Prepare for Emergencies Now: Information for People with Disabilities

Your ability to recover from an emergency tomorrow may depend on the planning and preparation you do today. This guide provides tips which individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs, and the people who assist and support them, can take to prepare for emergencies before they happen.

1 Be Informed

It is important to know what types of emergencies are likely to affect your region. For more information about specific types of emergencies, visit www.ready.gov/be-informed.

Be prepared to adapt this information to your personal circumstances and make every effort to follow instructions received from authorities on the scene. Above all, stay calm, be patient and think before you act. With these simple preparations, you can be ready for the unexpected.

2 Make a Communications Plan

A disaster can interfere with your ability to communicate with your family, friends and coworkers. It is vital to have backup plans for staying in touch with your support network, and for your network to be aware of where you will shelter or evacuate.

Create a Personal Support Network

Everyone should make a list of family, friends and others who will be part of your plan. Include a relative or friend in another area who would not be affected by the same emergency, and who can help if needed. Make sure everyone knows how you plan to evacuate your home, school or workplace, and where you will go in case of a disaster. Make sure that someone in your personal support network has an extra key to your home and knows where you keep your emergency supplies. Teach them how to use any lifesaving equipment or medicine in case of an emergency. If you use a wheelchair, oxygen or other medical equipment, show friends how to use these devices so they can move you or help you evacuate. Practice your plan with your personal support network.

If you undergo routine treatments at a clinic or hospital, or if you receive regular services at home such as home health care, meals, oxygen, or door-to-door transportation, talk to your service provider about their emergency plans. Work with them to identify back-up service providers within your area and the areas you might evacuate to. If you use medical equipment in your home that requires electricity to operate, talk to your health care provider about a back-up plan for its use during a power outage.

This information was developed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in consultation with AARP, the American Red Cross and the National Organization on Disability and updated by the FEMA Office of Disability Integration and Coordination.
Create a Personal Support Network (con't)
Talk to your employer and co-workers about the assistance you might need in an emergency. This is particularly important if you need to be lifted or carried. Talk about any communication difficulties, physical limitations, and any access and functional needs. Also talk about medical services and any other services you must have available. If you are not allowed inside, plan in advance for shelter alternatives that will work for both you and your animals. Consider ways you might make these arrangements in advance.

Evacuation
There may be situations in which you decide to leave, or are ordered to leave. Plan how you will get away and anticipate where you will go. Choose alternative destinations in advance and plan for changes in the event of an emergency. Ask about evacuation plans at the places where you spend time including work, school, community organizations, and other places you frequent. If you typically rely on elevators, work with others to develop back-up plans for evacuation in case they are not working. When traveling, consider alerting hotel or motel workers if you will need help in a disaster situation. Keep your equipment with you in an evacuation, if at all possible. If you must leave your wheelchair, bring your cushion.

Consider Your Service Animal and Pets
Whether you decide to stay put or evacuate, you will need to make plans in advance for your service animal and pets. Keep in mind that what’s best for you is typically what’s best for your animals. However, if you go to a public shelter, it is important to remember that by law only service animals must be allowed inside. Plan in advance for shelter alternatives that will work for both you and your animals. For more information about service animal/ preparedness, visit http://www.ready.gov/animals.

Fire Safety
Plan two ways out of every room in case of fire. Check for items such as bookcases, hanging pictures, or overhead lights that could fall and block an escape path. For more fire safety tips, go to http://www.usfa.fema.gov/citizens/disability/.

Contact Your Local Emergency Information Management Office
Some local emergency management offices provide registries for people with disabilities. Some registries are online, allowing information; others may be used to offer assistance in emergencies. If you add your name and information to a registry, be sure you understand what information is shared and that a registry is NEVER a substitute for personal preparedness. Even if the registry may be linked to first responders, assistance may not be available for hours after a disaster. Contact your local emergency management agency to see if they maintain registries where you live, or visit www.ready.gov/ to find links to government offices in your area.

Build an Emergency Kit
The reality of a disaster situation is that you will likely not have access to everyday conveniences. To plan in advance, think through the details of your everyday life. You should include the following in your planning:

Basic Supplies
Think first about survival basics - food, water, first aid, and tools. Plan to make it on your own for at least three days. Consider two kits. In one kit put everything you will need to stay where you are and make it on your own for a week. The other kit should be lightweight, smaller version you can take with you if you have to leave your home. For more information on what should be in a basic kit, please refer to www.ready.gov/basic-disaster-supplies-kit.

The second step is to consider how an emergency might affect your individual needs. During emergencies, you may not have access to disaster assistance, a medical facility or even a drugstore. It is crucial that you and your family think about what kinds of resources you use on a daily basis, and what you might do if those resources are limited or not available.

Include Important Documents in Your Kit
Include copies of important documents in your kit, such as family records, medical records, wills, deeds, social security cards, bank account information, and tax records. Also be sure you have cash or traveler checks for people who don’t have a bank account. The second step is to consider how an emergency might affect your individual needs. During emergencies, you may not have access to disaster assistance, a medical facility or even a drugstore. It is crucial that you and your family think about what kinds of resources you use on a daily basis, and what you might do if those resources are limited or not available.

Finances
Signing up for direct deposit or the Direct Express card is a simple but important step that can help protect your family’s access to funds in case an emergency happens. If you or those close to you are still receiving Social Security or other federal benefits by check, please consider switching to one of these safer, quicker options:

* Arrange electronic payments for your paycheck and federal benefits.

* The Direct Express® prepaid debit card is designed as a safe and easy alternative to paper checks for people who don’t have a bank account. Sign up is easy, toll-free at (877) 212-9991 (phone), (866) 569-0447 (TTY) or sign up online at www.USDirectExpress.com.

Depending on your needs, additional items for your Go Kit might include:

* Copies of medical prescriptions, doctors’ orders, and the style and serial numbers of the assistive technology devices you use.
* At least a week’s supply of any medication or medical supplies you use regularly, or as much as you keep on hand.
* Medical alert tags or bracelets or written descriptions of your disability and support needs, in case you are unable to describe the situation in an emergency.
* A list of the local non-profit or community-based organizations that know you or assist people with access and functional needs similar to your own.
* Extra eyeglasses; backup supplies for any visual aids you use.
* Extra batteries for hearing aids; extra hearing aids if you have them (or if you have insurance coverage for them).
* Battery chargers for motorized wheelchairs, or other assistive technology devices.
* Supplies for your service animal. You can find more information at www.ready.gov/animals.
* A laminated personal communication board, if you might need assistance with being understood or understood by others.
* If you use a motorized wheelchair, have a light weight manual chair available for emergencies.
* Know the size and weight of your wheelchair, in case it has to be transported.
* If it is collapsible, in case it has to be transported.
* If you have allergies or chemical sensitivities, be sure to include items that you are able to use for personal hygiene and for cleanup.