

Disability Emergency Personal Evacuation Transportation Planning

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Why You Need an Evacuation Plan

These tips focus on preparing for the many hazards that can involve leaving a disaster-affected area.

An evacuation plan helps you:

- Stay in charge and control.
- Protect your health, safety, and independence.
- Prepare for a large amount of time you will be on your own.
- Remember to identify and build support team(s) that can help each other.

For emergency preparedness, it's important to understand that there are three types of warning events. Each warning type needs different preparedness and response actions.

No Warning

Sudden and unexpected emergencies that leave no time for preparation

Short Warning

Emergencies that develop over short periods, allowing for a short time for preparation

Long Warning

Emergencies that develop over days, weeks, or even months, allowing for preparation

No warning events include:

- Earthquakes: Shaking begins without warning
- Landslides: Triggered by an earthquake or sudden heavy rainfall
- Structural Collapses: Failures of buildings/bridges due to design flaws
- Sudden Power Outages: Can occur due to cyberattacks or technical failures
- Explosions: Can result from industrial accidents, gas leaks, or terrorist attacks
- Terrorist Attacks: Bombings, shootings, and other violent incidents

Short warning events include:

- Heat Waves
- Tornadoes
- Tsunamis: When caused by a distant earthquake
- Volcanic Eruptions
- Flash Floods: Occur due to sudden heavy rain or dam failures
- Hazardous Material Spills: Result from chemical plant leaks or tanker accidents
- Severe Thunderstorms: Can involve hail, strong winds, and lightning
- Wildfires: Can spread rapidly due to high winds

Long warning events include:

- Hurricanes
- Droughts
- Pandemics
- Climate Change Effects: Rising sea levels and shifting weather patterns
- Economic Crises: Stock market crashes, inflation, or financial collapses

It is impossible to prepare for every possible disaster or emergency. However, planning is important because the impacts and results of emergencies and disasters are often similar. Along with the need to plan for power outages, transportation evacuation is one of the most common disaster needs across many types of disasters.

In large disasters, there are widespread and severe disruptions to the functioning of a community that goes above its ability to respond using local resources. There is often a long wait of many hours or more (also known as a response time gap) between when you need help and when police, fire, and other first responders arrive. You need to prepare to be on your own.

Government response capacity is limited, and it is rarely immediate. In disasters, calling 9-1-1, 3-1-1 / 2-1-1, or 9-8-8 for help may not work or work well due to overwhelming call volumes, resulting in long wait times.

The content below gives specific ideas about what you should discuss as receivers and givers of help. Helpers are people willing to help each other in emergencies and disasters.

“Preparing takes discipline, and it is like exercising; it takes persistence. The payoff is a sense of control and empowerment versus feeling overwhelmed, powerless, helpless, and hopeless.”


“It helps you deal with fear, uncertainty, and doubt.”

- Aaron Titus, author of “How to Prepare for Everything”

Your real first responders are nearby neighbors, friends, co-workers, family, and strangers. You need to pre-plan to check on and help each other before, during, and after a disaster.

Your plans should involve people who can get to each other quickly. So, make sure your support team or helpers are aware of your needs and that you are aware of their needs.

Preparing takes discipline. Break the tasks into doable parts. Planning and preparation are rarely treated as urgent, but they are important and should not be delayed.



**We cannot forecast every outcome or every condition,
but there is much we know, can predict, and plan for.**

**The lessons observed are clear, they
just have to be applied.**

How to Use this Document

This tool and tips are for your emergency and disaster evacuation transportation planning. They include answering who, what, where, when, why and how questions.

Not all this information will apply to you, so use the parts that match your needs! Regularly review and update your plan. **The “Definitions and Terminology” section defines underlined and bolded terms and words.**

- Enter your answers directly into this document.
- Use the text boxes for your answers. They will expand as needed.
- When you complete the document, you can print it or save it to your device.
 - Make sure to keep it in an easy-to-find location.
- Update your plan regularly (at least once a year).

What You Need to Evacuate

Evaluating Your Resources, Needs, and Abilities

It is crucial to be clear about your resources, needs, and abilities when you plan.

When You Need to Leave

- Are you able to open your door to let helpers in?

☐ Yes ☐ No

- If not, what is your plan:

- List all exits you can use without help (including windows):

- List all exits you can use with help:

- List all exits that need power (garage door, gate, elevator, etc.) that you can use **without power and without help**. Provide instructions on using them.

- List all exits that need power (garage door, gate, elevator, etc.) that you can use **without power but with help**. Provide instructions on using them.

- Have you practiced using these exits without power and explaining what needs to be done to helpers?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Need to do

- If you spend time in/or live above or below the ground floor in an elevator building, how will you get out when the elevator is not working?

