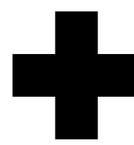
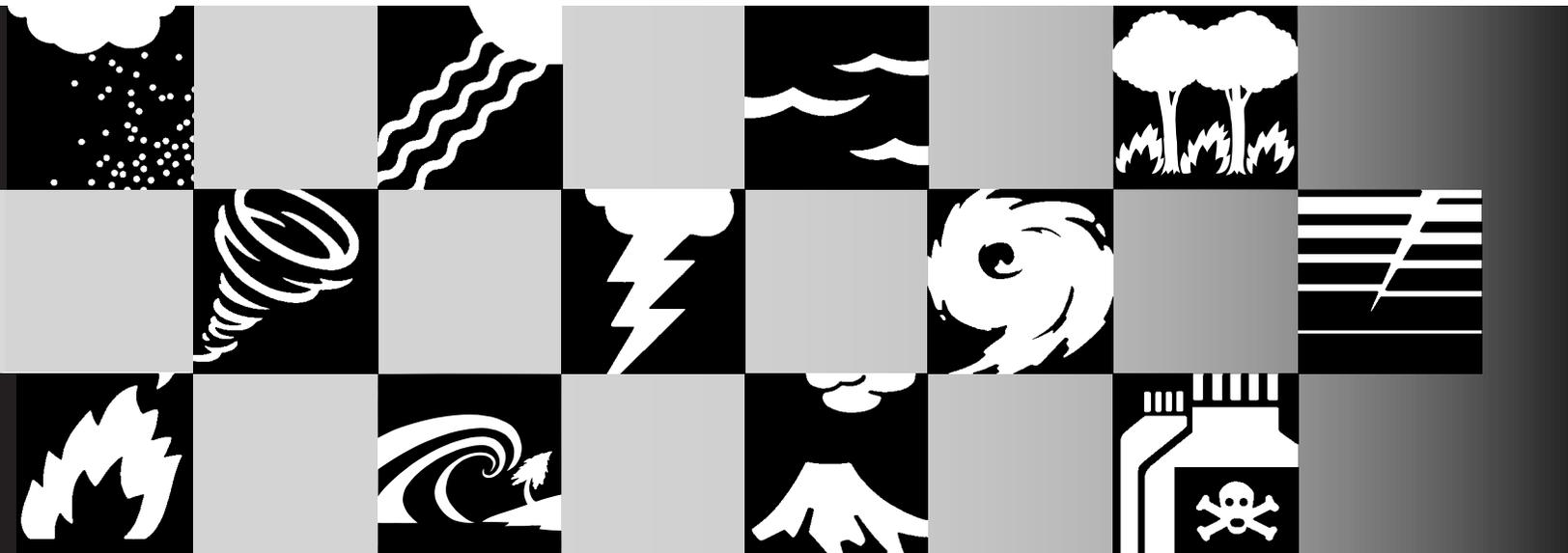


# Talking About Disaster

Guide  
for Standard  
Messages



**American  
Red Cross**

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# Acknowledgments



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This guide represents the hard work and collaboration of many professionals affiliated with the organizations that founded the National Disaster Education Coalition:

