

# preparing for the next **BIG THING**

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**preparing for  
emergencies  
a user guide**

from the people of the  
centre for emergency preparedness  
and technical cooperation

## Overview

If you want to prepare for an emergency, this guide will give you some ideas on how to get started. Preparing for emergencies is worth the effort and will pay dividends.

This guide is divided into three parts, as follows:

### **Part I: Understanding Emergencies**

Identifying Hazards which could Become Emergencies

What Emergency Situations should I Prepare for?

Hazard Risk Assessment Matrix

### **Part 2: Preparing for Emergencies**

How Do I Know if I am Prepared for an Emergency?

Contingency Plans

Testing My Preparedness

### **Part 3: Keeping Updated on Emergency Preparedness**

Why Conduct Periodic Review?

Evaluator Checklist

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# Why Prepare?

An emergency can occur when we least expect it. We never really get to choose whether to be caught in an emergency. Being prepared to respond to, ride through and recover from an emergency is everyone's challenge.

We should prepare for emergencies for several reasons. One, preparing for emergencies helps us to be mentally prepared for the consequences and impact that are likely to occur. Two, we would have a rough idea of what to expect, how we should react and respond, and more importantly, know what we should do. This is important because knowing what to do minimises panic. Three, we can start to make available resources which would help us ride through an emergency.

# What are we Preparing for?

The first step to take when preparing for emergencies is to map out the list of potential emergencies that could occur. We would like to share with you a hazard risk assessment matrix which could be useful to you in mapping out the list potential emergencies and in determining which emergencies should be accorded greater priority.

There are 2 things we need before we can plot the hazard risk assessment matrix. The first is to identify the types of hazards which could become emergencies for you, your family, colleagues and friends, and community. Next is to prioritise each hazard based on the expected impact on you, your family, friends, colleagues and community.

