



First aid tech

Red Cross apps help you cope with emergencies

Heavy rains, thunderstorms, hail, tornadoes and flooding took a terrible toll on Texas and surrounding areas this week. Mother Nature likes to remind us every now and then that, despite our technological prowess, she still is in charge.

Springtime in the southwest is not the only time and place she unleashes her fury. Different seasons bring different challenges to different parts of the country. Late spring and early summer bring deadly twisters to the middle of the country, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great

Lakes, otherwise known as tornado alley. Springtime brings the threat of wildfires to the northeast and south. Summer brings dangerous thunderstorms to much of the country, while heat waves can strike in many parts with deadly consequences. Late summer and early fall bring hurricanes to the southeast. Fall is wildfire season in the west. Winter brings killer cold and paralyzing blizzards to northern states and higher elevations.

Not all disasters are seasonal, however. Earthquakes, flooding and structure fires can happen throughout the year in many places. Some disasters don't even come from nature. Civil unrest, large-scale industrial accidents and mass transit accidents can occur anytime, anywhere. And, of course, there are more exotic events that can ruin your day — like volcanoes, tsunamis and meteor strikes.

Help is here

While technology can't always prevent or predict disasters, it can help us prepare for and respond to them. Combine technology with the Red Cross — an organization with quite a bit of disaster experience — and you get a couple helpful emergency apps.

The first app, called **Emergency**, is available for free at the Apple App Store and Google Play Store. It's like a virtual Swiss Army knife, combining emergency alerts, useful information and communications capabilities all in one handy tool.

You can customize the app for the types of incidents common to your location. You don't need volcano alerts in Pennsylvania any more than you need blizzard warnings in Hawaii.

If you have loved ones in Hawaii, or anywhere else, howev-

er, you can set up alerts to notify you about emergencies in their locations. You also can customize the app so your loved ones can message you about how they're faring, or you can send them a warning of impending doom — or advice on what to do and where to go for safety.

If you find yourself in an emergency situation and don't know what to do, the app can tell you. It has a list of 16 types of calamities, and tapping on one gives you several categories of information. Each emergency has different categories telling you what to do in different situations. For instance, Flood has four categories: Right Before, During, After and Plan Ahead. Home Fire also has four: Prevention, During, Recovery and Plan Ahead.

Emergency also has a quiz section that tests your knowledge of different dangerous events. A Maps section displays the United States with pins in the locations for which you have chosen to receive alerts. It also displays any ongoing emergencies and the locations of Red Cross shelters set up to help victims.

First aid

The second app from the Red Cross is called **First Aid**, and it's also available for free at the

Apple App Store and Google Play Store. It's set up very much like Emergency, but it doesn't have as much useful information. The information it does have is good, but a lot of the first aid instruction is pretty superficial. The instructions for bleeding, broken bones and burns are good for minor incidents. For more severe cases, you're instructed to call 911, which is good advice but might not be timely enough in a serious incident.

There's a good section on preparing for emergencies that mirrors the Emergency app. There also are tests on various first-aid situations and a section that locates hospitals near you. Several other sections have useful information on emergency kits, pet first aid, taking Red Cross courses, giving blood, volunteering and more.

Both apps are well designed with intuitive navigation, a clear typographical hierarchy that organizes sections logically, and good graphics and photos. The Red Cross has similar apps for specific situations, but these two cover most of the basics and should be added to your emergency kit.

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