

Become a “Hurricane Helper”

There are many steps in hurricane preparedness, including what your actions are before, during, and after. A hurricane helper could be a very important step in preparation if you or someone you know has functional and access needs such as hearing or vision impaired, elderly, homeless, disabled, or non- English speaking. Only you can give a personal assessment of what you'll need to prepare.

Before the news of a hurricane reaches, make sure you have a support system in place. If you have functional and access needs, rescue workers may not be able to assist you immediately.

The first step is to find someone who can be your helper. Trust makes the world go around and it can save your life. Copy residence and vehicle keys and give your support system copies of your emergency information list, medical information list, disability related supplies and special equipment list, evacuation plans, any emergency documents and your personal disaster plan.

Arrange for your support system to check on you immediately if local officials give an evacuation order or if a disaster occurs. Always plan to call or contact each other through an alternate method of communication, such as text messaging or mobile phones.

Make sure your support system knows how to operate and transport any equipment specific to your disability. Make sure it is labeled and laminated instruction cards are attached.

Secondly, decide how you will contact each other, and develop alternate ways of finding each other in an emergency. Rehearse and test your plan with your helper on a regular basis.

In addition, choose an out-of-state friend or family member as a “check-in” contact that you and your family and helper can call. Everyone must know the name, address and phone number of the contact. Have two predetermined locations outside the emergency area where you and your helper can reunite, if separated. Each should be a safe distance from your home, neighborhood, or workplace.

Take the time now to develop your own personal plan for surviving a hurricane. Consult your service support agencies, home healthcare providers (if any), family, friends, neighbors and physician, if necessary.

Disaster & Emergency Preparedness

If it was just that easy, if we could all be prepared for the “unknown”.

What we do recognize or should know is that there are levels of danger when it comes to emergencies and disasters. They can be hurricanes, floods, chemical accidents, acts of terrorism, tsunamis, and many other catastrophes. They have the power to affect a small number or to spread wide. The most important thing any person with functional and access needs can do is to avoid putting off emergency and disaster planning.

The past is a clear indication of what can happen in the future. State governments and local officials unfortunately can not be everywhere at once. Consider the hurricane that hit New Orleans and other coastal cities; we'll always have chilling evacuees' accounts but from the rest, sadly, we'll never hear. These lost stories will be from the many of those with functional and access needs.

If you or someone you know is hearing or vision impaired, elderly, homeless, disabled, or non-English speaking, it is critical that you have an alternate plan for every aspect of your daily routine.

You should have strategies and tactics. Stay informed; have more than one communication system (telephone, e-mail). Establish a support group (friends, families, neighbors) within your area. Make sure they're people who are dependable and have the physical and emotional capabilities to assist you reliably. Think about what modes of transportation you use and what alternatives are also accessible. Wear medical alert tags or bracelets to identify your disability. If you have tools or aids specific to your disability, plan how you would cope without them.

Urge your loved ones, neighbors and friends to prepare.

Check with your local county chapter of American Red Cross at www.redcross.org or the www.weatherchannel.com for more information on crisis planning. For more information about specific types of emergencies in regions, visit www.ready.gov.

Hurricane Season & Special Terms

We all are aware of what a hurricane is and can imagine the damage 74 mph winds can bring. But some of the weather terms associated with the hurricane season can be confusing. If you or someone you know has functional and access needs, you should familiarize yourself with the following weather-related terms.

The hurricane season in the Atlantic, Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico begins each year on June 1st and ends on November 30th. During this time of the year, there is a relatively high incidence of hurricanes. If local radio or television broadcasts refer to any of the terms below, pay attention close attention so that you and your family can react accordingly and if necessary, follow your emergency plans.

