**SPECIAL NEEDS EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS**

**Disaster Safety for People with Disabilities**

Create an emergency plan that addresses your needs.

Being Prepared Means Planning Ahead

Emergencies can happen at a moment's notice. Mobility, hearing, learning, or seeing disabilities can create specific needs that individuals need to address to be able to respond to an emergency. We urge everyone to become “Red Cross Ready” for any urgent situation, which means assembling a survival kit, making an emergency plan, and being informed. In addition, people with disabilities, and their caregivers, may benefit from the tips below about managing communications, equipment, service animals, pets and home hazards.

Co-authored by the American Red Cross and Department of Homeland Security and FEMA.

Create a personal support network

A personal support network (sometimes called a self-help team) can help you prepare for a disaster. They can do this by helping you identify and get the resources you need to cope effectively. Network members can also assist you after a disaster happens. Learn how to create and implement your personal support network.

Complete a personal assessment

Think about the following questions and share your answers with your network. These answers should describe both your current capabilities and the assistance you may need before, during and after a disaster. Base your plan on your lowest anticipated level of functioning.

(A printable version of this assessment is included in our free brochure Preparing for Disaster for People with Disabilities and Other Special Needs.)

Daily living

* Personal Care: Do you regularly need assistance with personal care, such as bathing and grooming? Do you use adaptive equipment to help you get dressed?
* Water Service: What will you do if water service is cut off for several days or if you are unable to heat water?
* Personal Care Equipment: Do you use a shower chair, tub-transfer bench or other similar equipment?
* Adaptive Feeding Devices: Do you use special utensils that help you prepare or eat food independently?
* Electricity-Dependent Equipment: How will you continue to use equipment that runs on electricity, such as dialysis, electrical lifts, etc.? Do you have a safe back-up power supply and how long will it last?

Getting around

* Disaster Debris: How will you cope with the debris in your home or along your planned exit route following the disaster?
* Transportation: Do you need a specially equipped vehicle or accessible transportation?
* Errands: Do you need help to get groceries, medications and medical supplies? What if your caregiver cannot reach you because roads are blocked or the disaster has affected him or her as well?

Evacuating

Building Evacuation: Do you need help to leave your home or office? Can you reach and activate an alarm? Will you be able to evacuate independently without relying on auditory cues that may be absent if the electricity is off or alarms are sounding?

Building Exits: Are there other exits (stairs, windows or ramps) if the elevator is not working or cannot be used? Can you read emergency signs in print or Braille? Do emergency alarms have audible and visible features (marking escape routes and exits) that will work even if electrical service is disrupted?

Getting Help: How will you call for the help you will need to leave the building? Do you know the locations of text telephones and phones that have amplification? Will your hearing aids work if they get wet from emergency sprinklers? How will you communicate with emergency personnel if you don’t have an interpreter, your hearing aids aren’t working, or if you don’t have a word board or other augmentative communication device?

Mobility Aids/Ramp Access: What will you do if you cannot find your mobility aids? What will you do if your ramps are shaken loose or become separated from the building?

Service Animals/Pets: Will you be able to care for your animal during and after a disaster? Do you have another caregiver for your animal if you are unable to meet its needs? Do you have the appropriate licenses for your service animal so you will be permitted to keep it with you should you choose to use an emergency public shelter?

Gather information

Community Disaster Plans: Contact your local emergency management office or American Red Cross Chapter to learn about community response plans, evacuation plans and designated emergency shelters. Ask about the emergency plans and procedures that exist in places you and your family spend time (such as work, schools, senior care centers, and child care centers). If you do not own a vehicle or drive, find out in advance what your community’s plans are for evacuating those without private transportation.

Assistance Programs: Ask about assistance programs. Many communities ask people with a disability to register with the local fire or police department or emergency management office, so needed help can be provided quickly in an emergency. Let your personal care attendant know you have registered, and with whom. If you are electric-dependent, be sure to register with your local utility company.

Learn about other important ways to get informed before an emergency or disaster.

Make an emergency plan

Learn how to make an emergency plan for yourself and your household.

* Meet with Your Family/Personal Care Attendants/Building Manager: Review the information you gathered about community hazards and emergency plans.
* Escape Routes and Drills: If you or someone in your household uses a wheelchair, make exits from your home wheelchair accessible. Practice emergency evacuation drills at least two times a year, or any time you update your emergency plan or change the layout of your home’s furniture. Be sure to include family and/or your personal care attendant in the drills.
* Prepare for Different Hazards: Include in your plan how to prepare for each hazard that could impact your local community and how to protect yourself. For instance, most people shelter in a basement when there is a tornado warning, but most basements are not wheelchair-accessible. Determine in advance what your alternative shelter will be and how you will get there.