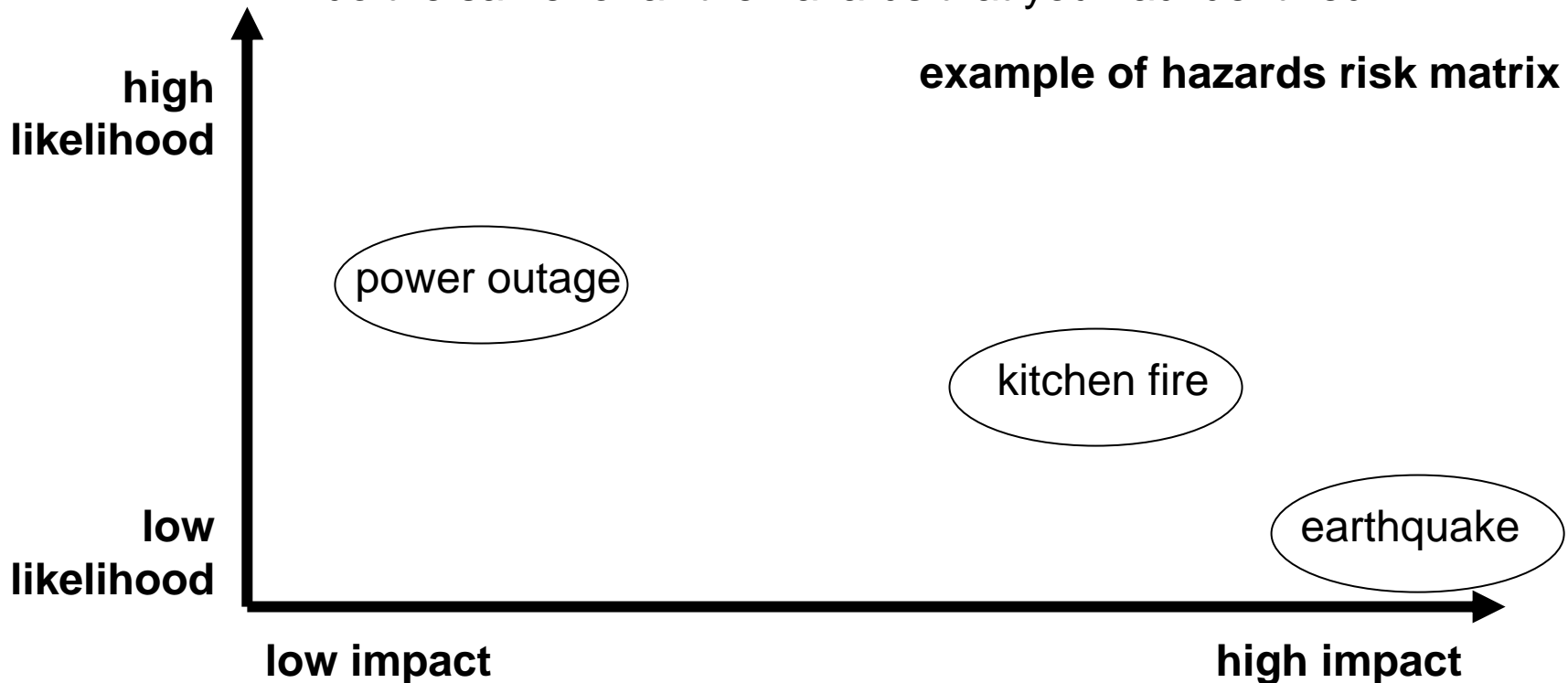
# Power Outage

What are the chances of a power outage in your housing estate or workplace? How does a power outage impact you? Do you know what to do if there is a sudden power outage in your HDB block or office building? Should you take the elevator or head for the stairs? Do you remain indoors or proceed outdoors? Do you know where the torchlight is kept or do you have supply of candles and matchsticks or a lighter? Do you know where to get information on what is going on?

# Fire

What is the likelihood of a household fire in your case? What is the likely impact if there is a fire in your flat or house? Do you know what to do if a fire breaks out in your workplace?

A useful way to classify the types of hazards identified is to prioritise each hazard based on the expected impact on you, your family, friends, colleagues and community. You can plot each hazard against a simple matrix. On one axis is the likelihood of occurrence and on the other axis is the likely impact. You should do the same for all the hazards that you had identified.



# Getting Prepared

Do you have a contingency plan in place to deal with the hazard if it occurs. A basic contingency plan should have several components, as follows:

- A list of relevant equipment or items and their availability and location. For example, fire extinguisher, torch-light, battery, radio, and first-aid kit.
- Access to information, i.e. identify critical information needed and established channels to the information. For example, floor plans, maps, manpower strength and status, contact numbers and details are important for emergencies.
- A list of resources available to tap. For example, tie-ups with the SCDF, or community volunteers.
- An action plan, i.e. identified triggers for activation and a step-by-step workflow. Work through the steps you would take from the point of activation to point of safety.

# Getting Prepared for Organisations

For organisations, the contingency plans should cover the structure, command and control for managing and responding to the hazard when it arises. For instance, who is the overall Incident Manager for the organisation. Who will decide when to activate evacuation. Think also about communications. How would staff be notified and alerted to an incident or hazard? If mobile phones are to be used as the primary communications tool, be sure you have an updated list of the mobile phone numbers of the relevant staff. Has an assembly point been identified and do staff already know where it is and the safest route to get there?

After you have covered the components of a basic contingency plan for one type of hazard, you should move on to do the same for different hazards. The contingency plans for different hazards should be compiled and made available to those who need to know.

# Getting Prepared for Organisations

Developing contingency plans alone is not complete. This is because you would need to test your plan to (a) determine if the plan works, and (b) to ensure that the people the plan is supposed to cover, know what to do when activated. Exercises are a useful way to achieve both purposes.

An exercise is a focused activity that enables participants to react to simulated situations in a capacity expected of them in a real event. Exercises train people to play their expected roles based on the contingency plan.

# Getting Prepared for Organisations

When designing an exercise, you should determine which aspect of your contingency plan that you wish to test. For instance, if your contingency plan pertains to evacuation, then you may be testing (a) the alert mechanism, (b) staff compliance with the evacuation route, and (c) whether the evacuation plan is feasible. You could use a simple scenario to set the context. For instance, a bomb threat has been made and your building has been ordered to be evacuated. You should then trace the steps to be taken to safely get all your staff to the assembly point. To make the context more realistic, you may wish to build in local knowledge. For instance, you may want to highlight general staff profile, such as number of males and females, and age groups.

# Getting Prepared for Organisations

There are some factors you should consider when designing an exercise. In deciding which aspect of your contingency plan that you wish to test, you have in effect set the scope of the exercise. You should decide how many participants you want to involve. More participants means more facilitators needed to help in the flow of the exercise. You should also pay attention to special needs. For instance, do you need to make special provisions for those who may have difficulty in movement, those in poor health, or those who understand only one language.

# Check. And Check Again

Over time, circumstances may change and staff would definitely change. As a result, contingency plans should always be periodically reviewed. This ensures that contingency plans are up-to-date.

In addition to updating contingency plans, you should also periodically review the list of hazards. Have new hazards emerged which you should pay attention to. Or, have new developments resulted in hazards becoming less hazardous.