

Preparing Emergencies for the Special Needs Population

A checklist for People with Mobility Problems

For the millions of Americans with mobility problems, emergencies such as fires and floods present a special challenge. Protecting yourself and your family when disaster strikes requires planning ahead. This checklist will help you get started. Discuss these ideas with your family, friends, or a personal care attendant, and prepare an emergency plan. Post the plan where everyone will see it.



Emergency Checklist

Ask Questions

Call your local emergency management office or Red Cross chapter.

- ✓ Ask what kind of disasters could occur in your area and how to prepare for each.
- ✓ Ask how you would be warned of an emergency.
- ✓ Ask about special assistance that may be available to you in an emergency. Many communities ask people with a disability to register, usually with the local fire department or emergency management office, so needed help can be provided quickly in an emergency.
- ✓ Ask your supervisor about emergency plans at your workplace.
- ✓ Ask your children's teachers and caregivers about emergency plans for schools and day-care centers.
- ✓ If you currently use a personal care attendant obtained from an agency, check to see if the agency has special provisions for emergencies (e.g., providing services at another location should an evacuation be ordered).

Create a Plan

- ✓ Meet with household members or your personal care attendant. Discuss the dangers of fire, severe weather, earthquakes, and other emergencies that might occur in your community.
- ✓ Determine what you will need to do for each type of emergency. For example, most people head for 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.
- ✓ Post emergency telephone numbers near telephones and teach your children how and when to call for help.
- ✓ Learn what to do in case of power outages and personal injuries. Know how to connect or start a back-up power supply for essential medical equipment.
- ✓ If you or someone in your household uses a wheelchair, make more than one exit from your home wheelchair-accessible in case the primary exit is blocked in a disaster.
- ✓ Teach those who may need to assist you in an emergency how to operate necessary equipment.
- ✓ Arrange for a relative or neighbor to check on you in an emergency.
- ✓ Learn how to turn off the water, gas, and electricity at main valves or switches.
- ✓ Plan and practice how to escape from your home in an emergency.
- ✓ Consider getting a medical alert system that will allow you to call for help if you are immobilized in an emergency.
- ✓ If you live in an apartment, ask the management to identify and mark accessible exits.
- ✓ Learn your community's evacuation routes.
- ✓ Listen to a battery-operated radio for emergency information.
- ✓ Pick one out-of-state and one local friend or relative for family member to call if separated by disaster.
- ✓ Pick two meeting places:
 - 1) A place near your home in case of fire.
 - 2) A place outside your neighborhood in case you cannot return home after a disaster.
- ✓ Keep family records in a watertight, fire-proof container.

Prepare a Disaster Supplies Kit

Assemble supplies you might need in an evacuation. Store them in an easy-to-carry container such as a backpack or duffel bag.

Include:

- ✓ A battery-powered radio, flashlight, and plenty of extra batteries for them.
- ✓ A first aid kit, prescription medicines, and an extra pair of glasses.
- ✓ A supply of water (one gallon per person per day). Store water in sealed, unbreakable containers. Identify the storage date and replace every six months.
- ✓ A supply of non-perishable food and a non-electric can opener, plus any special foods you require.
- ✓ If you have a baby, include extra diapers and other infant care items.
- ✓ Extra wheelchair batteries, oxygen, medication, catheters, food for guide or service dogs, or other special equipment you might need.
- ✓ A change of clothing, rain gear, and sturdy shoes.
- ✓ Blankets or sleeping bags.
- ✓ A list of family physicians and the relative or friend who should be notified if you are injured.
- ✓ A list of the style and serial numbers of medical devices such as pacemakers.
- ✓ An extra set of car keys.

Also . . .

- ✓ Store back-up equipment, such as a manual wheelchair, at a neighbor's home, school, or your workplace.

Home Hazard Hunt

In ill a disaster, anything that can move, fall, break, or cause a fire is a potential hazard.

- ✓ Repair defective electrical wiring. Smell for leaky gas connections. If you smell gas, turn the gas off and call a professional to repair it.
- ✓ Keep the shut-off switch for oxygen equipment near your bed or chair, so you can get to it quickly if there is a fire.
- ✓ Fasten shelves securely to the wall. Place large, heavy objects on lower shelves or the floor.
- ✓ Hang pictures and mirrors away from beds. Bolt large pictures or mirrors to the wall.
- ✓ Secure water heater by strapping it to a nearby wall.
- ✓ Repair cracks in ceilings or foundations. Brace overhead light fixtures.
- ✓ Store weed killers, pesticides, and flammable products away from heat sources.
- ✓ Have chimneys, flue pipes, vent connectors, and gas vents cleaned and repaired by a professional.

If You Need to Evacuate

- ✓ Listen to a battery-powered radio for location of emergency shelters. Know in advance the location of wheelchair accessible shelters. Follow instructions of local officials.
- ✓ Wear appropriate clothing and sturdy shoes.
- ✓ Take your Disaster Supplies Kit.
- ✓ Lock your house.
- ✓ Use the travel routes specified or special assistance provided by local officials.

If you are sure you have time...

- ✓ Shut off water and electricity if instructed to do so.
- ✓ Let others know when you left and where you are going.
- ✓ Make arrangements for pets. Animals other than service animals may not be allowed in public shelters.

Prepare a Car Kit

Include:

- ✓ Battery-powered radio, flashlight, extra batteries, and maps.
- ✓ Blanket and first aid kit.
- ✓ Shovel.
- ✓ Tire repair kit, booster cables, pump and flares.
- ✓ Fire extinguisher (5 lb., A-B-C type)
- ✓ Bottled water and non-perishable foods such as granola bars, raisins, and cookies.

Fire Safety

- ✓ Plan two escape routes out of each room. If you cannot use the stairways, make special arrangements for help in advance. Never use the elevators.
- ✓ Install smoke detectors. Clean and test smoke detectors once a month. Change batteries at least once a year.
- ✓ Consider installing home sprinklers.
- ✓ If there is a fire, do not try to fight the fire. Get out fast. Do not stop for pets or possessions. Call the fire department after you are outside. Never go back into a burning building.
- ✓ Feel the bottom of the door with the palm of your hand. If it is hot, find another way out.