

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS:

A Guide for People with Disabilities

“To be better prepared as a nation, we all must do our part to plan for disasters. Individuals with or without disabilities, can decrease the impact of a disaster by taking steps to prepare BEFORE an event occurs.”

*National Organization
on Disability (NOD)*



Minnesota State Council
on Disability

Your Policy, Training and Technical Resource

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DISASTER strikes with more frequency than in the past.

Environmental changes, population shifts, terrorism, and other factors affect how often and how many people disasters affect. This reality brings about an increased need to plan for disasters.

YOYO Always remember,
at least initially,
You're On Your Own!

Don't assume that neighbors, co-workers, family or friends will not be affected by the emergency and will be available to help you, or that first responders will arrive in a timely manner. **YOU** are in the best position to know your abilities and needs before, during, and after a disaster.

Many people with disabilities have been lead to believe that in an emergency situation, they will play little, if any, role in their own survival. But nothing can be further from the truth. **BEING PREPARED** can have life saving benefits – **PLANNING AND PRACTICE** do make a difference.

During the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, a man with a mobility disability was working on the 69th floor. With no plan or device in place, it took him over six hours to evacuate. In the 2001 attack, the same man had prepared himself to leave the building using assistance from others and an evacuation chair he had acquired and had stored under his desk. It took less than 90 minutes for him to evacuate the building the second time.





“All people, regardless of circumstances, have some obligation to be prepared to take action during an emergency and to assume responsibility for their own safety.”

**National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)
Emergency Evacuation Planning Guide for People with Disabilities**

Is your disability related to your mobility, hearing, sight, mental health or a combination of several? Try to think through what would happen in an emergency and how your disability might impact your ability to evacuate. Review the steps on the next page while thinking about your disability. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, notification might be an issue. If you have a mobility disability, it might be difficult getting out of a multistory building.

Know your abilities, and also consider temporary or situational disabilities, such as allergies/asthma and Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS) which can be triggered by the emergency itself, such as a fire or a chemical spill.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Most emergencies can result in **ONE OF TWO PLANS OF ACTION:**

- 1. GO,** leave immediately, evacuate, leave the building or the neighborhood. Disasters such as fires and floods are usually in this category.
- 2. STAY,** shelter-in-place, don't go out. Disasters such as tornadoes and chemical spills are typically in this category.

On this document you will find plans and kits for both GO and STAY situations.

GO PLAN

Whether you are at home, at work, or in a place that you visit regularly (such as a volunteer or activity setting), you need to have an escape plan so that you can evacuate quickly and safely in case of emergency. This includes preparing your Emergency Kit (pages 13 and 14) and addressing the points in the Evacuation Checklist (pages 11 and 12).



The FOUR ELEMENTS OF EVACUATION INFORMATION:

- 1. Notification (What is the emergency?
How will I be notified?)**
- 2. Way finding (Where is the way out?)**
- 3. Use of the way (Can I get out by myself, or
do I need assistance? Do I need a device?)**
- 4. Assistance (What kind of assistance might
I need? Answer the questions: Who? What?
Where? When? How?)**

Source: National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)

You must **COMMUNICATE** with others, such as family members, neighbors and direct support professionals. Develop a network of individuals that you can rely on for assistance. Meet with these individuals and create a preparedness plan, discuss what would happen in different types of emergencies: Fire, tornado, flood, etc. Remember, when creating an emergency preparedness plan, proximity is very important, so rely most on those closest to you. This plan goes beyond home: It applies to locations where you spend significant time, such as schools, clubs, community centers, work and volunteer settings.

Communicate your issues and train your
NETWORK OF PEOPLE in how best
to assist you in an emergency.

- How to notify you of an emergency if you are deaf or hard-of-hearing;
- how to use your evacuation equipment if you have a mobility disability;
- how to notify you of an emergency if you are deaf or hard-of-hearing, or how to guide you if you are blind or low vision;
- how to identify support needs and provide assistance if you have an intellectual or cognitive disability, or are a person with autism spectrum disorder;
- how to do a blood pressure check, assist with an injection, or assist with a transfer, etc.



If you live with a mental illness:

- Tell your network of people how to secure the documents and assistance you might need in an emergency, e.g., how best to notify you of an emergency; information on your disability, your current medication, name of your therapist, psychiatrist or psychopharmacologist; where to be taken in a mental health emergency; contact information for a family member or friend who listens to you and can advocate for you if in crisis.
- Also bring a week's worth of medication, and slip-on clothing without strings or ties.
- Tell responders: "Do not escalate the situation. Talk softly, listen closely to what I am saying. Don't be judgmental, help me get the proper resources."

Developing a network is a two-way street, so as you identify what others can do for you, be sure to identify what you can do for others. Many individuals with disabilities have organizational and communication skills or other skills and abilities that can be utilized in a plan.