☐ Ramps ☐ Use of an [evacuation aid \[p.3\]](#)

Do you know where these items are and how to tell helpers to use them?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Need to do

- Do you know all the usable routes you can use when you have to get out of the area (when most used routes are blocked) when walking or rolling:

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Need to do

- List all routes you could use to get out of the area when **walking/rolling**:

- Do you know all the usable routes you can use when you have to get out of the area (when most used routes are blocked) when using a vehicle:

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Need to do

- List all routes you could use to get out of the area when **using a vehicle**:

Getting a Ride Out of the Area

- Do you have a vehicle available?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes:

☐ Can drive ☐ Need driver

☐ Can give others a ride

- List the names and provide contact info for all potential drivers:

- Do others know they can call on you for a ride?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Need to do

If you do not have an available vehicle, and even if you do, plan for other options just in case!

- Can you get a ride with neighbors, family, or friends?

☐ Yes ☐ No

- List the names and provide contact info for those you can get a ride from:

- Can you get into a vehicle that does not have a wheelchair ramp or lift?

☐ Yes, without help ☐ Yes, with help ☐ No

- Can your wheelchair or scooter fold or be taken apart and loaded in a trunk or other empty vehicle space?

☐ Yes ☐ No

- If no, what is the plan?

- List equipment you need to use while riding (e.g., oxygen, ventilator, etc.):

- What is your plan if you cannot ride in a sitting position?

YOYO: Helpers, Support Networks, and Support Teams

In **disasters**, “you are often on your own” (YOYO). As already stated, the real disaster first responders are mostly nearby co-workers, neighbors, friends, family, **personal assistants**, and strangers.



- Discuss how you can help each other. Be specific. Almost everyone can be a getter as well as a giver of help. Discuss what each person can do.

The more people prepared to help each other, the more deaths and injuries are prevented.

The number of first responders is tiny compared to those in need during a disaster.

For example, this was clear in the Las Vegas October 2017 concert shooting.

- When you create a large team of helpers, you are more likely to get help and give it when needed. [Do not depend on any one person \(buddy\) \[p.14\]](#).
- Knowing your neighbors is important because responders will likely not be available in a disaster. People who can help each other are typically those who live nearby. Your neighbors' network may still work when phones are down, and power is out.
- Keep your helpers' contact information on your cell phone and in paper copies. Keep paper copies where you can quickly get to them (e.g., wallet, purse, briefcase, vehicle, book bag, etc.).
- [Practice giving quick information on how best to assist you \[p.13\]](#) (i.e., take my oxygen tank on the right side of the brown bookcase, I can manage without it for about 15-20 minutes).

“Don’t prepare alone. Prepare together.”

- Aaron Titus, author of “How to Prepare for Everything”

Communication Plans

Plan for how you will communicate with your helpers, including your [attendants](#) via:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Landline phone | <input type="checkbox"/> Communication app |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cell phone | <input type="checkbox"/> Intercom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Text | <input type="checkbox"/> Two-way radio |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Email | <input type="checkbox"/> Ham radio |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social media | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: | |

[Mobile devices can be a communication lifeline.](#) You rarely leave home without them and often store important information on them.

Keep your cell phone and other communication devices charged. If possible, keep a portable charger accessible.

Keep your communication devices within easy reach, for example, by your bed.

Consider setting up your **emergency** contacts and enter any [disability or health conditions](#) you have that emergency personnel should be aware of and can access even when your phone is locked. Search the internet for “cell phones in case of emergency” or “first responders can help you even when your phone is locked.”

Do not rely on just one plan, as plans will fail.

For example, if you use transportation services such as paratransit, ask if they can help you before, during, and after a disaster. But make sure this is not your only plan, as they may not be available.

Registries

If you voluntarily sign up for a disaster registry for people with disabilities, you should never assume you will get help. [Registries fail](#) during disasters because there are not enough resources to help people. Registries are based on guestimates that over-promise assistance.

People [ignore registry disclaimers \[page 8\]](#) and continue to magically believe that “If I register, they know where I am, and they will come to help me.” This false and dangerous belief decreases the attention needed to develop, review, and strengthen your preparedness plans.

If you choose to register, be skeptical and ask these questions of the registry:

- What am I registering for?
- What specific help will it provide and when?
 - Before the event (e.g., providing a backup generator, batteries, etc.)
 - During the event (e.g., a ride to evacuate, sheltering)
 - After the event (e.g., life-safety check, recovery assistance, etc.)
- Are these resources available locally?
- Where is the response coming from (e.g., time, distance, etc.)?
- How will we communicate?
- How will you know where I am?
- Is there two-way communication?
- How do I let you know help has not arrived?