- **Hurricane Warning:** A warning that sustained winds 64 kt (74 mph or 119 km/hr) or higher associated with a hurricane are expected in a specified coastal area in 24 hours or less. A hurricane warning can remain in effect when dangerously high water or a combination of dangerously high water and exceptionally high waves continue, even though winds may be less than hurricane force.
- **Hurricane Watch:** An announcement for specific coastal areas that hurricane conditions are possible within 36 hours.
- **Hurricane Local Statement:** A public release prepared by local National Weather Service offices in or near a threatened area giving specific details for its county/parish warning area on weather conditions, evacuation decisions made by local officials, and other precautions necessary to protect life and property.
- **Major Hurricane:** A hurricane that is classified as Category 3 or higher.
- **Present Movement:** The best estimate of the movement of the center of a tropical cyclone at a given time and given position.
- **Landfall:** The intersection of the surface center of a tropical cyclone with a coastline. The strongest winds in a tropical cyclone are not located precisely at the center. It is possible for a cyclone's strongest winds to be experienced over land even if landfall does not occur.
- **Strike:** For any particular location, a hurricane strike occurs if that location passes within the hurricane's strike circle, a circle of 125 n mi diameter, centered 12.5 n mi to the right of the hurricane center (looking in the direction of motion). This circle is meant to depict the typical extent of hurricane force winds, which are approximately 75 n mi to the right of the center and 50 n mi to the left.
- **Storm Surge:** An abnormal rise in sea level accompanying a hurricane or other intense storm, and whose height is the difference between the observed level of the sea surface and the level that would have occurred in the absence of the cyclone.
- **Direct Hit:** A close approach of a tropical cyclone to a particular location. For locations on the left-hand side of a tropical cyclone's track (looking in the direction of motion), a direct hit occurs when the cyclone passes to within a distance equal to the cyclone's radius of maximum wind. For locations on the right-hand side of the track, a direct hit occurs when the cyclone passes to within a distance equal to twice the radius of maximum wind. Compare indirect hit, strike.

- **Indirect Hit:** Generally refers to locations that do not experience a direct hit from a tropical cyclone, but do experience hurricane force winds (either sustained or gusts) or tides of at least 4 feet above normal.
- **Eye:** The roughly circular area of comparatively light winds that encompasses the center of a severe tropical cyclone. The eye is either completely or partially surrounded by the eyewall cloud.
- **Eyewall / Wall Cloud:** An organized band or ring of cumulonimbus clouds that surround the eye, or light-wind center of a tropical cyclone.
- **Fujiwhara Effect:** The tendency of two nearby tropical cyclones to rotate cyclonically about each other.
- **Relocated:** A term used in an advisory to indicate that a vector drawn from the preceding advisory position to the latest known position is not necessarily a reasonable representation of the cyclone's movement.

Help yourself prepare through researching your local Red Cross chapter at www.redcross.org. If you'd need transportation services during an emergency, dial 2-1-1 to pre-register for evacuation assistance in the event of an emergency. Make sure you have a protective action plan and a three-week supply backup for things you couldn't live without. For a longer, more-detailed list of hurricane terms, visit <http://www.fema.gov>.

Making Sure Your Supply Kits Fit Your Needs

In today's uncertain times, everyone needs a basic emergency supply kit.

If you or someone you know has functional and access needs (hearing or vision impaired, elderly, homeless, disabled, or non-English speaking), contact your local emergency management or civil defense office and American Red Cross Chapter to find out what can happen in your region. Ask what types of disasters are most likely to happen. Request information on how to prepare for each possibility.

Also, take the time to learn about your community's warning signals: what they sound like and what you should do when you hear them.

Then think about the basics for survival. Individual needs certainly vary according to your location and needs, but everyone needs food, water, clean air and any life-sustaining items. A basic supply kit can be crucial to your survival during an emergency. Recommended basic emergency supplies for persons with functional and access needs include:

- Water, one gallon of water per person per day for at least three days, for drinking and sanitation.
- Food, at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food and a can opener if kit contains canned food
- Battery-powered or hand crank radio and a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert and extra batteries for both
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Extra batteries for oxygen, breathing devices, hearing aids, cochlear implants, cell phone, radios, pagers or PDAs
- First aid kit
- Whistle to signal for help
- Dust mask to help filter contaminated air and plastic sheeting and duct tape to shelter-in-place
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation
- Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities
- Local maps
- Pet food, extra water and supplies for your pet or service animal
- Copies of prescriptions and important family papers (insurance policies, deeds, stocks, passports, birth certificates)

Of course, you will need to tailor the contents of the kits to your specific needs and abilities. Ideally, you will need to plan for up to two weeks and include every item that you must use on a daily and weekly basis – such as: medication, syringes, ostomy bags, catheters, padding for example.

