

Guide for Apartments, Condos and Townhomes



Working together to prepare

Did you know that half of all people in British Columbia live in some form of multi-unit residential building, such as apartments, condos or townhomes? This PreparedBC guide contains information and advice for how to work together with your neighbours and how to prepare as part of a complex. Strengthening relationships with the people in your building could mean a faster response and quicker recovery following an emergency or disaster.

This guide will increase your personal emergency preparedness while also serving as a conversation starter to engage your neighbours, building managers, strata council members, and building employees. Use this guide in addition to your building's fire safety plan and any other emergency or evacuation plans already in place.

Prepared neighbourhoods – whether a street, cul-de-sac, or apartment floor – are resilient neighbourhoods. When you're in it together, you're stronger.



Table of contents

Step 1: Your personal emergency plan..... 4

- Communication plan.....5
- Emergency meeting places.....6
- Where to get information.....7
- Insurance coverage.....8

Step 2: Emergency planning for your complex 9

- Assign roles and receive training10

Step 3: Gathering emergency supplies 16

- Build a home emergency kit.....16
- Build grab-and-go bags.....17

Step 4: Responding during an emergency..... 18

- Sheltering-in-place.....18
- Evacuating your home.....19

Step 5: Recovering after an emergency 20

- Returning home (if evacuated)..... 20
- Psychological care20
- Insurance claims.....21

Step 6: Maintaining and updating your plan..... 22

Additional resources 22



Step 1: Your personal emergency plan

Preparedness starts with your own home emergency plan. Thinking ahead and creating an emergency plan will strengthen your ability to respond and recover from events like earthquakes, wildfires and floods.

Making an emergency plan is as simple as starting a conversation with the people you live with. Visit PreparedBC.ca/EmergencyPlans to download a free, fill-in-the-blanks guide.

As you create your plan, keep the following in mind:

- Phone, gas, electric and water services may not work after a disaster
- Your building's exits could be blocked, and alarms may be triggered
- You and the people you live with could be on your own for several days or weeks
- You could be required to evacuate on short notice
- Roads could be blocked, stores closed and gas stations out of service
- It may be weeks before infrastructure, utilities and essential services are restored

COMMUNICATION PLAN

Make a contact list of friends, family, neighbours, building managers, strata council members, and employees (if any), and make sure everyone you live with has a copy. The list should include at least one out-of-area contact in case local phone and mobile networks are overwhelmed. Ideally, choose someone who lives outside of B.C. and wouldn't be affected by a major event, such as an earthquake.

| Name | Phone & Email |
|-------|---------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

Follow these guidelines for staying connected:

-  Keep your phone fully charged. Conserve battery life by dimming your screen and avoiding power-hungry apps and video.
-  Consider a virtual meeting place. Create a private group chat (on Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp, for example) for everyone in your home to check in during an emergency.

TIP: Details like contact info and meeting places can change over time. Review and update your emergency plan at least once every year.



My Emergency Meeting Place
10 min away

EMERGENCY MEETING PLACES

During an emergency such as an earthquake, wildfire or flood, you, those you live with, and your neighbours should gather at a predetermined safe meeting place to evaluate the situation and what needs to be done.

Depending on the emergency and where you live, you may need different types of meeting places. Be sure to consider these in your plan. You could identify a safe place to meet near your building as well as a safe place to meet away from the property, like another building in your neighbourhood. Also take the time to familiarize yourself with your building's evacuation routes, as outlined in your building's fire safety plan.



Our meeting place close to home is:



Our meeting place away from home is:

WHERE TO GET INFORMATION

Contact your community's Emergency Management Program to find out how it will share alerts and instructions during an emergency, whether it's by social media, mobile alerts, sirens, radio or television. The most important thing is to seek out credible sources so you can make good decisions during a disaster.



Websites

.....

.....

.....



Social Media

.....

.....

.....



Phone Numbers

.....

.....



Radio Stations

.....

.....



EmergencyInfoBC

Additionally, we recommend following [@EmergencyInfoBC](#) on X (formerly Twitter) or at [EmergencyInfoBC.ca](#) for emergency updates.

INSURANCE COVERAGE

Whether you rent or own, investing in comprehensive home insurance is not just a financial decision, but a proactive measure to safeguard your home and ensure a secure future for you and those you live with.

Your personal contents, upgrades, evacuation expenses or belongings are not covered by your strata corporation. Strata fees cover the strata corporation's insurance; strata fees do not pay for unit owner's or tenant's insurance.

Insurance is available for most perils, including earthquake coverage. If you are evacuated or your home is damaged from a major event and you can't live there, insurance coverage is also available for your additional living expenses while your home is being repaired.

