

Protecting Your Health, Safety and Independence in Emergencies!

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This is a companion piece and extended dive into Anita Cameron's post: [Emergency Preparedness - A Common Sense Measure for the Disability Community](#). This post offers more reasons to prepare, as well as checklists, forms, tools, and tips, you can use.

Why Prepare

Emergency preparedness is not the goal; it is a means to an end, protecting your life, Independence, health, safety, loved ones, family, pets and property.

Anita makes the point that "Emergency preparedness is everyone's concern and responsibility, but for those of us in the disability community, it is especially important because typically, we are forgotten or remembered only as an afterthought."

In the world of emergency management, advocates with disabilities are making progress. Recognition of the need for inclusive planning, services, processes, and training is growing: models are shifting.

- resistance is weakening,
- outdated dogma is disintegrating,
- acceptance and adoption is increasing,
- the dents are getting deeper,
- and the ripples are getting wider.

But these dents and ripples should not lull us into complacency. Progress is slow. People with disabilities continue to lose their health, independence and sometimes their lives because, over decades, information transfer and lessons are often not documented in policies and procedures, and are not practiced or consistently applied. We cannot predict every outcome or every emergency. But there is much we know we can anticipate and plan for. The lessons observed are clear, they must be applied.

It is too late to start planning when:

- the land is sliding,
- the water is rising,
- the wind is blowing,
- the brush is burning,
- the earth is shaking &
- the waves are crashing!

Avoid Avoidance

Eric Holdeman, past Director of Emergency Management, Seattle's King County describes avoidance as four stages of disaster DENIAL:

1. It won't happen here.
2. Even if it happens here, it won't happen to me.
3. Even if it happens to me, it won't be that bad.
4. Even if it's that bad, there's nothing I could have done about it anyway.

Prevent this "helpless syndrome creep." You do have some control and there is much you can do to dodge preparedness avoidance.

Survivor Skills

Many of us already live in a daily state of heightened preparedness. Because when it comes to living with disability planning is a routine survival skill. The challenge is adding emergency planning elements to our skill sets.

For us, barrier free, as well as, barrier-ridden places become much more hostile and difficult to deal with during and after an emergency. For example, those with physical disabilities may have reduced ability to get to accessible exits, as well as reduced access to personal items and emergency supplies. Those with vision, hearing loss, and speech disabilities often encounter many more communication barriers, especially when regular communication channels are down or overloaded. These barriers appear at a time when rapid communication may be crucial to survival and safety.

The first step is to let go of the magical thinking that first responders will be available to help you. That may be the case in small emergencies, like a house fire. But in larger events like a regional severe storm, flood or strong earthquake, or a catastrophic emergency like Hurricane Katrina, responder resources can be quickly overwhelmed. In large-scale disasters, the needs of survivors outweigh collective resources and capabilities of government at all levels. In other words, plan for "YOYO" (you're on your own) possibly for several days or longer.

Checklists, Forms, Tips and Tools

I'm a list maker so I like checklists and forms because they are a quick, simple, concrete, memory-assist way to compensate for my over-active, distracted, tangential and unorganized thinking. Checklists are easy to read and scan, and I don't have to waste time slowly reading long paragraphs in order to mine a few key points.

General preparedness information is important for everyone. But general information is not always equally applicable or adequate for people with disabilities. The checklists, forms, tips and tools below have information:

- developed in partnership (of, with and by) people who live with disabilities and others with access and functional needs;
- includes information that is useful and specific to people with hearing, vision, mobility, speech, and cognition (thinking, understanding, learning, remembering) disabilities;
- recognizes that not all people can afford to buy emergency supplies and equipment so the content focuses on no cost and low cost preparedness in addition to more costly preparedness actions;
- describes disability in accurate and respectful ways and uses neutral terms that avoid offensive words reflecting negative attitudes and stereotypes toward disability;
- uses resources that are clearly described and annotated with specific links to more resources.

[**Be Ready to Go: Evacuation Transportation Planning Tips for People with Access and Functional Needs**](#) (2010)

Are you ready to safely leave your home, neighborhood, school, or work during an emergency? You may have to evacuate with some notice, with little notice or without any notice. That is why it is important to create a personal evacuation plan. Also, see below: [Emergency Supplies Kits for People with Disabilities and Activity Limitations, 2010, Edition 2.0.](#)

[Emergency Health Information: Savvy Health Care Consumer Series](#) (2011)

This tool guides you through developing your emergency health information. You should keep copies of this information in your wallet (behind driver's license or official identification card), on your mobile devices, and in your emergency kits. It tells rescuers important information about you if they find you unconscious, or unable to provide information. It contains information about your medications, equipment, allergies, communication needs, preferred treatment and important emergency contact people including your health care providers. [Word](#), [PDF](#).

[Emergency Preparedness for Personal Assistant Services \(PAS\) Users, Edition 2.0, 2016](#)

These tips are for those who get support from personal assistants, attendants or caregivers. Planning elements include a checklist, and strategies for collecting supplies, developing support teams, using multiple communication methods, evacuating and sheltering, and finding more resources that provide "how to" details. [WORD](#)

[Emergency Supplies Kits for People with Disabilities and Activity Limitations, 2010, Edition 2.0, 2016](#)

This checklist suggests emergency kit contents including no cost supplies that you can tailor to your needs and abilities. Kits to consider for different places and situations: keep it with you, grab and go, home, bedside and car. Specific suggestions are made for hearing, speech, communication and vision issues as well as for wheelchair and scooter users, service animal owners and people with allergies, chemical sensitivities and breathing conditions. [WORD](#)

[Out-of-town emergency contacts listed in priority order \(first person reached calls others on this list\)](#) (2015)

Use this tool to let people know, using multiple communication methods, that you are safe or that you need help. This list should have phone and email contacts. In some emergencies, phones or cell phones may not be working.

[Tips for Emergency Use of Mobile Devices Edition 2, \(2015\)](#)

Cell phones, smart phones and other mobile wireless devices like tablets are a big part of our lives. We rarely leave home without them and we often store important information on them. In a small or large emergency they can be a communication lifeline. These tips give details regarding preparing your device to quickly get and give emergency information. It includes a checklist, how to list emergency contacts and collect essential documents, as well as how to use alerts, texts, apps, and bookmarks of important mobile sites. It also covers having "no service" backup plans, conducting skill drills and finding other resources. Also available in December, 2015 Use of Mobile Devices "e-ACCESS" newsletter at www.nfpa.org/eaccess.

For more see: <http://www.jjk.com/disaster-individ.html>

A Little Preparation and Thought Can Go a Long Way

Preparation may seem like work. It is. Preparing does take time and effort. Most of the cost involves your time, not your money. You can do a little at a time. The important thing is to start preparing. The more you do, the more confident you will be that you can activate your protective emergency preparedness skills.

Ben Franklin said: "By failing to prepare you are preparing to fail." Here are a few last tips to wrap this up.

- Doing a little is much better than doing nothing!

- Take small steps that move you toward being prepared, because it's:
 - Your responsibility
 - Your choice
 - Your health
 - Your safety
 - Your life
 - Your call!