A “carry on you” kit is for the essential items you need to keep with you at all times. Have you made a list of the essential items?

“Grab and go kits” are easy to carry kits you can grab if you have to leave in a hurry – this includes the things that you cannot do without but are not so big or heavy that you cannot manage them independently.

A "home kit" is your large kit with water, food, first aid, clothing, bedding, tools, emergency supplies, and your disability specific items. It would include items that you need to be self-sufficient for several days either at home or at an emergency shelter.

A "bedside kit" includes items that you will need if you are trapped in or near your bed and unable to get to other parts of your home.

Remember to store kits securely in a set place so they are easy to find. Keep important items in a consistent, convenient and secured place so you can quickly and easily get to them.

Protective Action Plan for People with Functional and Access Needs

It's one of those scenarios where it's easier said than done, but if you are asked to evacuate or take shelter during a hurricane or disaster, stay calm. Evacuation and taking shelter orders will be broadcast over the radio and television or directly by law enforcement officers in your area.

If you or someone you know is hearing or vision impaired, elderly, homeless, disabled, or non-English speaking, pay close attention to local instructions in the event of an emergency.

If you are asked to take shelter, stay indoors, either inside your home or in a nearby building. Do not leave unless told to evacuate. Close all windows, doors and fireplace dampers. This limits outside air from entering your home. Turn off any heating or cooling system that draws in air from the outside. Use portable fans or ceiling fans to circulate the air inside.

In the case of an evacuation, instructions can be confusing and overwhelming but remember responding to any emergency requires common sense and simple precautions. Gather what you've put aside (emergency supply kit, emergency plan) and make sure you limit telephone use to emergencies only. Also, plan two evacuation routes because some roads may be closed or blocked in a disaster. Do you have a place to go to if your home must be evacuated? Who will you travel with? Do you have a backup if that person can't reach you? Listen closely as evacuation orders are issued and if you are in an area ordered to evacuate, do so immediately.

If you won't have any modes of transportation in an evacuation, you can pre-register by dialing 211 for evacuation assistance in the event of an emergency. Once you are registered, many counties require you put a sign in a front window or tape it to the front door which states "Assistance Needed" during an emergency.

If you need additional information on evacuating and sheltering family members or people you know with functional and access needs, visit www.TexasOnline.com.

Registering with 211 Texas

Ever thought about being prepared for a natural disaster but didn't know who to call? Many counties are required to voluntarily register people who need evacuation assistance in the event of an emergency such as a hurricane, such as hearing or vision impaired, elderly, homeless, disabled, or non-English speaking. For those who haven't registered, make sure your name and address are recorded by your county chapter so that they will know to assist you in an emergency.

For example, in some areas during an evacuation, appropriate vehicles will be sent to transport pre-registered residents to a public shelter, Special Needs Unit, or hospital. However, transportation will not be to private destinations such as a relative's home. Make sure you explain your functional and access needs clearly when registering, since dialysis, respirators, etc. may require very specific accommodations while oxygen may be offered at several Functional and Access Needs Shelters. If your functional and access needs require that you go to a hospital, consult with your physician about the need for a signed letter from him/her authorizing preadmission.

The 211 Texas is an information and referral provider for the State of Texas in the event of a disaster that connects callers to a resource specialist who has access to a comprehensive database listing of nearly all health and human services that exist in Texas. This includes, but is not limited to, emergency shelters, help with transportation, food, and counseling.

The operation was established in 1947 but today, it's partnered with the Salvation Army, American Red Cross, Interfaith Ministries, Volunteer Houston, and Seventh Day Adventists. They've developed an integrated system for placing spontaneous volunteers who want to help during the height of a disaster. Services are also available in multiple languages using either in-house capabilities or a translator service.

If you are registering a family member or elderly/disabled person, be able to confirm you have their consent. Before calling, have their complete contact information, emergency contact information, and the reason that the individual/s needs transportation assistance.