Check out Insurance Bureau of Canada's (IBC) website at www.ibc.ca or call **1-844-227-5422** for more information on insurance and the different coverages available for protecting your home.

There are many different insurance providers that offer home, tenant and business insurance coverage. Contact your insurance representative to review the options that are available in your area (including earthquake coverage) and to find the coverage you need for your home and everything inside.

Review your insurance coverage at least annually, or if you make any major changes, to understand the coverage you have and options that are available to safeguard your home and contents.

Step 2: Emergency planning for your complex

When you live in a multi-unit residential building, having a personal emergency plan is a great start but ideally a complex-wide emergency plan should be in place.

A good first step is to talk to your landlord, building manager or strata corporation and encourage them to create a complex-wide plan if one does not already exist. There is useful information in this guide and in BC Housing's Security, Safety & Emergency Preparedness Guide:

[bchousing.org/publications/Housing-Provider-Kit-Security-Safety-and-Emergency-Preparedness-Guide.pdf](https://www.bchousing.org/publications/Housing-Provider-Kit-Security-Safety-and-Emergency-Preparedness-Guide.pdf)

It's also important to reach out to your neighbours and encourage them to participate in emergency preparedness efforts. If you already have a neighbourhood network in place like a residents' association or strata council, those are great places to start - work with them to add your preparedness ideas to a meeting agenda. If you prefer a less formal approach, you can organize a get-together such as a BBQ or potluck.

Some topics to prompt a conversation:

- What potential risks exist in your area? Is your area prone to flooding or at-risk of earthquakes?
- Does everyone know how to be personally prepared?
- Who has special skills that may be useful in an emergency?
- Where should you meet if it is not safe to enter or gather near your building?
- Do you have an inventory of residents, including pets? You'll need this to account for each other in an emergency.

ASSIGN ROLES AND RECEIVE TRAINING

It can be difficult to think clearly during and immediately after a disaster. Assigning responsibilities in advance will enable more coordinated response.

To be better prepared, you and your neighbours, building managers, strata council members, and employees should consider safety-related training such as:

- First Aid / CPR
- Rapid Damage Assessment
- Light Search and Rescue
- Personal Emergency Preparedness

If your building is operated by a society or as a co-op, ask your building manager to speak with the Non-Profit Portfolio Manager (NPPM) at BC Housing, or visit www.bchousing.org for more information.

Your First Nation, municipality or regional district's Emergency Management Program can also help answer questions and provide tools and tips.

In an emergency that affects your entire building or complex, leadership roles will need to be established. **Wardens** and **chief wardens** should be identified to make decisions and communicate on behalf of residents. In large buildings, consider identifying one or two wardens per floor. These individuals should keep a list of all residents on their floor and have a plan to account for them in an emergency or evacuation. **First-Aid attendants** should also be identified to attend to anyone suffering from injuries. Be sure to identify alternates for each role as people move in and out of your building.

Guide for Apartments, Condos and Townhomes

Record each person's role on the sheet located in the centre of this guide. Be prepared to adapt and reassign roles if needed during an emergency.

Chief Warden

- Responsible for directing wardens, liaising with emergency personnel, identifying what needs to be done at what time to ensure safety of all residents.
- Should have an inventory of residents (including those with mobility issues) and pets.
- Should know who can turn off utilities and where they are located.
- Should consider acquiring and storing communication equipment such as two-way radios in case phones do not work.

Floor Warden

- Responsible for accounting for individuals on their floor or within their pre-identified zone.
- Responsible for assisting or directing others to assist those in their zone who need help. Communicates issues to chief warden.
- Should know who is responsible for inspecting and assessing the building or complex and how to get in touch with them (including any building occupants with Rapid Damage Assessment training).

First-Aid Attendants

- Must gather at an accessible location to attend to those who need medical assistance.
- Work with chief warden to request emergency personnel if needed.
- Acquires and stores medical supplies and equipment as needed.

Communication Specialists

- Gather and disseminate information.
- Work with wardens to ensure accurate information is shared with residents and vice versa.
- Have important contact information handy such as phone numbers and email addresses for landlords, strata corporation, building or strata managers, non-emergency services, etc.

Strata Corporation or Landlord

- Depending on whether you rent or own your unit, who is accountable for building or complex-wide responsibilities can vary.
- These responsibilities can include turning off complex-wide utilities and planning for common areas like laundry rooms and stairwells.
- Have a conversation with your strata council, building manager or landlord about potential roles and responsibilities in your complex.

