

Evacuation Planning for Persons with Disabilities and Caregivers

The following information is intended to make planning for an evacuation less stressful for persons with disabilities by addressing some of their particular concerns. It is also intended to familiarize caregivers or members of a support group with some of the challenges facing their friends, family, and coworkers with disabilities. This guidance is not limited to people with physical or cognitive conditions specified in the Americans with Disabilities Act. It is meant to be helpful to people with even mild vision, hearing, or mobility impairments, to name just a few examples.



Think Ahead about Evacuation

People with disabilities face the same challenges as other members of the community about how to evacuate and where to go when an emergency threatens (for the basics, see “**Evacuation**”). But people with disabilities face additional challenges as well.

- People with disabilities who are self-sufficient under regular circumstances may have to rely on the help of others in an emergency situation.
- People with disabilities often need more time than others to make necessary preparations for an emergency.
- A service animal—such as an assistance dog—may be confused or disoriented in an evacuation.

The Americans with Disabilities Act defines a service animal as any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal individually trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability.

The basic guidance is the same for everyone: Listen to the advice of local officials. Then, if options are available, decide whether it is better to leave the area, stay with a friend or family member who does not live in the affected area, or go to a public shelter.

Decisions like this require planning and preparation. You are used to being in a certain environment. But an emergency such as severe weather or a terrorist event can change your relationship with your surroundings.

It is important that you anticipate your lowest level of functioning for your personal disaster plan. This means you should ask yourself what might be your needs on your worst day and how would you prepare for that, assuming a changed environment.

Being ready for a disaster is a part of maintaining your independence. You may need to ask for help to do things you usually do independently. Understandably, this may make you feel especially vulnerable. The best way to cope with disaster is to learn about the challenges you might face if you could not use your home, office, and personal belongings.

Take steps to understand and determine ways to reduce the impact of a disaster on you and your regular functioning. Start by considering the following actions:

1. Complete a personal assessment of your needs (see page 15 of “Disaster Preparedness for People with Disabilities”).
2. Create **personal support networks**.
3. Create a **personal disaster plan**: Collect information and take actions that will help you meet your needs during evacuation.
4. Create a **personal disaster supplies kit**: Gather essential items you will need, especially those specific to your disability.



For detailed information designed to help people who have physical, visual, auditory, or cognitive disabilities prepare for natural disasters and their consequences, see the American Red Cross publication, “**Disaster Preparedness for People with Disabilities.**”

Contact your local emergency management office and local fire department now. Many maintain registers of people with disabilities so they can be located and assisted quickly in an emergency. Be sure to keep your information up to date.

Now, learn more about—

Your Personal Support Networks | Your Evacuation Plan | Your Disaster Supplies Kit | Considerations for Caregivers

For more information, contact—

- The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
- Your **local American Red Cross chapter**
- Your **state and local health departments**
- Your **local emergency management agency**
- The **Humane Society of the United States**

This page was last updated on August 18, 2006.