

# Shelter-in-Place

## Fact Sheet

As a public safety precaution, a shelter-in-place notification is the most appropriate strategy if the situation is dissipating, the situation can be controlled before an evacuation would be completed, or an evacuation would expose people to more risk.

Seeking shelter during a storm is different. Shelter-in-place means selecting a small interior room, with no or few windows, and taking refuge there. You do not need to seal off your entire home or office building.

A shelter-in-place notification *generally* lasts no more than about 3 - 4 hours in duration, is used to keep you safer indoors rather than on the roads or outside, and separates you from a hazardous outdoor environment.

### Why Would You Need to Shelter-in-Place

Extreme weather events like high winds or tornadoes may be imminent, an active shooter may be in your neighbourhood, or hazardous materials may be released accidentally or intentionally into the environment from incidents such as explosions, commercial or industrial fires, train derailments or pipeline ruptures.

Should any such event occur, **be prepared** to keep yourself, your family and pets safe. **Stay informed** with updates from Alberta's Emergency Alert system and from emergency authorities releasing information on local television and radio stations and through the City of Edmonton's social media.

If you are notified to shelter-in-place, **follow the instructions** of local emergency authorities and in this Fact Sheet.



# Shelter-in-Place

## At Work

### **PREPARE** – *what to do before a shelter-in-place notification is given*

- Identify a 'safe room' - an interior room (preferably a larger one) with the fewest windows and doors.
  - If possible, choose a room above ground level. If there's a chemical threat, an above-ground 'safe room' is preferable because some chemicals are heavier than air, and may seep into basements - even if windows are closed.
  - The room(s) should have adequate space for everyone to be able to sit in. Avoid overcrowding by selecting several rooms if necessary.
  - Large storage closets, utility rooms, pantries, copy and conference rooms without exterior windows will work well. Avoid selecting a room with mechanical equipment like ventilation blowers or pipes because this equipment may not be able to be sealed from the outdoors.
  - A room connected to a bathroom with a water supply is a good choice.
  - It is ideal to have a hard-wired telephone in your 'safe room' so you have a phone available if you need to report a life-threatening condition. Cellular telephone equipment may be overwhelmed or damaged during an emergency, and cordless phones may become inoperable during a power failure.
- Create an emergency communication plan to reach each other if you're separated during a shelter-in-place notification.
- Ensure team members know how to access and turn off all heating, air conditioning, power and mechanical systems. Some systems automatically provide for exchange of inside air with outside air – these systems, in particular, may need to be turned off, sealed or disabled.
- Ensure office emergency kit is adequately supplied for this type of situation with emergency radio, 2 to 4 millimetre plastic sheeting (such as heavy duty garbage bags), duct tape, scissors, first aid kit, N95 masks, as well as some ready-to-eat non-perishable foods and bottled water for every person.
  - For efficiency, cut the plastic sheeting several inches wider than the items/openings you're covering in your 'safe room'. Label each sheet. Put back into emergency kit so they're the right size, already labelled and ready when you need them.

# Shelter-in-Place

## At Work

### RESPOND – *what to do when a shelter-in-place notification is given*

- Go inside – take your team members with you.
  - If there are customers, clients, couriers or any other visitors on your property or in the building, provide for their safety by asking them to stay – not leave. When authorities provide directions to shelter-in-place, they want everyone to take those steps now, where they are, and not drive or walk outdoors.
  - Do not attempt to leave to pick up other family members from home, work or any other places during a shelter-in-place order. They will need to shelter-in-place wherever they are.
- Close the business.
  - Turn on call-forwarding or alternative telephone answering systems or services.
  - If the business has voice mail or an automated attendant, change the recording to indicate that the business is closed and that staff and visitors are remaining in the building until authorities advise it is safe to leave.
- Close and lock all windows and exterior doors. Locking may provide a tighter seal.
  - Close all other interior doors.
  - If you are told there is danger of explosion, close the window shades, blinds, or curtains.
- Grab the office emergency kit.
- Go to the identified interior ‘safe room’ with your team members and guests.
  - Unless there is an imminent threat, ask employees, customers, clients and visitors to call their emergency contact to let them know where they are and that they are safe.
  - Write down the names of everyone in the room, and call your business’ designated emergency contact to report who is in the room with you, and their affiliation with your business (employee, visitor, client or customer.)
  - Then, unless there’s a life-threatening situation, stay off the phone lines so the equipment and networks are not overwhelmed. Leave them available for use by emergency responders.
- Stay calm. Stay informed.
  - Monitor City of Edmonton social media and local television or radio for updates until you are notified that all is safe.
  - Unless there is a life-threatening situation, do not leave the building unless told to do so by emergency authorities.
- Local officials may call for evacuation in specific areas at greatest risk in your community, but do not evacuate until you are notified to do so by emergency authorities. If asked, follow the instructions provided by emergency authorities.

# Shelter-in-Place

## At Work

### RESPOND – *continued*

- IF asked to seal your 'safe room' by emergency authorities, follow these instructions.
  - A well weather-stripped building slows the movement of air into the building and any hazardous material that does enter is weakened when it mixes with the indoor air. It is imperative that you stay indoors, especially if you see a cloud, vapour or smoke from the hazardous material outdoors or you can smell it indoors.
  - Sealing your 'safe room' means that all fresh air intakes are closed and remain closed so the air within the safe room becomes a reservoir of relatively uncontaminated air. This air will sustain you during an emergency.
  - Turn off:
    - All heating and air conditioning systems so they will not require inside air exchange with outside air.
    - All fans, and close all vents.
    - The main electrical power breaker and natural gas valve.
    - Any automatic systems that provide for exchange of inside air with outside air – these systems, in particular, may need to be turned off, sealed or disabled.
  - Further reduce the amount of possible contamination by taping shut any openings or leakage around doors, windows and vents.
    - Use duct tape and plastic sheeting (heavier than food wrap) or wet towels to seal all cracks around the doors and any vents (ie. floor, ceiling, etc.) into the room.
  - Breathe through wet towels to filter the air, or you may choose to use a masks from your office emergency kit, which should have bottled water, ready-to-eat non-perishable food, a flashlight and a radio.
- Avoid smoking as there is no air exchange and smoking will contaminate the air and increase exposure to carbon monoxide.
- Local officials may call for evacuation in specific areas at greatest risk in your community, but do not evacuate until you are notified to do so by emergency authorities. If asked, follow the instructions provided by emergency authorities.

# Shelter-in-Place

## At Work

### **RECOVER** – *what to do when notified that the emergency is over*

- Follow the instructions provided by emergency authorities to avoid further hazardous contaminants.
- Open all windows and doors to get cross ventilation through your facility.
- Get everyone outside. Stay outside until the building's air has been exchanged with the now clean outdoor air.
- If you had to seal your 'safe room', then:
  - Turn on all ventilation systems and open vents.
  - Turn main power back on.
  - Visit [atcogas.com](http://atcogas.com) to find out how to properly relight gas appliances after a break in natural gas service.
- Remember that your safety, mental and physical well-being are very important following an emergency.
  - Encourage your team members to talk about their experience and feelings.
  - If you'd like more family assistance then contact your health care provider.

**FIND OUT MORE** - Visit the City of Edmonton website for information on personal emergency preparedness and resiliency, emergency and evacuation kits, and much more at [edmonton.ca/EmergencyManagement](http://edmonton.ca/EmergencyManagement).