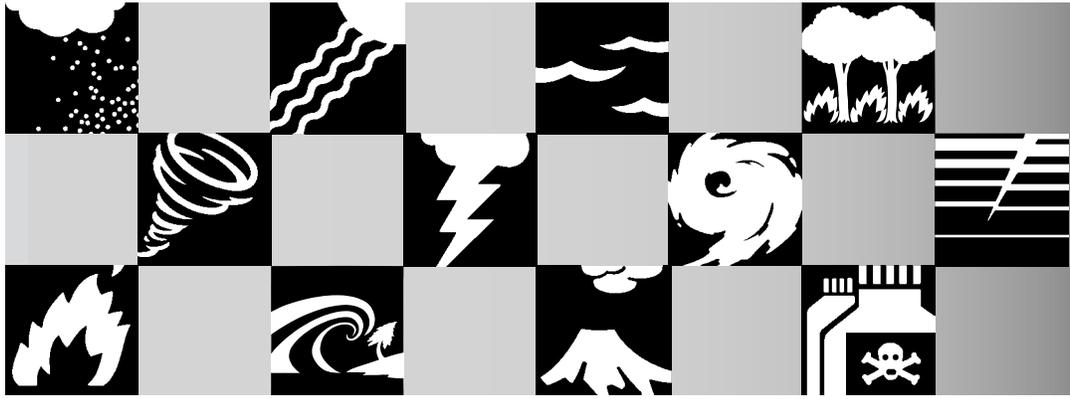
- **American Red Cross.**
- **Federal Emergency Management Agency.**
- **NOAA/National Weather Service.**
- **National Fire Protection Association.**
- **U.S. Geological Survey.**

Additional members of the National Disaster Education Coalition include—

- **Institute for Business and Home Safety.**
- **International Association of Emergency Managers.**
- **U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service.**

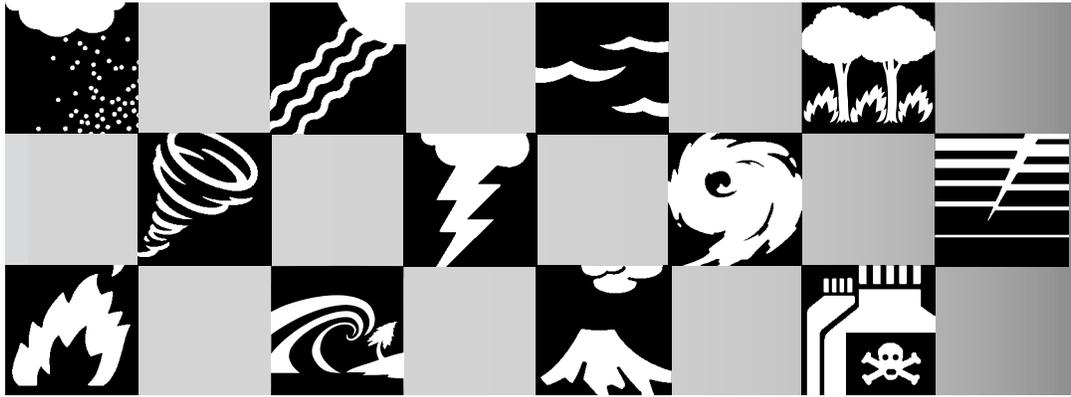
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# Introduction and Purpose

This guide has been developed to assist anyone providing disaster safety information to the public. The information is based on historical data for the United States and is appropriate for use in the United States. Some information may not be applicable in other countries. Users of this guide may include emergency managers, meteorologists, teachers, disaster and fire educators, public affairs/public relations personnel, mitigation specialists, media personnel, and/or any other person in the severe-weather, earthquake, disaster, or communications communities. The safety information is intended for dissemination to the general public. If you would like more in-depth or scientific information, please contact your local emergency management office, local National Weather Service office, **local American Red Cross chapter**, state geological survey office, or the National Fire Protection Association.

The National Disaster Education Coalition is composed of:

- **American Red Cross.**
- **Federal Emergency Management Agency.**
- **Institute for Business and Home Safety.**
- **International Association of Emergency Managers.**
- **National Fire Protection Association.**
- **National Weather Service.**
- **U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service.**
- **U.S. Geological Survey.**

We recognize that it is important for all agencies to deliver consistent disaster safety messages. As a result, the messages in this guide have been reviewed and approved by these national organizations, which work to

deliver disaster preparedness information to the public. Following each message are explanations, statistics, or reasons that reinforce the credibility of the message and that correct myths and misinformation.

