

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

FIRE SAFETY AND PREVENTION



PREVENTION IS EVERYTHING

Most home fires during a crisis are caused by carelessness with candles, gas and cooking.



NEVER LEAVE FLAMES UNATTENDED

Not candles, not gas burners, not braais.



EQUIP YOUR HOME

Every household needs a fire extinguisher, smoke detectors and a fire blanket.



KNOW YOUR ESCAPE ROUTES

Practise them as a family before you ever need them.



GET OUT FIRST

No possession justifies staying in a burning building.



KNOW THE NUMBERS

10177 for fire,
112 from any mobile phone.



BE PREPARED. BE AWARE. BE SAFE. FIRE CAN DESTROY IN SECONDS.
PREVENTION SAVES LIVES.

Earlier in this guide we discussed the treatment of burn wounds in detail. But as with most emergencies, prevention is always better than cure. A house fire during a normal situation is devastating enough. During a crisis – when emergency services may be unavailable, water pressure may be low and your family is already under stress – a fire can be catastrophic and potentially fatal.



South Africa has seen firsthand how quickly fires can destroy entire communities. The Knysna fires of 2017, the Betty's Bay fire and the devastating blazes in Cape St Francis are sobering reminders that fire does not discriminate and does not wait for a convenient moment. With load shedding forcing millions of South Africans to rely on candles, gas lamps, open fires and braais for light and cooking, the risk of accidental fire has never been higher.

THE MOST COMMON CAUSES OF FIRE DURING A CRISIS:

- ✓ Unattended candles left burning near curtains, paper or bedding
- ✓ Overloaded extension cords and power strips when electricity is restored after load shedding
- ✓ Gas leaks from incorrectly connected or damaged gas bottles and appliances
- ✓ Paraffin lamps that are knocked over or placed too close to flammable surfaces
- ✓ Open fires and braais that are not properly managed or extinguished
- ✓ Children playing with matches or lighters left within reach

11.5 PREVENTION – INSIDE THE HOME

11.5.1 CANDLES

- ✓ Never leave a burning candle unattended – not even for a minute
- ✓ Keep candles away from curtains, paper, clothing and any flammable surface
- ✓ Place candles in a proper holder on a stable non-flammable surface
- ✓ Extinguish all candles before going to sleep – without exception



11.5.2 GAS

- ✓ Always turn gas bottles off at the valve when not in use
- ✓ Never use a gas stove or burner in an enclosed space without ventilation
- ✓ If you smell gas, do not switch any electrical switches on or off – open windows and doors immediately and move everyone outside
- ✓ Store spare gas bottles upright in a well-ventilated outdoor area away from direct sunlight



11.5.3 ELECTRICAL

- ✓ When power is restored after load shedding, check that no appliances were left switched on before the outage
- ✓ Never overload extension cords or power strips
- ✓ Do not run electrical cables under carpets or rugs

11.6 EQUIPPING YOUR HOME

Fire extinguishers. Every home should have at least one dry powder ABC extinguisher – it handles wood, paper, liquid and electrical fires. Keep one in the kitchen and one in the garage. Remember the word PASS: Pull the pin, aim at the base of the fire, Squeeze the handle, sweep from side to side.

Smoke detectors. Install smoke detectors in every bedroom, hallway and living area. Test them monthly and replace batteries at least once a year.

Fire blankets. A fire blanket is an inexpensive and highly effective tool for smothering small kitchen fires. Keep one mounted on the kitchen wall within easy reach.



Escape routes. Every member of your family should know at least two ways out of every room. Discuss and practise your home escape route as a family and agree on a meeting point outside.

11.7 IF A FIRE STARTS

- ✓ **Get everyone out first.** No possession is worth a life.
- ✓ **Alert everyone** in the household immediately.
- ✓ **Feel doors before opening them.** If a door feels hot do not open it – find an alternative exit.
- ✓ **Stay low.** Smoke rises. Crawl along the floor where the air is cleaner.
- ✓ **Close doors behind you as you exit** – closed doors slow the spread of fire significantly.
- ✓ **Once out, stay out.** Never re-enter a burning building for any reason.
- ✓ **Call for help** as soon as you are safely outside – 10177 for fire department or 112 from any mobile phone.

11.8 SUMMARY

- ✓ **Prevention is everything** – Most home fires during a crisis are caused by carelessness with candles, gas and cooking.
- ✓ **Never leave flames unattended** – Not candles, not gas burners, not braais.
- ✓ **Equip your home** – Every household needs a fire extinguisher, smoke detectors and a fire blanket.
- ✓ **Know your escape routes** – practise them as a family before you ever need them.
- ✓ **Get out first** – No possession justifies staying in a burning building.
- ✓ **Know the numbers** – 10177 for fire, 112 from any mobile phone.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

SANITATION AND HUMAN WASTE

CLEANLINESS
PROTECTS
HEALTH

CHEMICAL
TOILETS
A PRACTICAL
INVESTMENT
FOR EVERY
HOUSEHOLD

PIT LATRINES
CAN BE
CONSTRUCTED
SIMPLY AND
SAFELY WHEN
NO OTHER OPTION
IS AVAILABLE.