Once you have the emergency plan and network in place, this forms the basis of your plan. Be sure to PRACTICE, PRACTICE AND PRACTICE!!!



EVACUATION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Arrange for a relative, friend or neighbor to check on you in an emergency. Discuss with them how they will gain access into your home if you're not able to open the door.
- ☐ Review possible transportation options, such as a personal vehicle, friend or contact your local paratransit system before the emergency occurs. Also, create a Back Up transportation plan, in case your first choice is unavailable due to being affected by the emergency.
- ☐ Make sure that you have adequate PCA support.
- ☐ Post EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS where you can find them easily, near the telephone or programmed into your cell phone. Make extra copies for each emergency kit.
- ☐ TEACH CHILDREN and others in the household what to do, who to call and when.
- ☐ Locate your EMERGENCY KIT, take the battery or crank-operated RADIO and listen for emergency information.

- ☐ If you or someone in your household has a mobility disability, make sure you have a second accessible exit, in case the primary exit is blocked. At a minimum, have some ideas on how you would evacuate in this case.
- ☐ Consider getting a medical alert system that will allow you to call for help if you are immobilized in an emergency.
- ☐ Keep family records, medical records and other important documents in watertight, fireproof containers.
- ☐ Consider getting a medical ID bracelet or medical dog tags that state your disability.
- ☐ Make sure your service animal, if you have one, is properly identified as such with a harness, otherwise first responders may think it's a pet.
- ☐ Learn how to turn off the water, gas and electricity at main valves or switches.
- ☐ Know how to connect or start a back-up power supply if needed.
- ☐ Pick one out-of-state and one local friend or relative for family members to call if separated by disaster.
- ☐ Pick two meeting places:
 - A place near your home in case of a fire.
 - A place outside your neighborhood in case you cannot return home after a disaster.

“GO PLAN” Emergency Kit

Make sure to put these items in a backpack or duffel bag, perhaps with wheels, that you can quickly grab and take with you in case you need to evacuate.

- ☐ A first aid kit, extra glasses or contact lenses. If you take medication or use medical supplies, make sure you have enough for at least a week.
- ☐ Some drinking water and non-perishable, high protein foods such as nuts and energy bars.
- ☐ Some food and water for your service animal, if you have one.
- ☐ A manual (non-electric) can opener.
- ☐ A battery or crank-operated radio, flashlight and plenty of extra batteries for them.
- ☐ A sturdy whistle.
- ☐ Candles and matches or lighter.
- ☐ A change of clothing, rain gear, and sturdy shoes.
- ☐ Personal care products – soap, toiletries, waterless hand cleaner, tissues and toilet paper.
- ☐ If you have a baby, include extra diapers and other infant care items.
- ☐ Any special items for people with special health needs.

- ☐ Critical miscellaneous items – notebook & pen, money & credit cards, extra car keys, medical and insurance information, and copies of other important documents (including a list of the style and serial numbers of medical devices such as pacemaker).
- ☐ A list of names and phone numbers: Doctor(s), other medical providers, and the relative or friend who should be notified if you are injured.

As You **PREPARE** Your **EMERGENCY KIT**

Store back-up equipment, such as a manual wheelchair, at a neighbor's home, school or workplace. Also, if you have a mobility disability and regularly spend time in levels higher than the ground floor of buildings, be sure to know where the stair-evacuation equipment is stored.



PLAN and **PRACTICE** how to **ESCAPE** from your **HOME** in an **EMERGENCY**.

Draw the floor plans of your home and identify the location of your Go Kit, utilities shut-off, and escape routes. If you live in an apartment or condominium, ask the caretaker or manager to identify and mark accessible exits.

Learn your community's evacuation plan:

- Are the shelters accessible?
- How will you secure a sign language interpreter?
- Will guides or assistants be available?



CAR EMERGENCY KIT

In addition to your emergency kit, keep a car kit in your vehicle:

- ☐ First-aid kit.
- ☐ Blankets, newspaper and large plastic bags for warmth.
- ☐ Extra warm clothing and footwear.
- ☐ Battery-powered radio and flashlight, and extra batteries.
- ☐ Water (a few 1-liter plastic bottles).
- ☐ Cards, games, puzzles.
- ☐ Bright cloth to use as a flag.
- ☐ Cloth or roll of paper towels.
- ☐ A large HELP sign.
- ☐ Cell phone and a charged spare battery.
- ☐ Phone list of friends, family, doctors, neighbors and towing services.
- ☐ Jumper-cables, small shovel, sand, ice scraper, brush.
- ☐ Sand, salt or kitty litter.
- ☐ Tow rope or chain.
- ☐ Fire extinguisher.
- ☐ Warning light or road flares.
- ☐ Road maps.

In the case of a pandemic, you need a **STAY PLAN**. Depending on the severity of the outbreak, you might need to stay in your home for several weeks.



