

PROTECTING YOUR FAMILY

Staying Connected During Emergencies

(NAPSA)—Putting a plan in place can help families stay connected with loved ones nearby and overseas, should an emergency strike.

Every year, people are separated from their relatives in an emergency, such as an earthquake, typhoon or armed conflict. Telephone, Internet and postal services are often disrupted, leaving loved ones miles or oceans apart with no way to communicate.

“The chaos and confusion that accompany these crises can separate families when they need each other most,” said Kathleen Salanik, manager of family tracing with the American Red Cross.

Similarly, when people immigrate or seek refugee protection in the U.S., an ongoing conflict in their homeland often prevents them from staying in touch with those left behind. People forced to suddenly leave their country can struggle for months or years to reconnect.

Experts offer tips to help you reconnect if separation occurs:

- Call during off-peak hours or send text messages, which can often work even if telephone lines are down.
- Check social networking profiles, such as Facebook or Twitter.
- Contact employers, schools or religious centers where loved ones might go.
- Use a free Internet-based tool, such as Safe and Well at www.redcross.org, to send or search for messages from loved ones within the U.S.
- Reach out to the U.S. State Department (1-888-407-4747) to inquire about loved ones with U.S. citizenship who are traveling or residing in another country.



Planning ahead could help families avoid prolonged separation during emergencies.

Additionally, the Red Cross offers a free service to help re-establish communication between immediate relatives separated internationally by a war or disaster, and last year alone helped reconnect more than 860 families.

Local caseworkers work with families to find loved ones and send messages until normal communications can be restored. In places like refugee camps, such a message is often the only method of communication available, but the words “I am alive” may be all that is needed to ease the minds of distraught relatives half a world away.

In addition, to avoid stress and prolonged separation during an emergency, Salanik says to prepare a family communications plan in advance. Start by identifying a meeting place, carrying a list of telephone numbers and designating an out-of-area contact.

For more information about preparing an emergency communications plan and finding loved ones, visit www.redcross.org or contact your local Red Cross chapter.