- How do I let you know if my needs have changed (e.g., I no longer need help)?
- How do you let me know if the situation has changed?
- How will you know if my needs have been met or if I need more help?

Create Plans for Where You Spend Time

Create plans for where you spend time, such as at home, work, school, volunteer site, vehicle, and when [traveling](#).

- Learn about, contribute to, and create plans for where you spend time.
- [Make sure your safety needs are included in plans \[pages 12,19\]](#).
- Never assume your needs are included in emergency plans.
- Review the plans to check if they will work for you, and if not work to change the plan.
- Participate in drills (fire, emergency) and be part of making changes in the plan where needed.
- Know how to use and transfer into [evacuation aids and devices \[page 23-29\]](#).

When to Evacuate

Alerts and Warnings

When evacuation orders are a real possibility, consider leaving early. Leaving ahead of others can help you avoid the crowds and traffic and spend less time in a vehicle.



- Sign up for emergency alerts and warnings (when available in your area) from fire, police, emergency departments, public health, universities, and colleges. Search for these words for local alerts and warnings to learn where and how to sign up for your area.
- Alerts and warnings in most areas are also announced on radio, TV, and social media.
- In disasters, you may have long, short, or no warning so plan for all three situations.
- Check on updates regarding detours and the location of evacuation centers and shelters.
- Let your support network know you are leaving and where you are going when possible.



Where to Evacuate

Plan Where You Will Go

Plan for several options for places to stay. Make sure these options vary in distances and directions away (10 miles, 50 miles, in neighboring city or state).

Map your options.

- Confirm that these locations are still available for you no less than once a year.
☐ Yes ☐ No
- Is staying in a hotel or motel an option?
☐ Yes ☐ No



When possible, instead of a shelter, many people prefer to stay with family or friends. Shelters can be crowded, too cold or too warm, uncomfortable, and may not have the accommodations you need.

What Will You Need to Take

Prepare [different kits](#) for different places and situations:

- **Keep it with you (KIWY) or carry on you** are vital items you must always keep with you.
- **Grab-and-go bags should be easy to** carry if you must leave in a hurry. This bag has things you cannot do without but are not so big or heavy that you cannot carry them.
- **Car kit** (if you have a vehicle): These are pre-packed items you will need if you have to evacuate the area and/or are in or near your vehicle during an incident.

Tailor the contents of these kits to your needs and abilities. It is ideal to plan for supplies for up to two weeks (medication syringes, ostomy bags, catheters, padding, etc.). Do what is realistic and affordable for you.

- Some items have no cost or are low cost, while others have a high cost.
- Know what you can carry in a fanny pack, backpack, or bag on your wheelchair, scooter, or other assistive device. If you can only carry a 3-day supply of insulin in your grab-and-go kit, then that is what's right for you.
- Keep current contact information in your kits for providers/vendors of your most important supplies.
- Check your kits, at least every few months, to make sure that the contents are not expired and have not been damaged (for example, some items may break down over time from being stored in a hot vehicle).
- Plan for what you can do.
- In a no-warning or short-warning event, you may have to leave behind almost everything to protect your life and safety.

Definitions and Terminology

For this document, these terms are defined as:

2-1-1 is a free telephone number available in some areas. It is an information and referral service. It provides access to local community services. For example, in California, 2-1-1 is available in multiple languages, allowing those needing information to obtain referrals to physical and mental health resources; housing, utility, food, and employment assistance; and suicide and crisis interventions.

3-1-1 is a free telephone number and website available in some communities that provides options to connect to various non-emergency government services and general government information.

9-1-1 is the “Universal Emergency Number used throughout the United States to request emergency assistance.

9-8-8 is a nationally available free Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline). It offers 24/7 call, text, and chat access to trained crisis counselors who can help people experiencing suicide, substance use, mental health crises, or any other kind of emotional distress.

Applications, or apps for short, are a type of program people can download to their tablet or smartphone. There are a variety of uses, such as signaling for help, shopping, banking, accessing health information, etc.

Emergency versus Disaster

An emergency is an urgent, sudden, and serious event or an unexpected change in conditions that needs immediate action to deal with or prevent harm to life, health, or property. An emergency is usually a small event handled quickly using local resources. It may be natural, technological, or human-caused disasters, such as power outages, earthquakes, chemical spills, extreme weather, hurricanes, tornadoes, heat waves, tsunamis,

terrorism, pandemics, wildfires, mudslides, floods, and droughts. An emergency can turn into a disaster when local services are overwhelmed.

Disasters are large-scale and widespread events causing severe disruptions to the functioning of a community that exceeds its ability to respond using local resources.