STAY PLAN

First things first: Contact the agencies that provide you services, such as direct support professional, skilled nurses, medical supplies, oxygen or food delivery service and make sure they have a plan for continuation of services during a pandemic. Work with your agencies ahead of time to address your needs. If you think you would be unable to manage a Stay Plan successfully, contact your local public health department, common entry point at the county, center for independent living or MSCOD for information and assistance.

Find a space in your home to store your **EMERGENCY SUPPLIES** following the checklist on the next page. This is so that you have everything you'll need to get by if you need to remain at home for a period of time – up to two weeks, if possible.

“STAY PLAN” Emergency Supplies

Keep these **EMERGENCY SUPPLIES** in your home in case you need to “shelter-in-place” due to pandemic or other emergency. Keep your Emergency Kit (pages 16-17) handy – you’ll still need a lot of the items in that bag. Make sure you have:

- ☐ A supply of drinking water (one gallon per person per day), and non-perishable food, high protein foods such as nuts and energy bars, plus any special liquids or food you require.
- ☐ A supply of prescription and over-the-counter drugs, soap, waterless hand cleaner, extra glasses or contact lenses, catheters or other supplies, tissues, toilet paper, disposal gloves, and any other special items for your health needs.
- ☐ Flashlight, battery or crank operated radio, supply of batteries.
- ☐ Food and water for your service animal, if you have one, for one or two weeks.
- ☐ Extra wheelchair batteries, oxygen, catheters, and other special equipment you might need.
- ☐ Games, reading material, and other entertainment items – for children and adults. You might need to stay home for a while during a pandemic.
- ☐ A manual (non-electric) can opener.
- ☐ Candles and matches or lighter.
- ☐ Blankets, bedding or sleeping bags and extra clothing.
- ☐ Kitchen utensils and dishwashing supplies,
- ☐ Back-up generator, if needed for life support purposes.

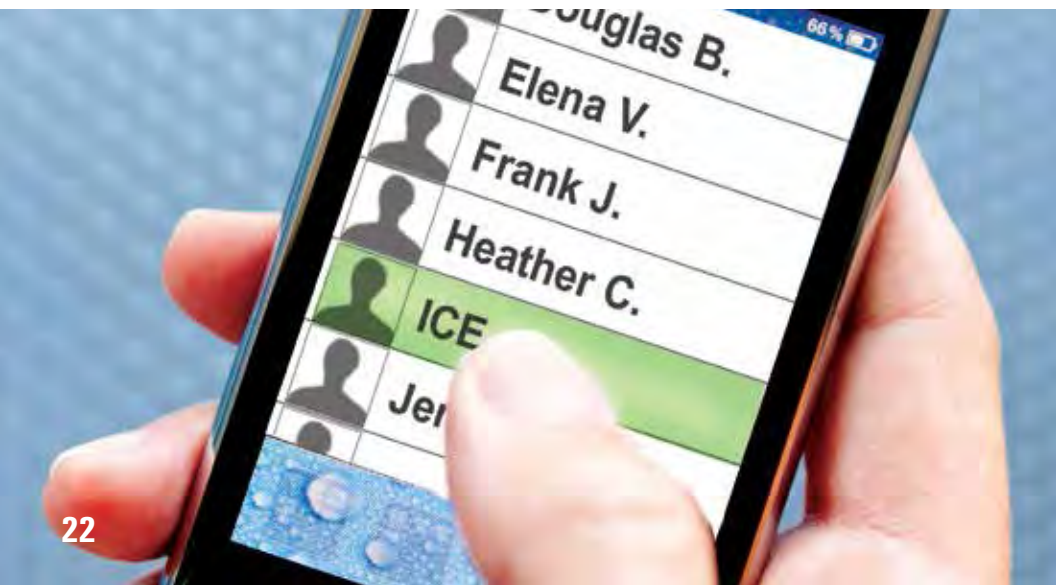
ICE – In Case of Emergency

Store emergency numbers in your cell phones under “ICE” (“In Case of Emergency”), so someone else can call your emergency numbers if you’re not able. Use more than one entry (“ICE-1,” “ICE-2,” etc.) if you have more than one emergency number.

If you lock your phone, first responders may not be able to see your ICE contacts. To solve this, check for applications or “apps” (with your phone service provider or online at your app store) for ICE solutions.

Also check for Panic Buttons (to dial 911 and text message or email to pre-designated contacts with just one button), Wandering devices (remote tracking), and other communication solutions and apps.

Find out if E-911 or Reverse 911 is available with your service, and ask about or explore any GPS/cell phone remote location apps.





PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

STAY HEALTHY. Keep yourself in shape. Eat nutritious foods, don't smoke, exercise regularly, and get enough sleep. And get a flu shot every fall, so you're protected against ordinary "seasonal" flu.

