

ARE YOU READY?



Preparedness tips for people with vision disabilities



If an emergency happened in your community, would you know what to do? Would you have the right kinds of supplies to stay safe and healthy at home? What if officials ordered you to evacuate? How would you get to safety? Have you spoken with a member of your support network about help you may need?

If these questions give you pause, that means it's time to get prepared. And there are some extra steps you should consider if you're living with a vision disability.

Knowledge is power

It's good to take an all-hazards approach when preparing for an emergency. In other words, create a plan that will keep you safe in a variety of emergency scenarios. But take note of the specific emergencies that are likely to happen and have happened where you live. These could be floods, tornadoes, earthquakes or even a volcanic eruption. This will help you drill down to some of the specific emergencies you may have to face.

Next, do a personal assessment. Think about all the things you need to function on a daily basis. Do you use assistive equipment that requires electricity? What would happen if you lost electricity? How and when would you contact friends, family or members of your support network? What if you're unable to reach your doctor or pharmacist? Would you have enough medication to stay healthy? These "what-if" scenarios are critical to good emergency preparedness planning.

Get in touch with your local emergency response agency. Many emergency agencies offer services to help people with disabilities during an emergency. This can be especially important if your community is at risk for emergencies that may call for evacuation. If you'll need help during an emergency, don't be shy about saying so.



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Stock up for preparedness

Every household should have an emergency preparedness stockpile. It's also a good idea to have a portable emergency kit that you can quickly grab if you have to evacuate.



Here are some basic emergency supplies you should have:

- A three-day supply of water and nonperishable foods
- A battery-operated radio
- Extra batteries
- A manual can opener
- A first-aid kit
- A flashlight

If you take medication, talk to your doctor about getting a seven-day supply for your stockpile. And don't forget to include copies of your medical records and contact information for your doctors in your evacuation kit.

Include enough food and water for your service animal in your stockpile. Also include paper towels, plastic bags and rubber gloves to dispose of animal waste. Don't forget to include an extra leash and collar. Consider including boots for your animal so it can safely walk through dangerous debris. Also, make sure its license and ID tags are up to date with your phone number and an out-of-town contact number. Post a sign on your door or windows that will inform emergency responders of the types of animals that live with you.

Have a pet carrier easily accessible. Carriers may make it easier to bring your service animal into an evacuation shelter. Evacuation shelters should accommodate your service animal unless it is threatening the health and safety of other people.

Keep in mind the possibility that you may be separated from your service animal during an emergency. In turn, practice your plan using other assistive devices.

If you have some vision, consider installing security lighting in each room to help you safely move around. Also, label your preparedness supplies so you can identify them quickly and easily.

Some other items for your emergency stockpile are an extra cane, a talking or Braille clock, and extra glasses or contact lenses.

And don't forget about including a battery-operated radio. Some TV stations may only broadcast warnings as a text scroll at the bottom of the screen. In that case, having a radio will be critical to staying abreast of the latest information.

Communication is key

Make sure friends, family or members of your support network know about your emergency preparedness plans. Let them know if you'll need help.

Sometimes it's easier to call long distance rather than locally in the wake of an emergency. Designate an out-of-town person that you and those in your network can call to confirm that you're safe. Make sure the people you'll be relying on to help you have keys to your home and are comfortable with your service animal.



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