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NEWS RELEASE

Sheltering in Place in an Emergency

In today's world many kinds of emergencies could affect the health and safety of you and your family. If you are away from home or separated from your family when an emergency occurs you need be prepared to "shelter in place." That means that when an emergency strikes you are prepared to remain wherever you are - - workplace, school, home, vehicle or outdoors - - for a few hours to several days in order to stay safe.

Knowing how to "shelter in place" may be lifesaving in response to a toxic explosion, chemical spill, release of a "dirty bomb," electrical blackout or snowstorm or other weather emergency.

Sue Smith Deputy Director of the Otsego County Department of Health said that in a "shelter in place" emergency people may not have access to food, water or medications that would be available to them at home. Family members may not be able to reunite at a designated meeting place because they may all be stranded at different locations and unable to communicate with each other. Parents or guardians may not be able to reach schools to pick up their children.

Such situations can be unsettling, but being prepared to handle sheltering in place will help you and your family remain safe and healthy. Authorities will let you know if and when you should shelter in place. If you hear an emergency siren in your community, listen to the local radio or television station for further information. You will be told what to do. If you are told to shelter in place, act quickly and follow instructions from local authorities.

The Otsego County Department of Health offers these suggestions:

- Bring children and pets indoors immediately. If your children are at school, do not try to bring them home unless told to. The school will shelter them.
- Close and lock all outside doors and windows. Locking may provide a tighter seal.
- If you are told there is danger of explosion, close all window shades, blinds and curtains.
- Turn off the heating, ventilation, or air conditioning system. Turn off all fans, including bathroom fans operated by a light switch.
- Close the fireplace or woodstove damper. Become familiar with proper operation of flues or dampers ahead of time.
- Take everyone, including pets, into an interior room with no or few windows and shut the doors.
- Prepare a place for pets to relieve themselves. They should not go outside during a chemical or radiation emergency. They would be in danger and could track contaminants into your shelter. Have plenty of plastic bags and newspapers, containers and cleaning supplies to help deal with pet waste.
- If you are instructed to seal the room, use duct tape and plastic sheeting, such as heavy duty plastic garbage bags, to seal all cracks around the door into the room. Tape plastic over windows. Tape over any vents and seal electrical outlets and other openings as much as possible to reduce the flow of air into the room.

- Keep listening to your radio or television until you are told all is safe or you are told to evacuate. Do not evacuate unless instructed.
- When you are told that the emergency is over, open windows and doors, turn on ventilation systems, and go outside until the building's air has been exchanged with new clean outdoor air.
- Follow any special instructions you may receive from emergency authorities to avoid chemical or radiological contaminants outdoors.

If you are in a vehicle and very close to home, your workplace or a public building, go there immediately and go inside. Follow the "shelter in place" recommendations for that location. If you are in a vehicle and unable to get indoors quickly and safely, pull over to the side of the road, turn off the engine, and close windows, heating, ventilating, and air conditioning vents. Listen to the radio periodically for updated advice and instructions.

In any emergency, you should have the following emergency supplies on hand:

- Flashlight and extra batteries and/or wind-up flashlight
- Portable, battery-operated radio or television and extra batteries or wind-up models
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Water for drinking and household use (at least one gallon per person per day for three days)
- Ready-to-eat canned foods to last three days
- Manual can opener
- Peanut butter, crackers, granola bars and other high-energy foods
- Supply of prescription medication
- Disposable diapers, baby food, formula
- Supplies for seniors or family members with special needs
- Bleach (for disinfecting)
- Plastic bags and ties (for sanitation)
- Credit card and cash
- Personal identification
- An extra set of keys
- Important documents, such as insurance policies

Make sure all family members know what to do in an emergency, whether they are at home, school, work or outdoors. This includes knowing the phone number of an out-of-town friend who has agreed to serve as an emergency contact. It is sometimes easier to reach someone out of town in an emergency than to reach someone locally. The contact person can collect the information and inform others on where and how everyone is and help reassure and reunite families.

For more information on emergency preparation, call the Otsego County Department of Health at (607) 547-4230 or visit the New York State Department of Health web site at www.nyhealth.gov.

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