



# Quarterly Update

## Emergency Preparation for People with Disabilities

While all of us should be thinking about our readiness in case of an emergency or disaster, those with a disability or who work with a person with a disability have additional considerations. Not only are there legal implications, there are practical considerations as well. Before an emergency occurs, take time to make plans. Think about the types of incidents that can occur, the planning or information that you might need, and the resources available before and after an event.

### Types of Emergencies/Disasters

This update cannot list all of the potential events that could occur, but there are at least two groups of events to think about when preparing for emergencies with individuals who have disabilities: natural or weather-related disasters and man-made emergencies. Natural or weather-related disasters include hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, and ice storms. Sometimes there is prior warning, but other times the event is quickly upon us. Man-made emergencies include fires, gas leaks, train derailments, or even campus shootings. The outcomes of these events can include power outages, lack of food or water, road damage, lack of safe shelter, and lack of phone service—all to be considered in emergency preparation.

### Preparation

Thinking through events BEFORE they occur is incredibly important because it increases the chance of survival and success. If an emergency response plan has not been created, now may be a good time to start that process. Here are a few simple tips to start your thinking:

- Be informed about the different types of emergencies that could be encountered, the community emergency plans, and the services needed during an emergency
- Determine the emergency exits of every office and building
- Know the evacuation routes out of the campus, community, and city
- Carry documentation/instructions about any special needs
- Establish a network of friends, family, or colleagues for assistance
- Create a communications plan to connect with friends and family, keeping in mind phones may not be working
- Create an evacuation kit that might include nonperishable food, water, medical equipment/supplies, medication, disability-related documentation, emergency contact information, copies of important documents, flashlight, radio, extra batteries, service animal supplies, clothes, blanket, etc.

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## Response

The type of incident will guide your initial response. One of the first decisions to be made includes whether to shelter in place or evacuate. For example, if a tornado is approaching, head to the lowest or below-ground level, but in a flash flood move to a higher floor. Obviously, if there is a fire, exit the building as quickly and safely as possible. If this is not possible, find the nearest fire proof area. If it is necessary to shelter in place, are resources available for an unknown period of time? Is it safer there than moving to another location? Is water, power, communication, and food available? If it is necessary to evacuate, are there means to get to a safer location and be there for an undetermined amount of time? Is it possible to navigate any debris on the ground, take any supplies or equipment or travel freely? Is communication with first responders or shelter staff easily accomplished? Does the disability prevent or inhibit good communication? Is a medical alert tag worn and visible, if needed?

If the individual with a disability is stuck in a location that will require search and rescue professionals' assistance (e.g., a collapsed building), the following suggestions should be made to the individual: remain calm and patient; conserve energy because the responders may not be able to gain access quickly; if able, tap on something or make a noise so location can be accurately identified; if able, alert responders to any medical/health issues.

## Web Resources

Below is a sampling of the numerous resources available that provide information about emergency planning and disaster response for people with disabilities.

- Center for Disability and Special Needs Preparation  
<http://www.disabilitypreparedness.org/>
- Disability Preparedness Resource Center  
<http://www.disabilitypreparedness.gov/>
- Disastersrus.org  
[http://www.disastersrus.org/MyDisasters/disability/disability\\_preparedness.htm](http://www.disastersrus.org/MyDisasters/disability/disability_preparedness.htm)
- FEMA: Individual Needs-Preparing and Planning  
<http://www.fema.gov/plan/prepare/specialplans.shtm>
- Resources on Emergency Evacuation and Disaster Preparedness  
<http://www.access-board.gov/evac.htm>
- U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy  
<http://www.dol.gov/odep/programs/emergency.htm>
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services—Tips for First Responders  
<http://www.hhs.gov/od/tips.html>

