

# Preparing for Disaster for People with Disabilities and other Special Needs



This flier contains excerpts from a FEMA/Red-Cross pamphlet found at:  
<https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/897>

For the millions of Americans who have physical, medical, sensory or cognitive disabilities, emergencies such as fires, floods and acts of terrorism present a real challenge. Protecting yourself and your family when disaster strikes requires planning ahead.

**Considerations for people with disabilities** Those with disabilities or other special needs often have unique needs that require more detailed planning in the event of a disaster. Consider the following actions as you prepare:

- Learn what to do in case of power outages and personal injuries. Know how to connect and start a back-up power supply for essential medical equipment.
- Consider getting a medical alert system that will allow you to call for help if you are immobilized in an emergency.
- If you use an electric wheelchair or scooter, have a manual wheelchair for backup.
- Teach those who may need to assist you in an emergency how to operate necessary equipment. Also, label equipment and attach laminated instructions for equipment use.
- Store back-up equipment (mobility, medical, etc.) at your neighbor's home, school, or your workplace.
- Arrange for more than one person from your personal support network to check on you in an emergency, so there is at least one back-up if the primary person you rely on cannot.
- If you are vision impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, plan ahead for someone to convey essential emergency information to you if you are unable to use the TV or radio.
- If you 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).
- If you live in an apartment, ask the management to identify and mark accessible exits and access to all areas designated for emergency shelter or safe rooms. Ask about plans for alerting and evacuating those with sensory disabilities.
- Have a cell phone with an extra battery. If you are unable to get out of a building, you can let someone know where you are and guide them to you. Keep the numbers you may need to call with you if the 9-1-1 emergency number is overloaded.

- Prepare your personal support network to assist you with anticipated reactions and emotions associated with disaster and traumatic events (i.e. confusion, thought processing and memory difficulties, agitation, fear, panic, and anxiety).

**Utilities** Know how and when to turn off water, gas and electricity at the main switches or valves and share this information with your family and caregivers. Keep any tools you will need near gas and water shut off valves. Turn off the utilities only if you suspect the lines are damaged, you suspect a leak, or if local officials instruct you to do so.

**Fire Extinguisher** Be sure everyone knows how to use your fire extinguishers (ABC type) and where they are kept.

**Smoke Alarms** Install smoke alarms on each level of your home, especially near the bedrooms. Individuals with sensory disabilities should consider installing smoke alarms that have strobe lights and vibrating pads.

**Insurance Coverage** Check if you have adequate insurance coverage. Homeowners insurance does not cover flood damage and may not provide full coverage for other hazards. Talk with your insurance agent and make sure you have adequate coverage to protect your family against financial loss.

**First Aid/CPR & AED** (Automated External Defibrillation) Take American Red Cross first aid and CPR/AED classes. Red Cross courses can accommodate people with disabilities. Discuss your needs when registering for the classes.

**Inventory Home Possessions** Make a record of your possessions to help you claim reimbursement in case of loss or damage. Store this information in a safe

**Reduce Home Hazards** In a disaster, ordinary items in the home can cause injury and damage. Take these steps to reduce your risk.

- 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.
- Place large, heavy objects on lower shelves, and hang pictures and mirrors away from beds.
- Use straps or other restraints to secure tall cabinets, bookshelves, large appliances (especially water heater, furnace and refrigerator), mirrors, shelves, large picture frames, and light fixtures to wall studs.
- Repair cracks in ceilings and foundations.
- Store weed killers, pesticides and flammable products away from heat sources.
- Place oily rags or waste in covered metal cans and dispose of them according to local regulations.
- Have a professional clean and repair chimneys, flue pipes, connectors, and gas vents.



**FEMA**



*Together, we can save a life*

For more information, please contact your local emergency management office or American Red Cross chapter. Preparedness materials listed below are online at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) and [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org). Other preparedness materials are available at these sites, as well as at [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).

Publications are also available by calling FEMA at 1-800-480-2520, or writing:

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