

Special Needs

People with special needs should include those considerations in their emergency and preparedness planning. It is important to remember that the usual methods of support and assistance may not be available for some time during an evacuation and after the disaster has occurred.

Make a personal disaster plan to help organize necessary information and activities during and after a disaster and share your disaster plan with your support network. 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. Other action steps to prepare for disaster are listed below:

- **Identify safe places to go.** 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.
- **Keep your service animals with you** in a safe place at home or take them with you to a shelter.
- **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. Turn off utilities only if local officials tell you to do so or if you believe there is an immediate threat to life.
- **Identify as many exits as possible** from each room and from your building. Be sure to include the windows as exits.
- **Make a floor plan of your home**, including primary escape routes. (You may want your network to assist you with it.) 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 to help them find you and your supplies, if necessary.
- **Prepare an evacuation plan beforehand.** 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.
 - **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 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, such as:
 - "Please take my. . .
 - Oxygen tank.

- Wheelchair.
 - Gamma globulin from the freezer.
 - Insulin from the refrigerator.
 - Communication device from under the bed."
- "I am blind/visually impaired. Please let me grasp your arm firmly."
- "I am deaf. Please write things down for me."
- **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.
- **Keep a small disaster supplies kit** in your automobile and maintain more than a half tank of fuel at all times. If you do not drive, talk with your network about how you will leave the area if the authorities advise an evacuation.
- **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.
- **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. Find out if there are predesignated shelters in your area and where they are.
- **Have a care plan for your pet(s)/service animals** if you have to evacuate your home. Pets will not be allowed into emergency shelters, so it is best to decide now where you will take your pet if you must leave. Service animals are allowed in hotels/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, vaccination records, medications and food for your service animal with you.

Information courtesy of the American Red Cross.

Online Resources

A number of excellent online resources are available to help people with disabilities and caregivers to prepare for emergency situations. All external site links will open in a new window.

- [National Organization on Disabilities](http://www.nod.org)
(http://www.nod.org)
 - [EPI Guide for Emergency Managers, Planners & Responders](http://www.nod.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&PageID=1034)
(http://www.nod.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&PageID=1034)
- [American Red Cross](http://www.redcross.org)
(http://www.redcross.org)
 - [Disaster Preparedness for People with Disabilities](http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/0,1082,0_603_,00.html)
(http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/0,1082,0_603_,00.html)
- [Preparing for Emergencies: A Checklist for People with Mobility Problems](http://www.fema.gov/pdf/rrr/mob-all.pdf) (FEMA)
(http://www.fema.gov/pdf/rrr/mob-all.pdf) [124kb PDF]
- [Prepare.org: Disaster Preparedness Information for People with Disabilities](http://www.prepare.org/disabilities/disabilities.htm)
(http://www.prepare.org/disabilities/disabilities.htm)
- [Citizen Corps Citizen Preparedness Publications](http://www.citizencorps.gov/ready/cc_pubs.shtm)
(http://www.citizencorps.gov/ready/cc_pubs.shtm)

- [Employers' Guide to Including Employees with Disabilities in Emergency Evacuation Plans](http://www.jan.wvu.edu/media/emergency.html)
(<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/media/emergency.html>)
- [U.S. Access Board Emergency Evacuation Procedures](http://www.access-board.gov/evacplan.htm)
(<http://www.access-board.gov/evacplan.htm>)
- [Emergency Preparedness on the Job for People with Disabilities](#)
from the National Center on Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities [114kb PDF]
- [Removing the Barriers: A Fire Safety Factsheet for People with Disabilities and their Caregivers](http://www.usfa.fema.gov/public/factsheets/fswy22.shtm)
(<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/public/factsheets/fswy22.shtm>)
- [Special Populations Fire-Safe Checklist: A Fire Safety Factsheet for People with Special Needs](http://www.usfa.fema.gov/public/factsheets/fswy23.shtm)
(<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/public/factsheets/fswy23.shtm>)