



Independent Living Center of the North Shore and Cape Ann, Inc.

Disaster Preparedness By People With Disabilities



Personal Disaster Preparation

How well you prepare and how much you practice before a disaster occurs will determine how successfully you deal with and recover from disasters. Your personal disaster preparation is a continuing process. It helps you and your network identify, get, develop, manage, and maintain the information and resources you will need to deal with a disaster when it happens.

Prepare yourself based on the capabilities and limitations you believe you will have after the disaster. Also keep in mind that your usual ways of support and assistance may not be available to you for some time during an evacuation and after the disaster has occurred.

Make a personal disaster plan. This will help you organize information you will need and activities you will do during and after a disaster. Key items in a personal disaster plan are described below. Keep copies of your disaster plan in your disaster supplies kit, car, wallet (behind driver's license or primary identification card), wheelchair pack or at work, etc. Also, share your disaster plan with your network.

Emergency Information List

Make an emergency information list that you and your network can use. This list will let others know whom to call if they find you unconscious, unable to speak, or if they need to help you evacuate quickly. Besides emergency out-of-town contacts, your list should include the names and numbers of everyone in your network.

Ask a relative or friend who lives more than 100 miles away from you to be your "contact person." Keep in mind that a caller is more likely to connect with a long-distance number outside the disaster area than with a local number within it. In fact, all family members in a disaster area should call the contact person and give their location and condition. Once this is done, have the contact person give messages to your other friends and relatives who live outside the disaster area. This will help reduce calling into and out of the affected area once the phones are working.

If you have a communication disability, make sure your emergency information list notes the best way to communicate with you. This may be by writing notes, pointing to letters, words, or pictures, or finding a quiet place.

Medical Information List

Complete a medical information list that you and your network can use. The list should have information about your medical providers. Also include the names of medications you take and their dosages, when you take a medication, the condition for which you take a medication, the name of the doctor who prescribed it, and the doctor's phone number. It is important to record any adaptive equipment you use, your allergies and sensitivities, and communication or cognitive difficulties you may have. Keep this list attached to your emergency information list (described above).



Attach copies of health insurance cards and related information to the medical information list. Keep at least a seven-day supply of essential medications with you at all times. Work with your doctor(s) to get extra supplies of medications and extra copies of prescriptions. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about what you should do if you do not have enough medicine after a disaster and cannot immediately get what you need. Be sure you ask about the shelf life of your medications and the temperatures at which they should be stored. Determine how often you should replace stored medication. This helps ensure that a medicine's effectiveness does not weaken because of long storage time.

Note: If you take medications (such as methadone, chemotherapy, or radiation therapy) administered to you by a clinic or hospital, ask your provider how you should prepare for a disruption caused by a disaster.

What You Can Do to Prepare for a Disaster



If you are in a wheelchair when the earthquake begins, lock your wheels.

- Identify safe places to go to during a disaster.

During an earthquake, get under a desk or table or cover your head and neck with a sturdy object.

- *Earthquake:* Identify a sturdy table or desk to get under in each room. This is important because while the earth is shaking, the movement of the ground will probably make it difficult or impossible for you to move any distance. If you cannot safely get under a desk or table, move near an inside wall of the building and cover your head and neck as best you can. Decide how you will get there when the earthquake begins. Lock your wheels if you are in a wheelchair. In bed, pull the sheets and





blankets over you and use your pillow to cover and protect your head and neck.

- *Tornado:* The lowest floor or below-ground area of your home or workplace is safest. If there is no basement or you cannot get there, choose a room without windows, such as a bathroom or closet. Identify where this safe place is and how you would get there.
 - *Hurricane or flood:* If local officials have not told you to leave the area, stay upstairs and in the middle of the building, away from windows. Avoid going to the lowest floor because hurricanes often cause flooding. If you are Blind or visually impaired, use a long cane in areas where debris may have fallen or furniture may have shifted. This is recommended even if you do not usually use a cane indoors.
 - For information about how to prepare for disasters that are specific to your area, contact your local Red Cross chapter.
- Keep your service animals with you in a safe place at home, or take them with you to a shelter.
 - Install at least one smoke detector on each level of your home, outside sleeping areas. If you are Deaf or have hearing loss, install a system that has flashing strobe lights to get your attention. If you have battery-operated detectors, replace batteries at least once a year, such as on your birthday, New Year's Day, etc. Test smoke detectors once a month by pushing the test button.
 - Find the location of main utility cutoff valves and switches in your home. Learn how and when to disconnect them during an emergency. Try to do this yourself (do not practice shutting off the gas). If you cannot practice alone, arrange for your network to help. Turnoff utilities only if local officials tell you to do so or if you believe there is an immediate threat to life. For example, if you smell gas, see or hear sparking wires, or see water gushing from broken pipes, you should turn off utilities immediately. If you turn gas off, only a professional should turn it back on. If you cannot use the proper tools to turn utilities off at the main valves or switches, turn off the valves under sinks and by the stove. Also turn off all electrical switches in every room. Be sure that the members of your network know the following information:
 - Where to find each utility shutoff valve.
 - How to turn off each utility.
 - Whether you have the proper tools and where they are located, or if your network members need to bring tools with them.