Stop thinking about being prepared, and register today by dialing 211.

Functional and Access Needs Supply Backup For Emergencies

Picture being without your wheelchair or your respirator-or anything you depend on to survive each day. That image can be pretty frightening as it is life-threatening. If you or someone you know is hearing or vision impaired, elderly, homeless, disabled, or non-English speaking, the following should not be overlooked or on your emergency planning checklist. Start your checklist of essentials by recording a daily log of your activities, what you use each day, for example. Repeat this process for your weekly and monthly activities. Special attention should be paid to the following:

If you use a wheelchair or scooter:

- Keep a patch kit and can of seal-in-air product in your portable disaster supplies kit to repair flat tires, unless they are puncture-proof. Also, keep an extra supply of inner tubes.
- Keep a pair of heavy gloves in your portable disaster supplies kit to use while wheeling or making your way over glass and debris.
- In areas prone to earthquakes, keep the wheelchair wheels locked and the wheelchair close to your bed at night to be sure it does not move or fall over.

If you use a motorized wheelchair or scooter:

- Have an extra battery. A car battery also can be used with a wheelchair but will not last as long as a wheelchair's deep-cycle battery.
- Check with your vendor to know if you can charge your battery by either connecting jumper cables to a vehicle battery or connecting batteries to a converter that plugs into a vehicle's cigarette lighter. Caution: Charge only one battery at a time.
- If available, store a lightweight manual wheelchair for backup.

If you are blind or have a visual disability:

- Store a talking or Braille clock or large-print timepiece with extra batteries.
- Have a high-powered flashlight with wide beam and extra batteries.
- Have at least one extra white cane.
- Mark your disaster supplies items with fluorescent tape, large print or Braille.
- Mark your gas, water and electric shutoff valves with fluorescent tape, large print or Braille.
- Store extra magnifiers.
- Have an extra pair of glasses if you wear them.
- Make photocopies of your information lists.

If you are deaf or have a hearing loss:

- Consider getting a small, portable, battery-operated television set or a weather radio with visual/text display that warns of weather emergencies. Emergency broadcasts may give information in American Sign Language (ASL) or open captioning.
- Keep pads and pencils in your home disaster supplies kit and with your car disaster supplies. Keep them with you at all times for communication.
- Keep a flashlight, a whistle or other noisemaker, and pad and pencil by your bed.

- Keep in the disaster supplies kits (in your home and car) and with you at all times, a card that indicates that you are deaf. Include any other appropriate communication information such as, "I do (or do not) know American Sign Language (ASL)," or, "My service animal may legally remain with me."

If you have a speech-related or communication disability:

- Consider buying a power converter if you use a laptop computer to communicate. A power converter allows most laptops (12 volts or less) to be operated from the cigarette lighter on the dashboard of a vehicle.
- Be sure to have pencil and paper with you as a backup communication resource.
- If you use an augmentative communication device (such as an electronic communicator or artificial larynx) that allows you to communicate by voice, be sure to keep it close to you at night in a safe place.
- Store copies of a word or letter board and preprinted key phrases you would use in case of an emergency in all of your disaster supplies kits, your wallet, purse, etc.

If you use self-administered medical treatments:

- Keep in mind that traffic delays and/or severe weather hazards can happen when you do not expect them. Be sure to carry the equipment and fluids (temperature controlled) you will need when traveling.

If you have a cognitive disability:

- Keep a copy of any instructions or information you think you will need in the disaster supplies kits you keep both at home and in your car. Prepare this information in a way that is easy for you to understand. You may want to break down the information into a step-by-step outline.
- This format will help you remember what to do during the confusion of a disaster.
- Have a pencil and paper ready to keep track of any new instructions or information you may receive.

Multiple Chemical Sensitivities, Breathing conditions:

- Keep towels, masks, industrial respirators or other supplies you can use to filter your air supply.
- Have a N95-rated particulate filter mask (protects against dust, radiological dust and biological agents).

The list might be overwhelming, but the important thing is to start adding to your supply backup in small increments. The more you prepare, the better you can protect yourself.

For more information on medical and equipment supply, visit www.redcross.org.