplies such as chemicals or medicine in old food containers. This can lead to “look-alike” poisonings if family members mistake one product for another.

- **Bites and stings** – During storms, bugs, spiders and snakes get displaced along with human residents. People can come across snakes in their damaged homes or in temporary shelters. Poison control centers around the country are familiar with local venomous animals and can walk callers through important first aid techniques for all sorts of bites and stings, as well as determine whether further emergency care is necessary.

## *How do I protect my family from poisonings associated with natural disasters?*

- Include the Poison Help phone number in your disaster plan, and program your cell phone with the nationwide, toll free number: **1-800-222-1222**. Keep your phone charged, and limit calls to emergencies.

- Secure all routine medications and necessary chemicals in watertight containers with their original labels intact. Pack each family member's medications in separate containers to avoid confusion. Don't forget your pets! Without accurate product information, poison centers are limited in how much information they can provide.

- Carefully follow the manufacturer's safety instructions for gasoline-powered generators. If you believe you have been exposed to carbon monoxide, call your poison center immediately.

- Keep a full first aid kit with your disaster supplies, including an up-to-date list of all medications taken routinely by household members.

The Texas Poison Center Network serves the State of Texas to prevent poisoning. TPCN offers free and confidential services 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you believe you have been exposed to a poison or have questions about a substance that may be poisonous, call **1-800-222-1222** immediately.