Many affiliates of the American Red Cross, Federal Emergency Management Agency, National Fire Protection Association, National Weather Service, and U.S. Geological Survey have contributed to this guide, and the national organizations encourage the use by their affiliates or members of the messages in this guide.

The messages are intended to be used in educational presentations, displays and bulletin boards, print and electronic media, radio and television, and in any other medium in which disaster safety is communicated to the public. The information is in the public domain and is intended to be used and shared without copyright restrictions. If you wish to cite the source when you use this material, the following is suggested: From: Talking About Disaster: Guide for Standard Messages. Produced by the National Disaster Education Coalition, Washington, D.C., 1999.

## Using This Guide

This guide provides disaster safety messages. Each message describes a recommended action or behavior. When you wish to deliver disaster safety messages to an audience, the messages should be worded in a positive manner that helps those hearing or reading the message know how to act. For example, in fire education, instead of saying, “Do not panic,” you might say, “Remain calm; leave the building as safely and quickly as you can.” This allows those hearing or reading the message to focus on what they can and should do in case of fire. For this message, you might next offer submessages on what “safely” means (crawl low through smoke, feel doors before opening, etc.).

In addition to action messages, awareness messages can be used to introduce a topic. An awareness message raises the awareness level of audience members, helping them to realize that disasters can and do happen in their communities and that they can do something to prepare for and lessen the effects of a disaster. Good examples of awareness messages include testimonials from neighbors and local statistics because they bring the reality of disaster close to home. Everyone has seen photos of horrific disasters on the evening news, but people often do not perceive them as real or as local; in fact, for some people, seeing too much “disaster news” can actually heighten their denial. They may feel they do not have any control or they cannot do anything to protect themselves or their property.

To use this guide, you should first get to know the audience who will be receiving the messages. Remember to consider the audience members’ ages and socioeconomic, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. Be sensitive to specific audience groups. Audience members who are struggling to provide food for their families will not be interested in purchasing supplies; members who learned safety actions to take in their native country may be

wary of information that contradicts what they were previously told. It is also important to consider your area's specific hazards and disaster history. The East Coast will not prepare for volcanic eruptions, and the West Coast will not prepare for hurricanes.

Audiences vary and, therefore, it is difficult to define messages as specific to one type of audience. Only by evaluating your audience will you be able to determine which messages are most appropriate.

Messages relevant to children have been provided where appropriate. Young children will be more apt to learn a task they can do, such as stop, drop, and roll. Including children in family disaster preparedness planning will help them understand what disasters are and why it is important to prepare. They will also learn how being prepared can help protect them should a disaster occur.

People with disabilities and elderly people who have difficulty moving quickly should prepare like anyone else. There are some additional considerations for them in the **"Family Disaster Plan"** section.

If you will be making a presentation, developing a news release, or writing an article for a newspaper or bulletin, it is recommended that you determine the hazard or topic you wish to discuss, locate the section appropriate to that topic, and select three to seven relevant messages. Design your presentation or news release around your chosen messages, providing submessages and supporting and/or background information as necessary. If time or space is limited, evaluate your audience and the chosen topic to determine the most important messages. For disasters with little or no warning, what to do during the disaster is generally most important. For disasters with plenty of warning time, preparation may be most important. If you will be conducting multiple presentations or classes for the same group, you may choose to use several sections of this document with many messages, spread out over time.

Within each section you will find that specific messages are in bold-face. There may be one basic message with several submessages under it. Following each message there may be supporting information, including information about why the message is important. In addition, there may be an explanation of why some commonly provided messages may be inappropriate.

Whatever your message, using physical props to make your presentation interactive will provide the greatest learning experience.

If you would like further information, brochures, or materials about disaster safety, or information about developing community disaster education presentations, you may contact any of the National Disaster Education Coalition member agencies or their local counterparts. Please see the **"Resources"** section for contact information. Keep in mind that the local affiliates of these national agencies may have additional resources and information specific to your community.