

**TEN THINGS
PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS
SHOULD KNOW AND DO
TO BE SAFE IN A DISASTER**

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1. PLAN

Make plans for what you should do for each type of emergency.

Think about:

- Where in your house is safe if a **tornado** is coming?
- What should you do when there is a **flood** warning?
- How will you get out of your bedroom if you have a house **fire**?
- What supplies would you need if there were a three day **ice storm**?
- How will you find out about **bad weather** and **emergencies**?
- What **legal papers** do you need to take with you if you have to leave your home during an emergency?

Get to a safe place as soon as you can.

- Get to safety quickly and take what you need with you.
- If emergency officials announce that leaving home may be necessary, do it quickly. It's best to leave quickly and get to a safer place while you have choices. If you wait too long to leave, roads may be closed or the weather may be too dangerous to be travelling on the roads.
- Shelters are not an ideal place to go. However, if you have family members or good friends who can assist you and are going to a shelter with you, then a shelter would be okay. If you do go to a shelter, know that they must accept you AND your guide dog. Remember, though, that the Red Cross shelters are not designed for people with disabilities. They will probably not have anyone available to assist you in any way. However, staying at a shelter during some types of emergencies is much safer than staying at home.

Who will help you?

Think about whom you can really depend on. Think about how long it might take this person to get from their home or work to you during an emergency situation.

Always have at least five different people lined up to help since one person might be sick or out of town when you need them. Talk to each of these people and decide with them the best way of communicating during an emergency. Also, keep their phone numbers written down in a convenient place.

Think about questions such as:

- If my regular helpers are very sick, who will assist me?
- If I'm alone and there is a fire or explosion, what should I do?
- What can I do if my wheelchair, my guide dog, or my telephone is no longer functioning?

Write down plans for all these events.

Review your plans regularly and make changes if needed.

Many people with disabilities in New Orleans and Biloxi waited too long for a family member or care provider to come and rescue them after the hurricane. It is better for two people to come to help rather than no one. So make arrangements and talk to more than one person who can help you.

2. CASH

Have some extra cash available.

When a large disaster happens, no one can use credit cards or get money from the bank. A little cash can help you get to safety.

- If you just put aside five or ten dollars a month in a secret place, within a year you will have enough to help buy gas and eat a few meals out.

3. EXTRA MEDICINE

Keep some extra medication in case you can't get a prescription filled during an emergency.

With health insurance and Medicaid/Medicare rules, you can probably only save one or two pills from each prescription per month. After three or four months of saving pills, you would have enough for most emergencies.

REMEMBER:

- Don't keep pills longer than one year.
- Keep your emergency pills in their original bottles.

4. EMERGENCY ITEMS

Keep emergency items together in a convenient place.

A backpack is a good way to keep these items together. Also, carrying them on your back in an emergency leaves both hands free.

Emergency Items:

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Whistle (to make noise for help)
- First aid supplies (bandages, antibiotic cream, gauze pads, alcohol, etc). Learn how to carry out some basic first aid.
- Extra medicines and a list of all your medicines with their dosages
- Radio and Weather Radio that run on batteries as well as electricity
- Bottled water and food such as cereal bars, peanut butter, crackers, cans of fruit, a can opener, etc.

- Toiletries (such as deodorant, toothbrush, wipes etc.)
- Other things specifically important for your particular disability
 - A folding cane for mobility or just to identify you as a person with low vision
 - Items you need for reading such as magnifiers, a portable light source, talking book machine that uses batteries and electricity, extra glasses, etc.
 - Dog food and folding bowl for guide dog;
 - Headphones.)
- A supply of plastic baggies (for storing money, legal papers, etc. in case of water damage)
- Extra phone charger

Important Documents:

- Insurance Policies (life, health, dental, homeowners, etc.)
- Deeds
- Wills
- Powers of Attorney

- Birth Certificates
- Social Security Cards
- List of your credit cards and their numbers
- List of important phone numbers in a format you can read.

