

The New Emergency Kit: Technology, Power, and Modern Necessities

When was the last time you updated your emergency kit? If it's been a few years, you might be surprised at how much has changed—not just in the tools available, but in what your household actually needs during an outage.

The classic 72-hour emergency kit remains foundational: water, non-perishable food, flashlight, batteries, first aid supplies, and a battery-powered radio. But Bedford residents now face different challenges than we did even a decade ago. We've experienced multiple power outages from nor'easters and severe storms over the years, and last July's fiber optic communications disruption reminded us how dependent we've become on our phones, internet, and connected devices.

What's Changed: The Modern Emergency Reality

Today's Bedford residents rely on smartphones for emergency alerts, communication with family members and friends, and access to critical information. Many of us work from home, at least part-time, and need to maintain connectivity even during outages. Some family members depend on CPAP machines, medication refrigeration, or other power-dependent medical equipment. Our home security systems, smart thermostats, and even garage door openers assume electricity will always be available.

The good news? Emergency preparedness technology has also advanced significantly.

Essential Emergency Kit Additions

Updated FEMA App (January 2025): If you haven't checked lately, FEMA released a completely updated mobile app in January with real-time alerts, the ability to monitor up to five locations (perfect for tracking your work location, kids' schools, friends and parents), and enhanced accessibility features. Download it now—it's free and works on both iPhone and Android. During an emergency is not the time to be searching the app store.

Portable Power Solutions: High-capacity battery banks (20,000+ mAh) can recharge your phone 4-6 times and cost \$30-60. For extended outages, consider portable power stations (300-500 watt-hour models run \$200-400) that can power phones, laptops, CPAP machines, and small medical devices for days. Some even include solar panel charging options—useful during multi-day outages when there's no way to plug in.

Reliable Communication: Hand-crank emergency radios remain the most dependable information source when power and cell service fail. Modern versions include NOAA weather radio, phone charging capability, and LED flashlights. Having something that works when nothing else does can be a life saver.

Medical Equipment Backup: If anyone in your household uses power-dependent medical equipment, talk with your doctor about backup power requirements. FEMA now recommends maintaining a 30-day medication supply (up from the previous 3-7 days) for anyone with chronic conditions. Keep a list of all medications, dosages, and prescribing physicians in your emergency kit.

Don't Forget the Basics

While we're adding modern technology, don't neglect traditional essentials:

- One gallon of water per person per day for at least three days
- Three-day supply of non-perishable food
- Manual can opener
- Flashlights, radios and extra batteries
- First aid kit with medications
- Specialized medical equipment, if necessary
- Spare eyeglasses
- Phone chargers
- Personal care items
- Copies of important documents in waterproof container
- Cash (ATMs and card readers won't work without power)
- Whistle for signaling help
- Dust masks and plastic sheeting

For details on a 72-hour kit, refer to [CERT's posting](#) and for detailed cold-weather additions like alternative heating options, winter clothing layers, and vehicle preparedness, refer to [CERT's winter emergency kit article](#) in The Bedford Citizen.

Storage and Maintenance Matters

Keep your emergency kit in an easily accessible location that everyone in your household knows about. Store it in a waterproof container, and set a calendar reminder to check it twice yearly. Replace expired food, water, and medications. Update emergency contact information. Charge those battery banks.

Take Action Today

Building a modern emergency kit doesn't have to happen overnight or break the bank. Start with downloading the FEMA app and getting a high-capacity phone charger. Next consider adding a portable power station if your budget allows, or at least a hand-crank radio. Then, work on medications and medical equipment backup.

The next major storm, communications outage, or power disruption will happen. The only question is whether you'll be ready with the tools that actually match how your household operates today.

For more emergency preparedness resources, visit [Ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov), <https://www.mass.gov/lists/emergency-preparedness-flyers-and-toolkits> and bedfordma.gov/773/Emergency-Preparedness

This article is brought to you by Bedford CERT (the Community Emergency Response Team), a volunteer group that supports the Town of Bedford Emergency Management and first responders during disasters and other emergency situations. CERT volunteers receive training in basic disaster response skills such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. To learn more about Bedford CERT, visit bedfordma.gov/185/CERT.