

Being Prepared for the Unexpected

We have learned from studies after hurricanes, floods, blizzards, tornadoes, fires, earthquakes and accidents that *kehillot* need to be prepared for the unexpected. There are many steps to take and plans to make which can aid a congregation, its members and surrounding community to fare better in case of a disaster. Each community is different, so the steps that should be taken will vary.

Your *kehilla* has, most likely, already taken many steps to protect property, such as locating computers off the floor, assuring that roof drains and gutters are kept clean, checking fire doors and fire drills and so forth. But have you taken the steps to be sure your synagogue can keep track of and help members? At first glance such preparations might seem unneeded; but experience has shown these steps to be valuable.

- Create membership lists with land line, cell phone numbers and e-mail addresses. The list should include who is related to whom, who has family members in town, who has family out of town and contact names and numbers. The list should be updated annually (at the beginning of hurricane/fire season, for instance). Keep at least two paper copies as well as computer back-up off site.
- Create a membership map, noting who lives where. This map will allow the *kehilla* to see who lives in an affected area.
- Create a contact plan. Determine who has responsibility to check in on members who do not have family in the community. Know who has special medical or other needs that would require help more quickly than the norm.
- Plan what services are primary to the *kehilla*'s mission. How will those be fulfilled if the building is damaged or cannot be reached? In addition to worship services, consider the need for spiritual counseling and support. How will those be managed?
- Plan for scenarios when professional leadership is not able to help (out of town, not able to get to area where help is needed). Establish who are the people next in line to take charge.
- Find a buddy congregation well away from your area where you can turn for help with coordinating efforts. Copies of calling lists and the contact plan should be stored there together with a commitment to help as needed. Are you able to be a buddy congregation or do you need one? Your KRM can help you find a match.
- Sign up for emergency notifications for your area at www.emergencyemail.org. Consider setting up an emergency notification system for your *kehilla* (you can find various types with a web search of "emergency notification systems.")
- Visit the [Houses of Worship](#) section of Secure Community Network and the [Security & Emergency Preparedness](#) section of the Jewish Community Relations Council for resources

In case of emergency, be in touch with your KRM as we can be a conduit to assistance and want to be sure that everyone is safe.