

Disaster Preparedness for People with Disabilities

Step 2: Make a Plan

To plan in advance, think through the details of your everyday life. If there are people who assist you on a daily basis, list who they are and how you will contact them in an emergency. Create your own personal support network by identifying others who will help you in an emergency. Think about what modes of transportation you use and what alternative modes could serve as back-ups. If you require handicap accessible transportation be sure your alternatives are also accessible. If you have tools or aids specific to your disability, plan how you would cope without them. For example, if you use a communication device, mobility aid, or rely on a service animal, what will you do if these are not available? If you are dependent on life-sustaining equipment or treatment such as a dialysis machine, find out the location and availability of more than one facility.

For every aspect of your daily routine, plan an alternative procedure. Make a plan and write it down. Keep a copy of your plan in your emergency supply kits and a list of important information and contacts in your wallet. Share your plan with your family, friends, care providers and others in your personal support network.

Create a Personal Support Network:

Make a list of family, friends and others who will be part of your plan. Talk to them and ask them to be a part of your support network. Share each aspect of your emergency plan with everyone in your support network. 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 administer 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 if necessary or help you evacuate. Practice your plan with those who have agreed to be part of your personal support network.

Develop a Family Communications Plan:

Your family may not be together when disaster strikes so plan how you will contact one another and review what you will do in different situations. Consider a plan where each family member calls or e-mails the same friend or relative in the event of an emergency. It may be easier to make a long-distance phone call than to call across town, so an out-of-town contact, not in the impacted area, may be in a better position to communicate among separated family members.

Deciding to Stay or Go:

Depending on your circumstances and the nature of the emergency, the first important decision is whether you stay or go. You should understand and plan for both possibilities. Monitor television or radio news reports for information or official instructions as they become available. If you require additional travel time or need transportation assistance, make these arrangements in advance.

If you decide to stay, consider what you can do to safely shelter-in-place alone or with friends, family or neighbors. Also consider how a shelter designated for the public would meet your needs. There could be times when you will need to stay put and create a barrier between yourself and potentially contaminated air outside. This process is known as "sealing the room." Use available information to assess the situation. If you see large amounts of debris in the air, or if local authorities say the air is badly contaminated, you may want to take this kind of action.

Shelter-in-Place and Seal the Room by performing the following:

- Bring the family and pets inside.
- Lock doors, close windows, air vents and fireplace dampers.
- Turn off fans, air conditioning and forced air heating systems.
- Take the emergency supply kit unless the individual have reason to believe it has been contaminated, into the selected room.
- Go into an interior room with few windows, if possible.
- Seal all windows, doors, and air vents with plastic sheeting and duct tape.
- Consider measuring and cutting the sheeting in advance to save time.
- Be prepared to improvise and use what is on hand to seal gaps so that the person can create a barrier between themselves and any contamination.

Consider Your Service Animal or Pets:

Keep in mind that what's best for you is typically what's best for your animals. If you must evacuate, take your pets with you, if possible. However, if you are going to a public shelter, it is important to understand 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; consider loved ones or friends outside of your immediate area, pet-friendly shelters and veterinarians who would be willing to take in you and your pets in an emergency.

Evacuation:

There may be conditions in which you will decide to get away or there may be situations when you may be ordered to leave. Plan how you will get away and anticipate where you will go. Choose several destinations in different directions so you have options in 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, have a back-up plan in case they are not working.

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. Check hallways, stairwells, doorways, windows and other areas for hazards that may keep you from safely leaving a building during an emergency, Secure or remove furniture and objects that may block your path, if there are aspects of preparing your home or workplace that you are not able to do yourself, enlist the help of your personal support network.

Contact Your Local Emergency Information Management Office:

Some local emergency management offices maintain registers of people with disabilities so you can be located and assisted quickly in a disaster. Contact your local emergency management agency to see if these services exist where you live or visit www.ready.gov to find links to government offices in your area. In addition, wearing medical alert tags or bracelets that identify your disability can be a crucial aid in an emergency situation. When traveling, consider alerting hotel or motel workers if you will need help in a disaster situation.

Excerpted from:

Considerations for Individuals with Access and Functional Needs (<http://www.ready.gov/individuals-access-functional-needs>)

Functional Needs Populations & Emergency Preparedness Education Questions & Answers, Glenda Ford-Lee (<http://www.ok.gov/health/documents/Q%20A%20for%20Functional%20Needs%20Populations%20March17%20FIN%20AL%20ABC%20gfl.pdf>)