

AT & Emergency Preparedness: Individual Responsibilities

Natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina and acts of terrorism like 9/11 have shown that people with disabilities, who are self-sufficient under normal circumstances, may need to rely on the help of others in a disaster. Being ready for a disaster is part of maintaining independence and is an individual responsibility. Meeting individual needs such as replacing medications, providing assistive technology, restoring electricity for power dependent equipment, evacuation, and/or supplying daily living supports may not happen right away. To increase the chance of surviving a disaster, everyone should be prepared to sustain themselves for up to 72 hours following the event.

Here are some strategies adapted from materials published by the American Red Cross and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that can help individuals with disabilities to prepare for emergencies.

- 1) **Identify one person** who lives at least 100 miles away to serve as a contact point. This person needs to know and can explain: a) your needs to an unfamiliar party; b) how to operate necessary equipment or devices; c) time-table for needed medications and dosages; d) medical providers roles, names, and numbers; and e) health insurance specifics and related information.
- 2) **Make a list of the type and model numbers** of the assistive technology devices you require. Label the devices, and have a laminated instruction sheet available on how to use and care for each device.
- 3) **Keep at least a 7 day supply of essential medications** with you at all times; make copies of current prescriptions. Make sure to check and update regularly so your supply of medications and prescriptions have not expired.
- 4) **Prepare brief, clear, and specific written instructions** and directions to give to rescue personnel and have it laminated. For example: Please take my oxygen, wheelchair, and communication device from under the bed; or, Please don't straighten my knees, they have been surgically fused in a bent position.
- 5) **Identify use of a service animal**, and have a 3 to 7 day supply of food and water, leash or harness, collar, identification tags, and vaccination records ready to go.
- 6) **If your service or companion dog is chipped for identification if lost**, ensure that your information on file with the chip tracking organization has the contact information for the person identified in item #1. This will enable them to contact you in the event you and the animal are separated.
- 7) **Make sure you have transportation** for evacuation. Know the location and availability of more than one refuge or shelter if you are dependent on life-sustaining equipment or treatment.

8) **Obtain a first aid kit**, add to it the supplies needed that are disability specific, and keep it in a dry, convenient place.

Next Steps: Emergencies can happen at a moment's notice. Individuals with disabilities can decrease the impact of a disaster by taking steps to prepare before an event occurs.

For further information go to:

Disability Preparedness - federal resource for emergency planning issues related to people with disabilities
<http://www.disabilitypreparedness.gov/index.htm>

New Jersey Office of Emergency Management - state resource for emergency planning issues
<http://www.state.nj.us/njoem/preparedness.html>

American Red Cross - contact your local office - <http://www.redcross.org> or <http://www.prepare.org>

Federal Emergency Information - <http://www.ready.gov>

Progressive Center for Independent Living - <http://www.pcil.org>

Or contact:

The Richard West Assistive Technology Advocacy Center (ATAC) of DRNJ

210 South Broad Street, Third Floor, Trenton, NJ 08608

For voice assistance and information, please call 1-800-922-7233. TTY users may dial (609) 633-7106, or use the NJ Relay, 711 to reach the 800# above. Visit us on the web at

www.drnj.org

The 58 statewide Assistive Technology (AT) Programs form a national network of statewide assistive technology programs. Information contained in this brochure represents the accumulation of knowledge of this national network. This publication was made possible by Grant Number 90AG0050-01-00 from the Administration for Community Living. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Administration for Community Living.

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