

Preparation for People in Special Circumstances

As you make your preparations, keep in mind that certain groups, such as children, the elderly and disabled, and pets are more at risk. Remember to think ahead about prescription medication and sanitation.

Children

Remember to include children when making disaster preparations. They can have an assigned part in the Family Disaster Plan, be taught to recognize danger signals (such as community warning systems), and memorize important family information and an emergency meeting place.

Take the following steps:

- Tell your children that after a disaster the family will get together again but that it may take from three days to two weeks.
- Educate them on the difference between entertainment (generally exaggerated for special effects) and reality.
- Give them "disaster buddies" (stuffed animals) they can talk to afterwards.
- Check with schools and day care about disaster policies and procedures.
- Work with schools and day care to make sure they conduct proper disaster drills.
- Make plans for someone to pick up children at school or day care if you are unable to do so.

Your child can have a personal kit kept at the foot of the bed or with the family kit:

- Extra clothes and shoes—keep a sturdy pair upside down under the bed
- Mittens, scarf, jacket
- Disaster buddy
- Books and games
- Comfort food
- Flashlight with spare batteries, or light stick
- Whistle
- Paper with home address, phone number, parents' names, plus an emergency contact number
- Toothbrush, toothpaste
- Comb, brush

Make sure you have the following for any infants:

- Formula
- Bottles
- Medications
- Diapers
- Powdered milk

During a disaster, children look to the adults for help. How you react gives them clues how to react. As an adult, you need to keep control of the situation. Immediately after the disaster, try to reduce your child's fear and anxiety.

Keep the family together. Make the children part of whatever you are doing. They worry that their parents won't return.

Calmly and firmly explain the situation. Tell them what you know about the disaster and explain what will happen next. Get down to their eye level and talk to them.

Encourage children to talk and ask questions and describe what they are feeling. Listen to what they say and remember to take their feelings seriously.

Include children in recovery activities. Give them their own responsibilities.

Be aware that after a disaster, children are most afraid that:

- The event will happen again.
- Someone will be killed or injured.
- They will be separated from the family.
- They will be left alone.

After the disaster, children are reassured by the household getting back to its normal routine. Maintain control, be understanding but firm, make decisions for them. Avoid inactivity.

Seniors and People with Activity Limitations

For those with impaired mobility, evacuating during a disaster may be difficult. Debris may block exits and elevators may not work. To prepare and make sure you can evacuate after a disaster:

- Let neighbors know you may have trouble getting out.
- Clear a path.
- Find alternate routes.
- Secure heavy objects, such as bookcases, which might block your path.

If you are in a wheelchair, practice locking the wheels and covering your head with your arms.

After a disaster: If you are trapped, do anything to attract attention. If you've previously asked your neighbors, they will be looking for you. If you need help, ask. For the hearing impaired, the biggest threat is after the quake, when communicating might be difficult. To help with this:

- Make sure you have a flashlight, paper, and pencil next to your bed.

- Ask a neighbor to be a source of emergency information as it comes over his radio.
- Remind neighbors and co-workers that you cannot hear an evacuation order.
- Store extra hearing aid batteries at home and at work or school.
- If you are trapped, knock on doors or hit objects together to let others know you are there. Have others give you disaster information as it comes over the radio. For those who are vision impaired, keep in mind that your usual surroundings may be disrupted, exits may be blocked, and seeing-eye dogs might be too injured or frightened to be relied upon.

To help prepare:

- Keep an extra cane at home and at work or school.
- Know alternate escape routes.
- Talk with a neighbor beforehand.
- If you hear falling objects, there will probably be obstructions. Ask others for help. Use your cane. If you are trapped, make noise to alert others. If the electricity fails and it is dark, you may be able to assist others in finding their way.

Prescription Medication

Prescription medication is an important item to include in your preparations. Try to keep two weeks worth of medication on hand at all times. Remember:

- Heart and high blood pressure medications
- Insulin
- Denture needs
- Contact lenses and supplies; extra eyeglasses
- Prescription medication
- Toilets & Sanitation

However, this can be expensive, depending on insurance limitations, and some medications are restricted, so this can be difficult. Talk with your doctor ahead of time about possibilities of addressing this difficulty.

There may not be running water, and the toilets may not be working. Make sure you have the following on hand:

- Toilet paper
- Towelettes
- Feminine supplies
- Plastic garbage bags, ties
- Plastic bucket with tight lid
- Household chlorine bleach
- Soap, liquid detergent
- Personal hygiene items
- Disinfectant

During disasters, sewage systems may not be functioning. During these times it may be necessary to create temporary solutions for collecting human waste. Line the inside of a toilet bowl or large pail with heavy-duty plastic garbage bags. Place cat litter, fireplace ashes, or sawdust at the bottom of each bag. Securely tie and remove the bag each night to a protected location such as the basement. Do not bury waste.

Persons with Limited English Proficiency

People who do not speak English as a primary language may have trouble understanding critical messages. They often face barriers to giving and receiving information:

- Critical messages are only in English
- Distrust between government agency and community
- Cultural practices between agencies and communities that are misunderstood.

These barriers can lead to more distrust. But many community organizations, by becoming involved and training before a disaster hits, have empowered local communities in assisting their members. But once in an emergency, some things to keep in mind when working with someone from a different culture, or who speaks another language:

- Everyone deserves to be treated with respect.
- Another language is a strength. People who speak other languages can often assist, and in assisting, can find ways to feel more in control in an emergency.
- Understand that there will be things beyond language that can be different. People may have a practice not understood by an assisting agency, and an agency may have procedures not understood by a community.

Before a disaster, see if your local community organizations, such as your church, mosque, temple, synagogue, cultural center, or other people in your community can get involved in training, such as Are You Ready, or Citizen's Emergency Response Team (CERT). This will help to promote coordination of information within your community. The best defense in a disaster is still neighbors helping neighbors.