Stay Informed, Be Vigilant, Prepare

In the aftermath of the recent explosions at the Boston Marathon and the reported Ricin-tainted mail to elected officials, you may be wondering what you can do to ensure the safety of you and your loved ones. Officials in the National Capital Region encourage residents to take three simple steps:

1. Stay Informed
2. Be Vigilant
3. Prepare

Stay Informed
There is **no** information of any specific threats to the National Capital Region at this time. Here are numerous ways to ensure timely receipt when there is emergency information disseminated:

- Visit [Capitalert.gov](http://Capitalert.gov) to register for emergency alerts from your local jurisdiction. If you live in one place and work in another, be sure to sign up for alerts from both localities. You’ll be able to get alerts delivered to your email account(s) and as text messages to your cellphone.
- Check your local jurisdiction’s website; sign up for email news alerts or RSS feeds.
- Add links to the mobile versions of websites to your smartphone – for example, your locality, [FEMA](https://www.fema.gov), the [American Red Cross](https://www.redcross.org), [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov) (CDC) and the [National Weather Service](https://www.weather.gov).
- Follow social media sites for your local government, such as Twitter and Facebook.
- Add apps to your smartphone. Many jurisdictions have their own apps, as well as the [American Red Cross](https://www.redcross.org) and [FEMA](https://www.fema.gov).
- Bookmark [www.CapitalRegionUpdates.gov](http://www.CapitalRegionUpdates.gov) for regional news and information, weather reports and links to valuable preparedness and response resources.

Be Vigilant
Always be aware of your surroundings – from your workplace to your neighborhood to a mall to public transportation. Remember, **“If you see something, say something.”**

Write down or save the hotline phone number to report suspicious activities. If you cannot easily locate someone in uniform, call one of the following numbers:

- Maryland: 1-800-492-TIPS (8477)
- Virginia: 1-877-4VA-TIPS (482-8477)

For imminent threats, call 9-1-1.

You can also submit information through online forms through the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](https://www.fbi.gov), [District of Columbia Police Department](https://www.mpdonline.org), [Maryland State Police](https://www.msp.state.md.us) or [Virginia’s Fusion Center](https://www.fusioncenter.virginia.gov).

Prepare
Mobile devices are an important way to stay informed and connected before, during and after an emergency. Here are some tips to prepare yourself and your mobile device; more information is [online](https):

- Communicate with friends and family via text, email, Twitter, Facebook and other social media. Texting takes less bandwidth than phone calls and is often the best way to get through to each other in an emergency.
- Make sure your mobile phone has an electric charger, inverter or solar charger.
- If you lose power, you can charge your cellphone in your car. Just be sure your car is in a well-ventilated place (remove it from the garage) and do not go to your car until any danger has passed. You can also listen to your car radio for important news alerts.
• If you do not have a cellphone, keep a prepaid phone card to use if needed during or after a disaster.
• Save important phone numbers to your phone.
• Prepare a family contact sheet. This should include at least one out-of-town contact that may be better able to reach family members in an emergency.

You should also prepare simple plans such as a Family Communications Plan and emergency contact cards for your children. Virginia residents can also create a family emergency plan or a business emergency plan at ReadyNoVa.org.

**Mail Handling Information**

For businesses and organizations in the region that operate internal mail facilities or clearinghouses, the U.S. Postal Service has guidance online for handling suspicious mail or packages. The Department of Homeland Security also has online an extensive guide, “Best Practices for Safe Mail Handling.” Among the guidance:
• Train workers to recognize and handle a suspicious piece of mail.
• Identify a single point of contact to open mail.
• Screen all incoming mail.
• Do not open mail in an unauthorized area.
• Establish procedures for isolating a suspicious package.
• Conduct training sessions for mail room, security and management personnel.
• Conduct unannounced tests for mail center personnel.
• Have appropriate protective wear available for mail handler’s use, such as gloves, masks and protective glasses.
• Know the phone number, location, time and response ability of the local HAZMAT team.

More information is online in the best practices guide and the USPS document.

**Stay Informed, Be Vigilant, Prepare**

This week’s events should remind us all that emergencies can and do occur at any time and in any location. The best thing to do to ensure your safety is to take these simple actions – stay informed, be vigilant and prepare – NOW!