

Preparedness

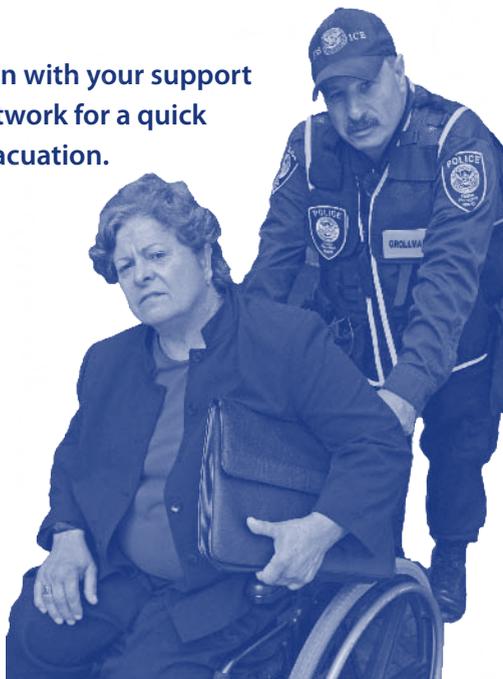
Assess Your Risks

Learn about hazards that may strike your community (blizzards, earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes, floods, and the like). You can get information from your state and local Emergency Management Agency (EMA) or Homeland Security Office by visiting their Websites. If you don't have computer access, you can get much of this information through brochures from these offices.

Build a Support Network

Establishing solid relationships with other people is one of the most effective means of surviving a disaster. Create a network of trusted individuals such as family, friends, co-workers, personal attendants, and others who can assist you during an emergency. Familiarize your network with your functional abilities and limitations, and include them in your emergency planning process.

TIP Plan with your support network for a quick evacuation.



More Information

Many of these agencies provide materials in accessible formats and different languages.

National Organization on Disability/Emergency Preparedness Initiative

www.nod.org/emergency

Disability Preparedness Resource Center

<http://www.disabilitypreparedness.gov/>

Easter Seals (S.A.F.E.T.Y. FIRST program)

www.easter-seals.org

Federal Emergency Management Agency

<http://www.fema.gov/plan>

Humane Society of the U.S. (Disaster Center)

www.hsus.org/hsus_field/hsus_disaster_center

NOAA Weather Radio

http://www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr/special_need.htm

United States Access Board

<http://www.access-board.gov/evac.htm>

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

www.ready.gov

U. S. Department of Justice: Americans with Disabilities Act

An ADA Guide for Local Governments: Making Community Emergency Preparedness and Response Programs Accessible to People with Disabilities

<http://www.ada.gov/emergencyprepguide.htm>

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NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON DISABILITY



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Disaster Readiness Tips for

People with Mobility Disabilities

Prepare Yourself



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To be better prepared as a nation, we all must do our part to plan for disasters.

Individuals with or without disabilities can lessen the impact of a disaster by taking steps to prepare before an event occurs.

This brochure is designed to help people with mobility disabilities begin to plan for emergencies. The term "mobility disabilities" refers primarily to people with little or no use of their legs or arms. They generally use wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, canes, and other devices as aids to movement.

You can take small steps every day to become better able to survive an emergency. Read NOD's general brochure, "Prepare Yourself: Disaster Readiness Tips for People with Disabilities." Identify your resources, develop a support network, make a plan, and create a Ready Kit and a Go Bag. **Start today to become better prepared, safer, and more secure.**

Evacuation

If you believe the weather or other hazard directly threatens you, leave your home or workplace. If officials order a mandatory evacuation, you must leave. Remaining in the face of a known hazard puts you in danger.

Don't expect rescue at the height of an emergency: first responders cannot risk their own lives driving into a chemical cloud or against hurricane-force winds. Long before the evacuation order, set aside money and supplies. It's tough to do on a tight budget, but your life is at stake.

