

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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UT SOUTHWESTERN THERAPIST ADVISES FAMILIES TO DEVELOP DISASTER PLAN THAT KEEPS EVERYONE IN TOUCH

DALLAS – Nov. 14, 2002 – Should disaster ever strike, Patrick Tiner offers a proven way to help families find calm and reassurance.

Find your loved ones – immediately.

“As a long-time disaster-relief volunteer, I’ve seen over and over how important being able to communicate with family members is in a disaster,” said Tiner, a faculty associate in psychiatry at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas. “People at the disaster site are worried about their loved ones and don’t know whether they’re dead or alive, and those watching the news on TV or hearing radio reports also are very frantic.”

To facilitate communication with those most important to him, Tiner carries a small, laminated informational card at all times, as does his wife, Mary; 13-year-old daughter, Sharon; and 19-year-old son, Daniel, who’s away at college.

The card lists the numbers for home and office phones, cell phones, pagers and any other means of contacting family members and close friends, both nearby and elsewhere. These cards are one component of an individualized disaster-response plan the Tiners have developed. Tiner, who directs the Employee Assistance Program for counseling at UT Southwestern, is a member of an American Red Cross volunteer team of disaster specialists that has generated a public-education program to promote such preparedness.

Besides the cards, said Tiner, his family’s personal emergency plan includes always having a fully stocked first-aid kit, maps, flashlights and extra batteries in each of their vehicles. He also suggests toys and books for families with small children but warns against keeping food and water – even in bottles and cans – for extended periods because of the possibility of food poisoning.

If there is ample emergency warning, Tiner adds items like blankets and pillows, heavy coats during cold weather, snack foods, cases of bottled water, boxes of crackers, and perhaps some canned goods. “And don’t forget the can opener,” said Tiner.

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Tiner, involved in Red Cross disaster-relief work for more than 17 years, has been at the scene of major airline crashes, at the Oklahoma City federal building bombing site in 1995 and at the World Trade Center last year. He also has helped at major weather-related disasters.

Tiner said the family cards provide an important link in situations as varied as terrorist attacks, air disasters, floods, hurricanes and tornadoes. Friends and family members – especially those who live outside the area – can serve as an informational “clearinghouse” for on-site family members who may become separated, a fact hammered home in the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001.

“One thing we learned at Ground Zero is that all communications aren’t necessarily cut off,” said Tiner. “We had people able to make calls out of the area and even around the country while we were shut out in the area of attack.”

The Tiners also have a set meeting place – the Dallas American Red Cross headquarters, because “they know that’s where I’ll be” – in case of emergency. His family lists both the local and toll-free Red Cross numbers on their cards since that is their designated place to regroup.

“Preparing the cards is good common sense,” he said. “We work with disasters all the time. We know what it’s like to be caught in that type situation.”

For further information, Tiner recommends the American Red Cross brochure on family disaster plan, “Terrorism: Preparing for the Unexpected.” The free publication can be obtained by e-mailing the national office at www.redcross.org or the Dallas office at www.redcrossdallas.org or by calling the national office at 202-728-6401 or the Dallas office at 214-678-4800.

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