



Don't Let an Emergency Find You Unprepared

By [Elizabeth L. Gray, Esq.](#)

While snowstorms, fires and other disasters can plunge entire communities into chaos, the challenges for those with disabilities are often even more acute. But with careful planning, individuals with special needs and their families can reduce the disruption.

Get Informed

Begin by contacting your local emergency management office to understand what arrangements are in place to handle disasters, including warning systems, shelters and evacuation of those without their own transportation. Communities often ask individuals with disabilities to register with the local fire or police department in order to speed needed assistance to them.

Make a Plan

Support Network

Family members should determine who will call whom to check on their safety during an emergency. Establish a place for everyone to meet. If you live alone, identify individuals who will contact you to determine your safety and provide any needed help. If you have an agency-provided caregiver, learn their policy for handling emergencies.

Personal Assessment

What would happen if suddenly you were without water, heat, electricity or phone? What if your caregiver couldn't reach you? Think through how important routines would be interrupted and what additional assistance would be needed.

- Would you be able to access emergency information from the internet, radio or tv? Would someone need to convey that information to you?
- If instructing rescue personnel would be likely to present challenges, practice with prepared phrases or your word board.
- Do you have adaptive equipment that depends on electricity?
- Would you need assistance in the event that evacuation is necessary?
- Do you have critical medical needs such as regular dialysis?

- Do you have medications that you cannot be without?
- Do you have a service animal or pet whose care needs to be considered?

Consider how you would respond to different emergencies. Basements, often used to shelter from tornados, may not be wheelchair-accessible. In case of fire, evacuation will be necessary, so ensure that primary and secondary exits are accessible and that you can find them in the dark or if obscured by heavy smoke.

While public shelters are [required by law to admit service animals](#), other pets may not be allowed. Identify individuals and “pet-friendly” locations where you can take other loved animals during an emergency.

Be sure that all members of your support network are familiar with your plan, have necessary keys and can operate assistive devices.

Make a Kit

Stock emergency supplies, and organize an “evacuation kit” that you can grab at a moment’s notice. Items could include:

- first aid kit and prescription medications
- copies of key documents in a waterproof container
- battery-powered radio
- flashlight
- cell phone
- extra batteries for all devices
- portable generator to replace interrupted electrical service
- three days’ worth of nonperishable food and manual can opener
- one gallon of drinking water per person per day
- hand sanitizer
- toilet paper
- clothing and blankets or sleeping bags
- cash
- pet supplies

- local area map

When disaster hits

Before and after an emergency situation arises, closely monitor the radio or tv for the latest news concerning local conditions and shelters. Note which shelters are accessible to individuals with physical disabilities. You'll be glad that you've planned ahead. A little preparation can make all the difference when disaster pays a visit.

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