BUCKET
FLUSH
USE GREY WATER

WASH
YOUR HANDS
PROTECT
YOUR FAMILY

LIME
POWDER
ODOR CONTROL
DISINFECTS

JIK
REGULAR
BLEACH
KILLS GERMS
DISINFECTS
CLEANS

DISPOSABLE
GLOVES

TOILET
CHEMICAL

TOILET
CHEMICAL

SOAP



BUCKET FLUSHING
is your first option
when municipal
water fails —
use grey water.



CHEMICAL TOILETS
are a practical
investment for
every household.



PIT LATRINES
can be constructed
simply and safely
when no other
option is available.



**STOCK SANITATION
SUPPLIES**
including lime
powder, Jik,
gloves and a
chemical
toilet.



HANDWASHING
is more critical
than ever during
a crisis — never
compromise on this.



CLEAN TODAY. HEALTHY TOMORROW. PREPARED ALWAYS.

Of all the topics covered in this guide, sanitation is perhaps the most overlooked – and yet in a prolonged emergency, it can become one of the most serious threats to your family's health. When municipal sewage systems fail, and they will during extended load shedding or a water supply collapse, the risk of disease spreads rapidly. Cholera, typhoid, dysentery and hepatitis A are all directly linked to poor sanitation. These are not diseases of distant countries. They are diseases of any community that loses access to clean water and functioning sewage systems.



The good news is that with a little preparation and knowledge, you can manage sanitation safely and with dignity – even in the most challenging circumstances.

12.1 WHEN THE TOILET STOPS FLUSHING

Most flush toilets require municipal water pressure to function. When water supply is cut or severely restricted, you have several options:

Bucket flushing. A toilet can still be flushed manually by pouring approximately ten litres of water directly into the bowl quickly. This uses grey water from your bath, sink or collected rainwater. This is why storing water in your bathtub during the early stages of a crisis is so important.

Chemical toilets. These are portable self-contained units that use a chemical solution to break down and deodorise waste. They are widely available at outdoor and camping stores across South Africa and require no plumbing or water connection. A chemical toilet is one of the most practical investments you can make for your emergency kit, particularly for families with young children or elderly members.



Cat holes and pit latrines. If you find yourself without any other option, human waste can be buried safely. Dig a hole at least 30 centimetres deep and at least 60 metres away from any water source, stream or borehole. Cover the waste completely with soil after each use. Never dig near your vegetable garden. This method has been used safely for centuries and remains effective when done correctly.

12.2 CONSTRUCTING A SIMPLE EMERGENCY PIT LATRINE

If a crisis extends beyond a few days and a chemical toilet is not available, a simple pit latrine can be constructed in your garden:

- ✓ Choose a location at least 30 metres from your home and at least 60 metres from any water source
- ✓ Dig a hole approximately one metre deep, 50 centimetres wide and 80 centimetres long.
- ✓ Build a simple wooden frame over the hole using planks or poles to sit on safely.
- ✓ Cover the seat frame with a wooden lid between uses to keep flies out.
- ✓ Keep a bucket of ash, dry soil or lime nearby and sprinkle a handful into the hole after each use to control odour and accelerate decomposition.
- ✓ When the hole is three quarters full, cover it completely with soil and dig a new one.

12.3 HYGIENE PRODUCTS TO STOCK

Your emergency supplies should always include the following sanitation items:

- ✓ Toilet paper – stock far more than you think you will need
- ✓ Disposable gloves
- ✓ Hand sanitiser and antibacterial soap
- ✓ Bleach or Jik – for disinfecting surfaces and toilet areas
- ✓ Lime powder – available at most hardware stores, used to treat waste and control odour
- ✓ Heavy duty refuse bags for waste disposal
- ✓ A portable chemical toilet or camping toilet seat
- ✓ Feminine hygiene products
- ✓ Baby wipes – invaluable when water is scarce



12.4 WASTE DISPOSAL DURING A CRISIS

Never dispose of human waste in open areas near your home, in stormwater drains or in any watercourse. This is not only a health risk to your family but to your entire community. Responsible waste disposal in a crisis is an act of neighbourly love – the same principle of looking out for others that runs throughout this entire guide.

12.5 A FINAL WORD ON HYGIENE

In a crisis, handwashing becomes more important than ever, not less. Diseases spread through contaminated hands are responsible for a significant proportion of illness during and after disasters. Keep antibacterial soap and hand sanitiser at every toilet and food preparation area. Wash hands thoroughly after using any toilet facility and before handling food – every single time without exception.

12.6 SUMMARY

- ✓ **Bucket flushing** is your first option when municipal water fails – use grey water.
- ✓ **Chemical toilets** are a practical investment for every household.
- ✓ **Pit latrines** can be constructed simply and safely when no other option is available.
- ✓ **Stock sanitation supplies** including lime powder, Jik, gloves and a chemical toilet.
- ✓ **Handwashing** is more critical than ever during a crisis – never compromise on this.