You can keep all of these documents in a small fireproof lock box at home. Keep them in one place so you can easily find the documents to take with you in case of emergency.

Pet Owners:

Keep all service animal and pet vaccinations up to date.
Most animal friendly shelters will require this.

5. WEATHER RADIO

Buy a weather radio that alerts you when there is dangerous weather or another type of emergency.

Be sure the weather radio you buy uses electricity and has a battery backup. Weather radios are available in most stores where radios are sold and start at a cost of about \$30.

For people with hearing problems:

Special weather radios are available that warn you with a flashing light and a written message. These weather radios cost approximately \$140. (To order the “Midland Alert Weather Radio with Strobe” call: TTY 1-800-281-3555)

6. YOUR COUNTY

Know what is going on in your county.

Make an appointment to meet with your County Emergency Manager to make sure he or she understands what people with your disability need. If there is an Emergency Committee in your county, make sure there is a person with your disability on it.

Know about the emergency plans in your county such as where people can get transportation to a safer place, how you will be alerted in case of a severe storm, etc. Your County Commissioners make the decision about evacuations.

Many people watch weather channels in other cities. Stay aware of what is happening in your own county. Use your weather radio.

Listen to **local** radio stations and stay tuned to the TV station nearest you.

Since people with disabilities need to get out early, it is very important that you know what is happening in your own community.

7. YOUR NEIGHBORS

Get to know your neighbors.

Even though you may live with family members, they may be away from home when an emergency occurs. In addition, paid care providers or drivers may not be able to help during a widespread emergency.

Get to know your neighbors if possible so that they understand your specific needs and could assist you if necessary. Become familiar with your neighbor's schedules so that you know when they are home and could assist you. Be sure you have the telephone numbers of the neighbors you know in a format you can read, and keep a copy of them with your emergency items. Also, be sure to learn how to get to a friendly neighbor's house or apartment on your own.

Of course this is not the only reason to get to know your neighbors. Think about ways that you can help your neighbors too. Give and take relationships are always the best kind.

8. SAFE PLACE

Choose a person and/or place you can go to in case of an emergency that requires evacuation. Plan for how you will get to this person.

If you can make friends with a person who has the same disability as you in a nearby city, you could go to their home if necessary.

Finding another person with a disability like yours means that they know the service providers you might need and perhaps have equipment or an environment that would benefit you. Make sure this person is far enough away to be in a safe place.

Staying with supportive friends or families is much better than staying in a hotel.

Make several plans for how you could get to a safe place outside your neighborhood. Keep in mind that public transportation may

not be able to run in your community during a widespread emergency.

Of course you need to make these arrangements way before the emergency happens.

Make sure you have a good map and can safely get to the safe home.

9. CONTACT PERSON

Select someone you know outside of the state where you live who you and your family can contact in case you get separated.

Make sure everyone in your family knows this person's name and phone number. Tell your friends and family that this is the person you will contact, and that they should also contact this person to know where you are and that you are safe.

By doing this you will also have a way of finding out how other friends and family members are doing who were also required to evacuate.

After hurricane Katrina, family members were separated and had no idea if their loved ones were safe.

10. DISABILITY GROUP

Become an active member in some disability group in your community.

Being part of a group of other people with disabilities helps you get to know others with the same concerns and interests that you have. You can feel more confident since you are working together with others on problems that affect you.

These advocacy groups can form committees to inform members about various important issues such as emergencies. Advocacy groups can work within a local community to make sure officials are doing everything possible to help you stay safe.

If there is no advocacy group in your community, contact the Disability Resource Group, and we can help you start a group.

For more information:

Ready.Georgia:

www.ready.ga.gov

Disability.Gov

www.disability.gov

Office of Disability Integration and Coordination (ODIC)

www.fema.gov/about

Disability Resource Group

www.disabilityresourcegroup.org