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- Identify as many exits as possible from each room and from the building you are in. Be sure to include the windows as exits.
- Make a floor plan of your home. You may want your network to assist you with it. Include your primary escape routes. On the floor plan, mark the rooms where you spend a lot of time. Also, mark where your disaster supplies kit is located. Give a copy of the floor plan to your network. This will help them find you and your supplies, if necessary.
- When traveling, know the types of disasters that threaten the area you will be visiting. Let the hotel or motel front desk know of your possible needs in case of an emergency. Describe the type of help you may need. Remember to let your network members know your travel plans: when you will leave and when you will return.
- Prepare an evacuation plan before a disaster happens.
 - If you have to leave your home or workplace, you may need someone's help to evacuate safely, especially down stairwells. If you need assistance during an emergency and your network is not available, find helpers and tell them about your condition. Give them instructions on what you need and how they can help you evacuate.
 - Practice using different ways out of a building, especially if you are above the first floor in a building with many stories. Remember, the elevator may not work or should not be used. Decide what type of equipment you may need for assistance during an evacuation. If you cannot use stairs, talk with your network about how you should be evacuated. They may want to take the Red Cross First Responder course or other training. This can teach them the proper and safe way to lift and carry you without injuring you or themselves.
 - If you need devices for an emergency escape, think about your physical capabilities before making a purchase. Store devices nearby, where you can get to them easily. This may mean having more than one emergency escape device available.
 - Advocate for yourself. Practice how to quickly explain to people the best way to guide or move you and your adaptive equipment, safely and rapidly.

Be ready to give brief, clear, and specific instructions and directions to rescue personnel, either orally or in writing. For example, say or write these instructions:

- "Please take my--



- Oxygen tank.
 - Wheelchair.
 - Gamma globulin from the freezer.
 - Insulin from the refrigerator.
 - Communication device from under the bed. "
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- "Please do not straighten my knees. They are fused in a bent position. "
 - "I have had a brain injury. Please write down all important instructions and information. "
 - "I am Blind/visually impaired. Please let me grasp your arm firmly. "
 - "I am Deaf. Please write things down for me. "
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- When needed, ask for an accommodation from disaster response personnel. For example, let a responder or relief worker know if you cannot wait in lines for long periods for items like water, food, and disaster relief assistance. Practice how to explain clearly and briefly why you need this assistance. You may also want to write the explanation down ahead of time.
 - Keep your automobile fuel tank more than half full at all times. Also, stock your vehicle with a small [disaster supplies kit](#). If you do not drive, talk with your network about how you will leave the area if the authorities advise an evacuation. In some communities, local government agencies offer transportation for persons needing assistance during an evacuation. Ask your local emergency management office if these services are available in your area for persons with your disability.
 - Become familiar with the emergency or disaster/evacuation plan for your office, school, or any other location where you spend a lot of time. If the current plan does not make arrangements for people with disabilities, make sure the management at these sites knows your needs. Be sure that you are included in the overall plan for safety and evacuation of the building.
 - Choose an alternate place to stay, such as with friends, family, or at a hotel or motel outside your area if you have been told to leave your home. You may have enough early warning time (as with a slow-rising flood or hurricane) to leave before the disaster occurs. This is especially



important if you live in a mobile home or trailer. Find out if there are predesignated shelters in your area and where they are.

- Have a care plan for your pet. Plan for the care of your pets if you have to evacuate your home. Pets, unlike service animals, will not be allowed into emergency shelters. So, it is best to decide now where you will take your pet if you must leave. Contact your local Red Cross chapter or Humane Society for more information.
- Have a care plan for your service animal. Service animals are allowed in hotels or motels and Red Cross shelters. However, these places cannot care for your animal. When you leave your home, remember to take a collar, harness, identification tags, records of vaccinations, medications, and food for your service animal with you.

Summary Checklist for Personal Disaster Preparation

There are many parts to a personal disaster plan. Fortunately, they do not have to be completed all at once. As you finish each part of your preparation, note the date in the space provided below. Review and update this plan regularly.

Date Completed

____ Make an emergency information list.

Include--

- Medical and emergency contact information.
- Emergency out-of-town contacts.
- Names and numbers of everyone in your network.
- Name and number of a relative or friend who lives more than 100 miles away from you.

If you have a communication disability, make sure your emergency information list notes the best way to communicate with you.

____ Fill out a medical information list.

Include information about--

- Medical providers.
- Medications you use.
- Adaptive equipment and/or body system support equipment you use.
- Allergies and sensitivities.
- Communication or cognitive difficulties.



___ Attach copies of health insurance cards and related information to your medical information list.

___ Keep at least a seven-day supply of essential medications with you at all times.

___ Have extra copies of prescriptions.

___ Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about what you should do if you do not have enough medicine after a disaster. Also, find out the shelf life of your medication and the storage temperature it needs.

Determine how often you should replace stored medication

___ Identify safe places to go to during an--

- Earthquake.
- Tornado.
- Hurricane.
- Flood.
- Fire.

___ Install at least one smoke detector on each level of your home, outside sleeping areas.

___ Find the location of utility cutoff valves and switches. Become familiar with how to operate them.

___ Identify as many exits as possible (but at least two) from each room and from the building you are in.

___ Make a floor plan of your home. You may want your network to help you do this. Include your primary escape routes.

___ Practice using different ways out of a building, especially if you are above the first floor in a building with many stories.

___ Decide what type of equipment you will need for assistance during an evacuation.

___ Be ready to give brief, clear, specific instructions and directions to rescue personnel.

___ If you do not drive, talk with your network about how you will leave the area if authorities advise an evacuation.

___ Ask your local emergency management office if transportation services are available to persons with your disability during an emergency evacuation. Find out how to arrange to get this service.

___ Become familiar with the emergency or disaster evacuation plan for your office, school, or any other location where you spend a lot of time.

___ Choose an alternate place to stay.

___ Have a care plan for your pet.

___ Have a care plan for your service animal.