Evacuation aids and devices are used for individuals with mobility disabilities who cannot use stairs or need help moving.

Helpers, Support Networks, and Support Teams are people willing to help and support each other in disasters and emergencies. This includes personal assistants, co-workers, friends, family, neighbors, and others at places where you spend time, like your home, work, school, or volunteer site.

Personal Assistance Services or direct support professionals (PAs, personal assistants, personal attendant services, personal care services, attendant care services, caregivers) assist those with physical, hearing, seeing, speaking, remembering, understanding, intellectual, or learning disabilities. This assistance can include feeding, dressing, toileting, transferring, explaining, coaching, reading, etc.

This assistance generally falls into three categories:

1. Informal (unpaid) services provided by family members, friends, and neighbors,
2. Services paid directly out-of-pocket, and
3. Services paid by public payers, private insurance, or other sources.

Resources

[Disability Specific Supplies Emergency Kits 2023, Edition 3.0](#) checklist suggests emergency kit contents, including no-cost supplies, that you can tailor to your needs and abilities. Kits to consider for different places and situations: Keep it with you, grab and go, home, bedside, and car. Specific suggestions are made for hearing, speech, communication, and vision disabilities as well as for wheelchair and scooter users, service animal owners, and people with allergies, chemical sensitivities, and breathing conditions.

[Emergency Evacuation Preparedness: Taking Responsibility For Your Safety, A Guide For People with Disabilities and Other Activity Limitation \(2002\)](#) develop plans that integrate people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs.

- Create, review, and practice plans.
- Gather emergency health information.
- Evaluate your need to identify as someone who will need help during an evacuation.
- Practice the skill of giving quick information on how to best assist you.
- Establish personal support networks.
- Conduct an ability self-assessment.
- Know your emergency evacuation options.

[Emergency Health Information: Savvy Health Care Consumer Series \(2011\)](#) guides you through developing your emergency health information. You should keep copies of this information in your wallet (behind your driver's license or official identification card) and your [emergency kits](#). This information may help rescuers to learn important information if they find you unconscious or unable to provide information. It contains information about your medications, equipment, allergies, communication needs, preferred treatment, medical providers, and important contacts.

[Emergency Power Planning for People Who Use Electricity and Battery Dependent Assistive Technology and Medical Devices \(2019\)](#) is for people who use electricity and battery dependent technology and devices, such as:

- Breathing machines (respirators, ventilators)
- Power wheelchairs and scooters
- Oxygen, suction, or home dialysis equipment

Some of this equipment is essential to your independence, while other equipment is vital to keeping you alive! This checklist can be used to make power-backup plans.

This document also contains:

- how to establish a support team,
- how to give quick information on how best to help you,
- advice from users, and
- sources for more information.

[Emergency Preparedness for Personal Assistant Services \(PAS\) Users, Edition 2.0, \(2016\)](#) contains tips for individuals who use personal assistants, attendants, or caregivers. Planning elements include a checklist, support teams, communication, evacuating and sheltering, supplies, and more ‘how to’ details. [[WORD](#)]

Emergency Preparedness: Taking Responsibility For Your Safety - Tips for People with Activity Limitations and Disabilities (2006).

[Emergency Travel Safety Tips for Overnight Stays, Edition 1, October 2017](#). Tips for everyone. [*] Items are specifically for people with disabilities who, because of a variety of disabilities (mobility, breathing, allergies, hearing, seeing, walking, understanding, or chronic conditions), may have difficulty or be unable to: use stairwells, hear alarms, see or read exit signs, and understand instructions. Safety tips include check-in, personal support in your guest room, other safety tips, and more resources.

[Map Your Neighborhood | Washington State Military Department, Citizens Serving Citizens with Pride & Tradition](#). Neighborhoods prepared for emergencies and disaster situations save lives and reduce the severity of injuries, trauma, and property damage. The Map Your Neighborhood program guides you and your neighbors through steps to help enhance your preparedness. These steps will help you quickly and safely minimize damage and protect lives. It improves disaster readiness at the neighborhood level, 15-20 homes, or a defined area you can canvas in 1 hour. It teaches neighbors to rely on each other during the hours or days before fire, medical, police, or utility responders arrive.

[Tips for Emergency Use of Mobile Devices Edition 2](#). Cell phones and other mobile devices like tablets are a big role in our lives. You rarely leave home without them and often store important information on them. They can be a lifeline for information and communication in disasters and emergencies. Provides details regarding preparing your device to quickly get and give emergency information, including a checklist, emergency contacts and documents, alerts, texting, apps, bookmarks of important mobile sites, “no service” backup plans, skill drills, and other resources.

Required Citation

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