Fire: The Deadliest Threat

For a person with a mobility disability, no disaster is more frequent or deadly than fire. Contact your fire department for help in evacuation planning, but make sure the advice fits your needs. Besides heeding the usual advice about fire safety at home, such as buying and maintaining smoke alarms and fire extinguishers, follow these tips:

- Buy clothing, linens, and blankets made of fire-resistant material
- Arrange furniture so it does not obstruct a quick exit
- Attach a small Go Bag to your wheelchair or walker
- Contact support network members to help you if you must evacuate a building by stairway
- Memorize a few critical phrases to quickly explain your situation to first responders, or write these phrases down
- Practice your plan regularly

Multi-Story Buildings

The tragedy of September 11, 2001, focused the attention of people with disabilities on the potential for fire in skyscrapers and the challenges of evacuation. However, the threat is just as real when the fire alarm rings and the elevators stop in a smaller multi-story building. Evacuation plans must be in place for small and large multi-story buildings.

Evacuation Devices

Several companies make products to facilitate the evacuation of wheelchair users or others with severe mobility disabilities. The most common are lightweight chairs used to carry a person down a stairway. A man with quadriplegia safely evacuated the World Trade Center using such a device with the help of several co-workers.

If your building has not purchased evacuation devices, take responsibility to educate the facility's manager. Use of these devices requires training and cannot be left for the last minute. Finally, an evacuation device is *not* a substitute for a wheelchair, so plan how to get along if you must abandon your wheelchair. Evacuation devices are not universally accepted by all fire service and emergency management leaders. There is still a need to raise the awareness of emergency professionals about the benefits of these devices.

Areas of Refuge

Many fire chiefs support the concept of an area of refuge, a temporary shelter-in-place area in an office or public building. The area can be as simple as a stairwell, where wheelchair users and others gather to await rescue. Many modern

buildings include a refuge area protected by flame retardants and equipped with two-way communication. Since September 11th, many people with disabilities have expressed reluctance to depend on areas of refuge, preferring to evacuate with everyone else. This may not always be possible, so learn the location of your building's designated refuge areas.

Sheltering

Sheltering in Place

If you are home when a sudden disaster occurs, you may take shelter there, where all is familiar and resources are close. It is important to keep a battery-operated radio or TV with you so that you can listen and follow directions from officials about steps to take. Contact members of your emergency support network and keep them informed of your actions and any changes in your condition.

Ready Kit and Go Bag

A Ready Kit is a supply of items that you will need if you should have to shelter in place or rely on your own resources for a few days. A Go Bag has fewer items, but they are the essential ones to take with you if you must evacuate quickly.

See NOD's booklet, *Planning for Hazards: A Guide for People with Functional Needs*, for a list of suggested supplies. The American Red Cross also has a comprehensive checklist of supplies on its Web site.

General and "Special Needs/Medical" Shelters

Unless you have other severe disabilities, you should have little difficulty as a person with a mobility disability staying in a public shelter for a short time. People with more serious needs might have to use the nearest "special needs" shelter, where medical issues can receive appropriate attention. Conditions in a shelter (usually a school building or an auditorium) are crowded, noisy, and boring. But these facilities can save your life.

People with mobility disabilities have a right under the Americans with Disabilities Act to use general public shelters. However, the reality is that many shelters are still inaccessible to people with mobility disabilities, so try to determine the status of the facility before you arrive. Wheelchair and scooter users may need assistance in transferring to and from a sleeping cot. People who use walkers or crutches might require aid navigating through a tightly-packed shelter. Staff in a general public shelter can assist you with these tasks, but they cannot perform more complex medical procedures or help you with other activities of daily living.

People with mobility disabilities may want to pack:

- Pair of heavy gloves to use while wheeling or making your way over glass and debris
- Extra battery for your motorized wheelchair or scooter
- Jumper cables or specific recharging device to be connected to an automobile's cigarette lighter
- Patch kit or can of "seal-in-air product" to repair flat tires
- Spare cane or walker