

Parents Don't Take Necessary Preparedness Measures, Report Says

BY: [Jim McKay](#) | September 4, 2014

Although 74 percent of parents with a kid in school or child care believe the federal government is not adequately prepared to protect their children from a disaster, most of those parents haven't spent much time on preparedness themselves, according to Save the Children's 2014 disaster report card, [What are You Waiting For?](#)

Save the Children polled 1,012 parents of children under 18 and found that the parents spent about five hours, on average, organizing back-to-school supplies over the summer but spent an hour or less over the past year on emergency planning. And 49 percent said they don't feel very prepared to protect their children from a disaster, although 66 percent said they were somewhat concerned about the risk their kids face while at school.

Despite their concerns, 63 percent said they weren't very familiar with the emergency plans at their child's school or day care, and 67 percent didn't know if emergency drills were held frequently or at all. Forty-two percent wouldn't know where to find their kid if the school or day care was evacuated.

"Parents are certainly anxious and yet they aren't doing enough to prepare," said Rich Bland, senior director of policy and advocacy for Save the Children. "That parents are spending about five times as much time preparing for school and actually purchasing back-to-school supplies than they are preparing for an emergency was pretty alarming to me."

Bland said there's a mistaken assumption by many parents that protections are in place in their state, that the state should take care of them, and on the state's part there's an assumption that parents should ensure that their child care provider or school should take care of it. "So which is it?"

The poll found that 40 percent of parents don't have an emergency plan because:

- 56 percent never thought of it;
- 29 percent procrastinated or forgot; and
- 15 percent didn't know how.

The poll indicated that parents don't have the basic supplies that might be needed during a disaster, such as the recommended five-day supply of food and water. In fact, 35 percent don't have two day's supply. Further:

- 59 percent of parents who have an emergency plan still don't know where to seek shelter locally;
- 55 percent who have a plan don't include a comfort item for their kids;
- 53 percent don't have an agreed-upon out-of-town contact; and
- 31 percent don't have a family meeting place.

More than half (54 percent) of American children have been affected by a disaster, including hurricanes (25 percent), tornadoes (20 percent), earthquakes (14 percent), building fires (9 percent) and school shootings (6 percent).

Save the Children was appointed chair of the National Commission on Children and Disasters after Hurricane Katrina and came up with four standards for states. Those call for states to plan for: evacuating children in child care; reuniting families after a disaster; children with disabilities and those with access and functional needs; and multi-hazard plans for all K-12 schools.

Thus far, [29 states](#) meet the standards and 21 states and the District of Columbia have not. "Here we are nearly 10 years later and 21 states are failing to require minimum standards of schools and child care, which is really inexcusable from our standpoint," Bland said.

One of the issues that has the attention of emergency managers as well is [family reunification](#). After Katrina it took six months to reunite all the families. "In talking to emergency managers, the issue that always perks their ears is reunification," Bland said. "It's perhaps not as bad as Katrina but it is certainly an issue that emergency management acknowledges too where we can do better in preparing."

The poll didn't ask parents if they were asked for contact information but the Save the Children standard is that states should create a "floor," a bare minimum of emergency plans required for regulated child care and that includes reunification, which is done by providing contact information.

Bland said the good news is that states that recently faced disasters — Colorado floods, Oklahoma tornadoes, Illinois tornadoes — have improved their standards. "Unfortunately, in many cases we find it takes a disaster for a state to do the right thing," Bland said. "What we're hoping to do now is get more states to do it ahead of time. Do you really want to wait for the worst to happen to find where the gaps are?"

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