LEARN HOW TO AVOID SPREADING DISEASE.

Practice "respiratory etiquette." Start developing habits that will help you avoid getting – or spreading – infectious diseases. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue – or the upper part of your sleeve – when you cough or sneeze. Dispose of the tissue afterward. Wash your hands thoroughly – and frequently. If you don't have access to soap and water, use an alcohol-based, waterless hand cleaner.

Source: Minnesota Department of Health

Try to avoid contact with those who are ill or who are exhibiting symptoms. If your direct support professional or others who provide you services appear to be ill, instruct them to go home, and call your provider. Get educated on the symptoms of the flu by going to www.health.state.mn.us.

Emergencies in **RURAL SETTINGS**

Because of increased isolation, in rural areas response times are longer and resources can be greatly reduced.

If you're a farmer, rancher, or other agricultural worker with a disability, plan for the additional challenges of responding to an emergency in your particular setting.

For example, set up a detailed plan of action and form a peer support network to assist in taking care of livestock in case of an emergency such as fire, tornado or flood – many accidents occur while trying to attend to animals when disaster strikes. Also, contact friends or family who are 15 to 40 miles away and make emergency arrangements with them for temporary livestock care.



“Ask about special assistance programs available in the event of an emergency. Many communities ask people with a disability to register, usually with the local fire or police department, or the local emergency management office so needed help can be provided quickly in an emergency. Let your personal caregiver know you have registered, and with whom. If you are electric-dependent, be sure to register with your local utility company.” –FEMA

Make sure to have legal and adequate markings to prove ownership of your livestock, and practice loading your animals as a disaster drill, so you and the animals are familiar with the effort.

Prepare a livestock disaster box with ropes, halters, concentrated feed, medicines, copies of ownership papers, buckets or feed nets, garden hose, flashlight or lantern, blankets or tarps, portable radio and spare batteries, and livestock first aid supplies.

Remember that the survival instincts of livestock can make normal handling techniques ineffective.

THE ACCEPTED PRIORITY SYSTEM FOR SAFETY AND EVACUATION is people first, then pets, then livestock, then property. In case of FIRE: Open possible escape routes and recapture animals later.

Also, be very detailed when completing your Emergency Plan and Emergency Kit. Consult EquipALife's AgraBility web site for assistive technologies that may help you better plan for emergencies: www.agrability.org/Resources/at.

For more information: www.EquipALife.org

A BASIC PLAN

Develop a Plan

- Pre-identify a safe meeting place
- Plan escape route for safe and quick evacuation

Stock pile 7 days of key supplies

- Medications, special diet and medical items
- Food, clothing, other essentials

Utilize 911, cell, GPS

- List any special needs
- Clearly state your exact physical location
- When working with machinery, keep a medical card in your pocket instead of wearing a medical ID bracelet



FEELING SAFE, BEING SAFE

If you have an intellectual or cognitive disability, or if you are person with autism spectrum disorder, you may want to work on your plan using the worksheet titled **FEELING SAFE, BEING SAFE: My Personal Safety in an EMERGENCY**. To download the PDF for printing, go to this link: www.tinyurl.com/FeelingSafe or to the site www.mnddc.org/emergency-planning.

The worksheet will guide you through clear steps of preparation:

- Get all the information you need: Personal, health and medical information, things that you use such as hearing aids, and communication issues such as the best way in which first responders can talk to you and assist you.

- Put your emergency kit together: A backpack or bag with your name on it and several supply items like water, food, medications, and many more things.
- Complete the worksheet: Which includes a list of people to contact in case of emergency.

PRACTICE TELLING people about
your **PERSONAL NEEDS.**

KEEP YOUR EMERGENCY KIT
in a place **EASY TO FIND.**

ON THE WEB:

The worksheet: www.tinyurl.com/FeelingSafe

The video: www.tinyurl.com/BeingSafe

Also: www.mnddc.org/emergency-planning

An important thing to do in order to be ready for an emergency is to clear pathways to enter and leave the home easily, and to keep windows and door areas free of clutter.



Use these online **RESOURCES** for additional information and education on emergency readiness:

www.health.state.mn.us

www.disability.state.mn.us

www.DisasterHelp.gov

www.cdc.gov

www.hsem.state.mn.us

www.noaa.gov

www.nod.org

www.PrepareNow.Org

www.ready.gov

www.redcross.org

www.pandemicflu.gov

www.codeready.org

MSCOD prepared this document with information from various sources, including:

- American Red Cross
- Federal Emergency Management Agency
- National Organization on Disability
- National Fire Protection Association
- Minnesota Department of Health

MSCOD is a state agency that advises the governor, the state legislature, state agencies and the general public on public policy issues affecting persons with disabilities. We work to advance the rights of Minnesotans with disabilities.



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