

COLUMN FOR JUNE 26, 2004.
HEADLINE; IN CASE OF EMERGENCY!!!

Q; I recently heard about a recommended list of things to do in a home for different emergencies. Do you have such a list for your readers?

A: It is a great idea for every homeowner to set up a list of “Things everyone in the household should know”. A list of emergency shut-offs, a where to go list and some basic tools is a good start. The mapping out of your home is also worth preparing. Some people recommend marking all of your shut-offs and this is OK, but if you do not know where to go looking, marking them is redundant. First lets cover the shut off list.

- A) If you live in the city, find your water meter and just before the meter there should be a metal valve or a gate style shut-off. In the majority of homes there are no shut-offs under the sinks or vanities and if you have a leak, this is where you head for. If you live in the country, you should identify the switch to turn your water pump off.
- B) Next is your electrical shut-off. If you have a short in your wiring or something starts to smoulder or smoke, this is where you head too. Generally the main disconnect is located in the front of a breaker panel. If you have an older fuse panel the most common one around was made by Amalgamated and the main is a push snap disconnect on the left or right side of the panel. You must give it a firm push. A few homes have a separate disconnect that is usually beside the main circuit panel. This is often marked as main disconnect. If you are not sure or your home has a number of smaller panels as I see in older homes, contact your electrician and have him mark it for you.
- C) If your home is supplied by natural gas you should have a main meter outside the home and individual shut-offs at each appliance. These are required by code. The main disconnect outside usually has a grey lever that if turned lines up with a hole on the main gas line. This allows the gas company to lock off a line to a home if you don't pay your bill! This is usually a quarter of a turn and sometimes will require a wrench to close this. Each appliance, your furnace, hot water heater if its gas, your fireplace and your kitchen stove if its gas all have small shut-offs. Quite often these are red and if turned horizontal to the main line will shut the individual appliance supply off. One note here, if your carbon monoxide detector has gone off, get out of the house. Call the gas company and the fire department immediately. Let them deal with the shut-offs and any issues with your gas that has caused your detector to go off.
- D) A 120V line from your electrical panel supplies your furnace and air conditioner. In a newer home this looks like a light switch and is generally positioned near the bottom of your stairs to the basement. Look up on the floor joists for this one. Older homes can have a switch just about anywhere and sometimes I see these wired directly to the electrical panel. If you have an air conditioner it should have an exterior shut-off. These are usually a small grey box attached to the wall behind your compressor. If you flip the cover up and swing it out it will reveal a breaker type switch that you can turn off.
- E) Your hot water heater should have a knob style or a gate valve installed on the supply line going to the tank. This should be on the cold side of the tank. Remember to turn the tank off when you do this. I have seen more than one electric unit burned out because the homeowner turned the water off in an emergency and then turned the tank back on and forgot to turn the water back on at the same time.
- F) One last suggestion; make sure everyone knows how to release the automatic door opener in your garage. Recently I asked ten clients while we were doing a home inspection if they knew how to do this and only one did! It is usually a rope with a small knob on the end of it that is attached to the track mechanism. It will take a stiff pull on some models. In an emergency if you need your car this could be very important.

The last recommendation that I have is prepare an escape plan, put a rechargeable flashlight in the hallway of every level of your home. Buy the emergency plug-in lights that come on if the power goes out. I am always amazed how many homes I see that lack fire extinguishers. I recommend a 2 1/2lb ABC unit in the kitchen and the basement at a minimum. Prepare a list of emergency numbers and attach them to electrical panel and the side of your furnace, put one by each exit door too.

Now the answer to last weeks "Trivia about Homes" question. What is an Air Well? The answer is C) and enclosed space within a building, open at the roof for ventilation. Now this week's question. What is "Stretching Bond?" Is it A) A manner in which bricks are laid to have each joint positioned over the centre of the brick below B) A type of adhesive used for carpet installations C) A method of joining different types of plumbing drains D) A type of roofing material used around flashings. The answer in next week's column!

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