Zone leaders

Unit number:

Name(s):

Phone:

Email:

Skills / resources:

Emergency role:

Unit number:

Name(s):

Phone:

Email:

Skills / resources:

Emergency role:

Our neighbours

Unit number:

Name(s):

Phone:

Email:

Skills / resources:

Emergency role:

Unit number:

Name(s):

Phone:

Email:

Skills / resources:

Emergency role:

Unit number:

Name(s):

Phone:

Email:

Skills / resources:

Emergency role:

Unit number:

Name(s):

Phone:

Email:

Skills / resources:

Emergency role:

Our neighbours

Unit number:

Name(s):

Phone:

Email:

Skills / resources:

Emergency role:

Unit number:

Name(s):

Phone:

Email:

Skills / resources:

Emergency role:

Unit number:

Name(s):

Phone:

Email:

Skills / resources:

Emergency role:

Unit number:

Name(s):

Phone:

Email:

Skills / resources:

Emergency role:

Our neighbours

Unit number:

Name(s):

Phone:

Email:

Skills / resources:

Emergency role:

Unit number:

Name(s):

Phone:

Email:

Skills / resources:

Emergency role:

Unit number:

Name(s):

Phone:

Email:

Skills / resources:

Emergency role:

Unit number:

Name(s):

Phone:

Email:

Skills / resources:

Emergency role:

Step 3: Gathering emergency supplies

Following a disaster, you may need to:

- Stay at home with an emergency kit or
- Leave immediately with a grab-and-go bag



BUILD A HOME EMERGENCY KIT

Put supplies in one or two containers, such as plastic bins or duffel bags. Store them in an area of your home that's easy to get to, such as a hall closet or spare room.

Include:

- Non-perishable food: minimum one-week supply (or longer), with a manual can opener
- Water: four litres per person, per day for drinking and sanitation. Plan for a minimum of one week (or longer)
- Phone charger, power bank or inverter
- Battery-powered or hand-crank radio
- Battery-powered or hand-crank flashlight
- Extra batteries
- First-aid kit and medications
- Personal toiletries and items, such as an extra pair of glasses or contact lenses
- Copy of your emergency plan
- Copies of important documents, such as insurance papers and identification
- Cash in small bills
- Garbage bags and moist towelettes for personal sanitation
- Seasonal clothing, sturdy footwear and emergency blanket

BUILD GRAB-AND-GO BAGS

A grab-and-go bag is a small emergency kit that's easy to take with you if you must evacuate. It's a good idea to make grab-and-go bags for your home, workplace and vehicle.

Include:

- Food (ready to eat) and water
- Phone charger and battery bank
- Small battery-powered or hand-crank radio
- Battery-powered or hand-crank flashlight
- Extra batteries
- Small first-aid kit and personal medications
- Personal toiletries and items, such as an extra pair of glasses or contact lenses
- Copy of your emergency plan
- Copies of important documents, such as insurance papers (including claims contact information) and identification
- Cash in small bills
- Local map with your household meeting places identified
- Seasonal clothing and an emergency blanket
- Pen and notepad
- Whistle

TIP: Storage space can be tight in apartments and condos, but there are ways to prepare that don't require a backyard shed. Purchase emergency rations that are small and air-packed. Discuss with your neighbours a central storage space for communal emergency items like water and blankets. Talk to your neighbours, strata corporation or landlord about other ways to share resources.

Step 4: Responding during an emergency

If an emergency has occurred but you have not yet been instructed to evacuate or shelter-in-place by emergency responders, follow these tips:

- Do not use elevators
- If your power goes out, know how to navigate your complex without electronic access
- Do not use BBQs or camp stoves in your unit following a disaster
- Fire alarms may go off: do not panic!
- Do not flush toilets in case water lines are damaged

For tips on how to respond to specific hazards, visit [PreparedBC.ca](https://www.preparedbc.ca)

SHELTERING-IN-PLACE

Following some emergencies like an earthquake, the best thing you can do if your building is structurally safe is to shelter-in-place. In other words – stay where you are. This will help first responders do their jobs.

As mentioned earlier in this guide, there should ideally be someone in your building with Rapid Damage Assessment training who can help determine if it is safe (or unsafe) to stay where you are.

Having a well-stocked home emergency kit will make sheltering-in-place an easier and more comfortable experience.



EVACUATING YOUR HOME

During some emergencies such as a wildfire or tsunami, officials may instruct you to leave the area immediately.

Likewise, after an earthquake, a Rapid Damage Assessment may determine that it is unsafe for you to remain at home, in which case you will need to evacuate.

Depending on the severity of the situation, an Evacuation Alert or Order may be issued. It's important to understand the difference and to always follow the advice and direction of local officials.

Evacuation Alert:

Be ready to leave on short notice.

Evacuation

Order:

You are at risk.

Evacuation Rescind:

The risk to life and safety has passed.

