



PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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Whether the situation dictates staying in place or evacuating to shelters when a disaster strikes, it is imperative to be prepared and know how you can help individuals with special needs and disabilities in your household or community. The following tips can be of assistance during an emergency:

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- ❖ Have a plan. Meet with family members or your personal care attendant to discuss the dangers and procedures to take in the event of a disaster;
- ❖ Know how to connect or start a backup power supply for essential medical equipment;
- ❖ If you use a wheelchair, make sure more than one exit is accessible;
- ❖ Teach others how to operate necessary medical equipment;
- ❖ Identify two or three people who will assist you. Arrange for a friend to check on you during an emergency;
- ❖ Consider getting a medical alert system, allowing you to call for help if immobilized;
- ❖ If you live in an apartment, ask the management to identify and mark accessible exits; and
- ❖ Store backup equipment, such as a manual wheelchair or backup battery, at a neighbor's home, school or workplace.

SENIORS

- ❖ Some elderly persons may respond more slowly to a crisis and may not fully understand the extent of the emergency. Be patient. Taking time to listen carefully or to explain again may take less time than dealing with a confused person who may be less willing to cooperate;
- ❖ Before moving an elderly person, assess their ability to see and hear;
- ❖ Persons with hearing loss may appear disoriented and confused. Determine if the person has a hearing aid. If they do, make sure it's available and bring new batteries that work;
- ❖ If possible, gather all medications before evacuating. Ask the person what medications they are taking and where their medications are stored. Make sure that you have at least a seven-day supply; and
- ❖ For families who have a family member with dementia, please let the emergency responders know to properly handle them in case of evacuation.

PEOPLE WITH SERVICE ANIMALS

(Reminder: A service animal is not a pet)

- ❖ Do not touch/pet, or give the animal food or treats without the permission of the owner;
- ❖ The dog is on duty when it is wearing its harness. In the event you are asked to take the dog while assisting the individual, hold the leash and not the harness;
- ❖ Plan to evacuate the animal with the owner. Do not separate them; and
- ❖ People with psychiatric and emotional disabilities may have a companion animal. These are just as important to them as a service animal is to a person with a physical disability. Please be understanding and treat the animal as a service animal.

PEOPLE WITH MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS

(Reminder: Always ask the person how you can help before attempting any assistance. Respect their independence to the extent possible)

- ❖ When carrying the person, avoid putting pressure on his or her arms, legs, or chest. This may result in spasms, pain, and may even interfere with their ability to breathe;
- ❖ Ask if they have limitations or problems that may affect their safety;
- ❖ Ask if you can help by offering to carry the extra crutch;



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(People with Mobility Impairments continued)

- ❖ Wheelchair users are trained in special techniques to transfer from one chair to another. Depending on their upper body strength, they may be able to do much of the work themselves;
- ❖ Before lifting a motorized wheelchair, turn off the power. Motorized wheelchairs may weigh up to 100 pounds unoccupied, and may be longer than manual wheelchairs. It requires two to four people to lift the motorized wheelchair and user; and
- ❖ Most people who use motorized wheelchairs have limited arm and hand motion. Ask if they have any special requirements for being transported down the stairs.

PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

- ❖ Hearing aids do not guarantee that the person can hear and understand speech. They increase volume, not necessarily clarity; and
- ❖ Written communication may be especially important if you are unable to understand the person's speech.

PEOPLE WHO ARE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

- ❖ State the nature of the emergency and offer them your arm. As you walk, advise them of any obstacles. Be sure to mention stairs, doorways, narrow passages, ramps, etc.;
- ❖ Offer assistance but let the person explain what help is needed; and
- ❖ When you have reached safety, orient the person to the location and ask if any further assistance is needed.

PEOPLE WITH MULTIPLE CHEMICAL SENSITIVITIES

- ❖ Inform the emergency responder/evacuating individual that your family member is chemically sensitive; and
- ❖ Whenever possible, take the person's own medical supplies and equipment with them, including oxygen mask and tubing, medications, food and water; bedding, clothing, and soap. He or she may be sensitive to these items if issued at a shelter or hospital.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRING POWER

- ❖ If you use a battery-operated wheelchair, life-support system, or other power-dependent equipment, call your power company. Many utility companies keep a list and map of the locations of power-dependent customers in case of an emergency. Ask them what alternatives are available in your area. Contact the Customer Service Department of your local utility company(ies) to learn if this service is available in your community;
- ❖ If you are blind or have a visual disability, store a talking or Braille clock or large-print timepiece with extra batteries; and
- ❖ If you are deaf or have a hearing loss, consider getting a small portable battery-operated television set. Emergency broadcasts may give information in American Sign Language (ASL) or open captioning.