

## DISASTER PLANNING TIPS

By: Mindy Gottesman, RD, Management PI Rep

Do you have a disaster preparedness plan? According to the Joint Commission, "it is not sufficient to require that healthcare organizations plan for a single event, they should be able to demonstrate sufficient flexibility to respond effectively to combinations of escalation events."

The first step is to have your basic plan. This will include at least a 3 day disaster menu as well as 1 gallon of water per person per day. After experiencing the 2007 San Diego Wildfires first hand, the disaster plan at my facility has now been increased to 4 days of food, supplies and water. This is not a requirement in the State of California but is strongly recommended. Your plan needs to be flexible based on what resources you have to work with. Is there electricity to keep your refrigerators going or gas to keep your stoves in operation? The general rule is to use your perishables first for as long as you can maintain proper temperature and then go to non-perishables.. A great option for well balanced meals are MRE's – Meals Ready to Eat. This is what the military uses for its troops out in the field and are now being utilized in disaster meal planning for healthcare institutions. They can even be purchased for home disaster preparedness kits through a variety of websites. They are self contained meals in a box that don't require any electricity or gas, yet you will be able to enjoy a hot meal. They contain the meal, water and their own heating element so after pouring the water on the heating element and putting the meal back in the box, it will heat up in less than 10 minutes.

Disaster plans commonly include what to do on site, but what do you do if you have to evacuate a facility. During the 2007 San Diego Wildfires, the hospital and long term care facility that I work at needed to be evacuated. We learned from this experience that snack bags should be readily available to give to patients or residents that are being transported to other facilities because you don't know how long it will be before they will get a meal. Evacuation Snack Bags are now part of our disaster plan and include a can of Ensure, a package of cheese and crackers and a bottled water.

Take a look at your disaster plan at home and work. Does it include what you would do without water, gas, electricity or if you have to evacuate? Plan ahead so in the event of a disaster, you will be prepared!