Evacuation Alert

This means be ready to leave on short notice. If you're under an Evacuation Alert, gather your grab-and-go bags, emergency plan, copies of important documents and cherished mementos. Have them at the front door or already packed into your vehicle.

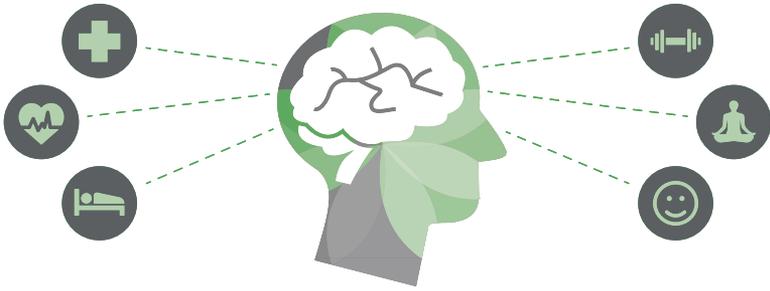
Evacuation Order

This means you are at risk and must leave IMMEDIATELY. Follow all directions from officials and evacuate using the route(s) they've identified.

An Emergency Support Services (ESS) reception centre may be opened for evacuated residents. Services may include: food, lodging, clothing, emotional support, information about the crisis and family reunification.

Evacuation Rescinded

Once officials determine the risk to life and safety has passed, the Evacuation Order will be rescinded. Continue to stay tuned for other possible Evacuation Alerts or Orders.



Step 5: Recovering after an emergency

RETURNING HOME (IF EVACUATED)

If you were required to evacuate during a disaster, returning home afterwards can be overwhelming. Use extreme caution and take it one step at a time.

For your own safety, do not return home until officials say it is safe and they have cleared your building of structural, electrical or other hazards.

Talk to your neighbours. We're all in this together and reaching out to people in your community, as well as accepting help, can be both comforting and encouraging.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CARE

Fear and anxiety are natural reactions to stressful events and can stir up past traumas. To help yourself and those you live with:

- Accept offers of help. Seek counselling or spiritual guidance
- Focus on positive memories and the skills you've used to get through other hard times
- Be aware of how children are reacting. Reassure them and encourage them to express themselves
- Give yourself and your loved ones permission to grieve
- Practice cultural or spiritual customs that bring you comfort

Guide for Apartments, Condos and Townhomes

Watch for warning signs of extended anxiety and contact a medical professional or trusted community leader if the following symptoms last more than two weeks:

- Trouble with eating and sleeping
- Feeling depressed or hopeless; showing low energy or crying often
- Being anxious and fearful
- Trouble focusing on daily activities
- Recurring thoughts or nightmares

TIP: Don't be afraid to seek help after a traumatic event. B.C.'s Mental Health Support Line is open 24 hours a day at **310-6789 (no area code)**. Counselling is also available through the First Nations Health Authority. Visit www.fnha.ca or call the KUU-US Indigenous Crisis Line at **1-800- 588-8717**.

INSURANCE CLAIMS

Before you start your cleanup activities, call your insurance representative or company as soon as you can. Most insurers have a 24-hour claims service. Be as detailed as possible when providing information. List all damaged or destroyed items. If possible, assemble proofs of purchase, photos, receipts and warranties. Take photos of the damage. Keep all receipts related to clean-up and living expenses if you've been displaced. Ask your insurance representative about what expenses you may be entitled to and for how long. If you do not know the name of your insurer or your insurance representative, contact Insurance Bureau of Canada's Consumer Information Centre at **1-844-227-5422**.

Step 6: Maintaining and updating your emergency plan

Once you have emergency plans in place for yourself and for your building, maintain the momentum by staying in contact with your neighbours. If you live in a building or complex that has a residents' association or strata, use their meeting times to talk about emergency preparedness. If possible, ask to be on the agenda at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) or organize a social event after the AGM to get to know your neighbours better.

Identify someone who will be responsible for organizing a get-together each year to review and update your building's emergency plan. You could change hosts each year if you like.

In addition, you should also review your insurance and refresh your emergency supplies at least once a year. Over time, your insurance needs may change and canned food does expire. Identify a consistent date to stay on top of things.

Additional Resources

- PreparedBC: [PreparedBC.ca](https://www.preparedbc.ca)
- EmergencyInfoBC: [EmergencyInfoBC.ca](https://www.emergencyinfobc.ca)
- Insurance Bureau of Canada: [ibc.ca](https://www.ibc.ca)
- Condominium Home Owners Association of BC: [choa.bc.ca](https://www.choa.bc.ca)
- BC Housing: [bchousing.org](https://www.bchousing.org)

This guide was created in cooperation with:

