

Service Animals

Federal law allows you to bring your guide dog or service animal into an emergency shelter. Be prepared to explain this to the staff, some of whom may be unfamiliar with this fact. You also have the responsibility to care for your companion animal while the two of you are in the shelter.

TIP Be prepared to tell shelter operators what your needs are.



In a 2004 survey of emergency managers across the United States, 42% said they had a public awareness campaign directed at providing emergency information to people with disabilities. Only 16% of those provide information in accessible formats (Braille, cassette, large type, etc.).

More Information

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

National Organization on Disability/ Emergency Preparedness Initiative

<http://www.nod.org/emergency>

Easter Seals (s.a.f.e.t.y. First program)

<http://www.easter-seals.org>

Federal Emergency Management Agency

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

Gallaudet University

http://gallaudet.edu/af/publicsafety_emergencypreparednessguide.xml

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

http://www.hsus.org/hsus_field/hsus_disaster_center

National Association of the Deaf

<http://www.nad.org/issues/emergency-preparedness/resources>

NOAA Weather Radio

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

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

<http://www.ready.gov>

The National Organization on Disability gratefully acknowledges support from AIG and the Walmart Foundation.

**NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON
DISABILITY**



EMERGENCY
PREPAREDNESS
INITIATIVE

09/09

**NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON
DISABILITY**

Disaster Readiness Tips for

People with Sensory Disabilities

Prepare Yourself



National Organization on Disability/ Emergency Preparedness Initiative

888 16th Street, NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20006

Tel: 202-293-5960

TDD: 711 Relay

Fax: 202-355-1399

Email: epi@nod.org

<http://www.nod.org/emergency>



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 sensory disabilities begin to plan for emergencies. The term "sensory disabilities" refers primarily to people with hearing or visual limitations, such as low or no vision, as well as people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

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.**

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.

If you need these items in an alternate format, such as Braille, audiotape, or large font, then ask. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) entitles you to this accommodation. The ADA also requires that any video for a public audience be, at a minimum, close-captioned for persons who are deaf. You may have to wait a reasonable time while an alternate-format document is prepared. By making the request, however, you help a vital arm of government to educate itself about the needs of persons with disabilities.

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 following are a few items of particular interest to people with sensory disabilities:

Other Emergency Plans

Find out about emergency plans developed at your workplace or by community-based service providers, or others. Review those plans to find out if they consider your specific needs. Depending on the size of the organization, the plans might not be as well developed as those available from your local or state EMA.

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 Form a network of people who can help one another during emergencies at home, work, or school.

- Pad of paper with pens or pencils for writing notes
- Extra batteries for tape recorders, portable TTYs, etc.
- Extra pair of dark glasses, if medically required
- Folding mobility cane
- Hearing aid batteries
- Food, medicine, and favorite toy for your service animal
- Plastic bags, disposable gloves, and other items for your animal's care
- Your medical records and those of your service animal

Warning & Response

At Work

If you're at work when a disaster occurs, an alarm may sound or an automated message may be sent over an intercom. People who are blind can hear these alarms with no difficulty, but the noise is often so loud that it drowns out other audio cues, such as the sound of people running. People who are deaf should find out if fire alarms at their work site are visual (flashing strobe lights) as well as audible. A support network will be especially critical for deaf people who work alone in offices far from visual alerts.

At Home

At home, nearly everyone relies on radio or TV for emergency information. Generally, people who are blind will find radio more useful. However, radio stations in smaller communities sometimes close after sunset or run automated programming with no staff present.

Emergency Information on TV

Regulations issued by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) require that spoken emergency information on TV also be presented in a visual form. The information is shown either on a special line on the screen, or through a superimposed text crawl. A sign-language interpreter may stand next to the speaker.

Emergency Technology

New technologies offer convenient options for receiving emergency information. Text-messaging pagers with broadcast weather alerts can be connected to the EMA for one or

more counties to provide immediate warnings. Individuals who use telecommunications relay services now have different options to use as an emergency backup, including dialing 711 (nationwide), CapTel (captioned telephone), Internet-based relay (through computer, text pager, PDA, etc.), and/or video relay services (through broadband). These services may fail in a major disaster, so it is still important to establish a network of hearing friends, family, and coworkers.

Sheltering

General and "Special Needs" Shelters

Unless you have other severe disabilities, you should have little or no difficulty as a person who is deaf or blind staying in a public shelter for a short time. People with more serious needs might be directed to use the nearest "special needs" shelter, where medical issues can receive appropriate attention.

Conditions in a general shelter (usually a school building or an auditorium) are crowded, noisy, and boring. But these facilities, operated by the local American Red Cross chapter or community-based agencies, can save your life. People with hearing or vision impairments or who are blind or deaf have a right under the ADA to use general public shelters. A person who is blind or visually impaired will need assistance finding a place to sit and the location of the rest room and food line. A person who is deaf or hearing impaired can get oriented relatively easily, but may need to communicate with others without an interpreter.