



**Helping people with disabilities
to prepare for emergencies
Presentation**

Emergencies and disasters can make conditions difficult for everyone, but for those with disabilities, the impacts of an emergency might be much more disputing. Service providers such as fire and police departments, support organizations and other nonprofit organizations will have some plans in place, but it is important for a person with a disability and their family or support network to make sure that their needs will be met following a disaster because services may not be available right away.

This is a loose outline for an emergency preparedness presentation. Please feel free to customize it to fit the group you are talking to.

Part 1: Type of Hazards in Our Area

Read: In order to prepare for emergencies, we must know what we are preparing for. We must be informed of what can happen here and how it can affect us.

Ask: What types of emergencies have you experienced in the St. Louis area?

Note to presenter: Start with what people have experienced because that is a good way to personalize the disaster. After you have exhausted emergencies that people have experienced, ask what else could occur in the area. If board available, jot down responses or simply repeat them back if board not available or if it is not appropriate to jot it down.

Ask: What types of emergencies could happen in the St. Louis area?

Possible answers:

- Chemical Spills/Gas leaks*
- Earthquakes*
- Floods*
- Heat Emergencies*
- House fires*
- Ice Storms*
- Pandemic Flu*
- Power Outages*
- Severe Thunderstorms*
- Terrorist Acts*
- Tornadoes*

Ask: Emergencies, such as the list we came up with may impact us directly or indirectly. What are ways that disasters may impact or affect us?

Note to presenter: *Sometimes you may need to give hints or ask additional questions, such as: Does anyone have equipment that requires electricity? Do you Use public transportation? Etc.)*

- Communication system disruption*
- Road/bridge/transportation damage*
- Electricity may be out*
- Water may be out*
- Gas may be out*
- Emergency Services may be overloaded*
- Property damage/loss*
- Families may be separated*
- Facilities such as schools, clinics, pharmacies, grocery stores, etc. may be closed*

Part 2: Personal Support Network

Read: Even if you typically handle daily activities on your own or with minimal assistance, during an emergency you may need some extra assistance to help with activities such as evacuation. Rather than waiting until an emergency occurs, it is recommended you should establish a Personal Support Network.

This is a team of people who can help you prepare for and respond to a disaster. Ideally, your network should include at least three people per location where you spend a lot of time (Home, work, school, etc.) You should not rely on one person because following an emergency they may be unable to help you. (*Or in the case of*

a caregiver, the Personal Support Network, would help him or her during the emergency.)

It is important that these people are willing to help you and are aware of your capabilities. In addition make sure they know how to operate any equipment you may need to use.

Part 3: Be Informed

Ask: Think about the last time we had a tornado warning; how did you find out one was occurring or about to occur?

Ask: What are some ways in which you may be notified if there is an emergency?

Answers may include:

- Local television/radio*
- Sirens (note that they are primarily for outside use)*
- NOAA weather radios*
- Community call-out service (like reverse 9-1-1)*
- Friends/relatives may call*
- Person to person*
- Email or text message services such as the National Weather Service or nixle.com*
- Smart phone applications*

Read: Make sure you know how you would be notified if there was an emergency in your community and consider getting a NOAA weather radio with SAME technology. NOAA Weather Radios typically will sound an alarm when there is a weather watch or warning and feature a battery back-up if the power goes out.

Note to presenter: *Omit sections as appropriate for audience.*

[Ask: One of the biggest concerns for those who are deaf or hard of hearing is how to receive emergency warnings. Most public systems are auditory, so you may miss the warnings.] **What are some things you could do to make sure you find out about a warning? *Field Answers***

Read: To ensure you receive these warnings, there are a few different options someone may choose: *(Share any answers the audience didn't come up with.)*

- There are weather radios that can be used with strobes, shakers or lamps. These can be expensive.
- There are text and email services, such as the National Weather Service or nixle.com in the St. Louis area. Depending on the settings on your phone, you would be able to have the phone vibrate if you received one of these

messages. The service itself is free; the only fees that apply are those for receiving a text message.

- Many smart phones have applications which act like weather radios. On some of these applications, the phone can be set to vibrate when a warning is in place. The Red Cross Tornado app is free and offers this service for tornado warnings. Other apps exist; there will be fees for many of these apps.
- Finally, you can make arrangements with someone to call you if there is a warning. It may be best to have more than one person do this, in case someone misses or sleeps through a warning.

Read: It's important to make sure you have smoke alarms installed in every level of your home, and especially near bedrooms. Make sure to test the smoke detectors once a month and replace the batteries at least once a year. We recommend that you change the batteries at daylight savings time as an easy way to remember. If you are unable to reach your smoke alarms, you can use a long pole such as a broom handle or you can ask someone to help.

Read: It's important to note that studies show that children often do not wake up to the sound of a smoke alarm. Make sure you know if your children or someone's children you may know are those children.

Read: Also, it's important to note that tornado sirens, although sometimes can be heard indoors, are designed to be heard outdoors. Do not rely on the outdoor warning siren to be informed that a tornado is in your area.

Part 3: Make a Plan

Ask: If there was a tornado right now, who would know how to get in touch with your child, spouse or other loved one? (*Take answers.*)

Read: Most of us would pick up our cell phone and try to call those we care about; however, following an emergency, we may not be able to use cell phones. This is why it is important that we determine our emergency communication plan *before* an emergency strikes.

An emergency communication plan can be broken into three main parts: evacuation, meeting places, and an out-of-town contact.

Evacuation Plan

Read: It is important that you have an evacuation plan in case you need to evacuate quickly because of fire or other emergency. You should identify two exits in each room of your house - one will most likely be a window. Depending on what story the

room is on, it may be necessary to purchase an escape ladder or if you do not have access to one, you can go to the window and use something like a towel, cloth or whistle to get the attention of the firefighters when they arrive.

If you need assistance evacuating, it is important to make sure that you have worked with your personal support team to make sure they know how to help you. (*For instance giving you appropriate directions to help you find your way out or using equipment such as an evacuation chair or sled.*) It is important to practice these procedures before an emergency happens so that your evacuation is not slowed because people are learning how to proceed during the event.

Depending on what type of damage has occurred and what type of disability you have—for instance if you are blind and unable to see the damage, or if you are in a wheelchair and cannot get over the debris, it may be easier and possibly safer in some types of emergencies to stay put rather than to try to navigate away from where you are. Think about when it would be best to stay where you are and how you would notify family or the members of your support network about your location.

In case of events like fire, you should consider practicing by yourself as well, particularly if there are times that you may be the only person at home and there would be a possibility that something could occur when you are home by yourself.

It is also important to designate a meeting place in your neighborhood for your family. This may be the tree in your front yard, your neighbors' porch or a mailbox. Once you've chosen your meeting place, make sure everyone knows where this place is and practice your evacuation plan.

Meeting Places

Read: You should also designate a meeting place outside of your neighborhood. You would use this meeting place if you were away from home when an emergency occurred and you were unable to get back home.

For example, there may be flooding that makes the roads into your neighborhood impassable. Or maybe emergency personnel won't allow people into your neighborhood out of safety concerns. This meeting place should be a location that everyone in your household is familiar with. It can be a family member's home, house of worship or other location that would make sense for your household. When deciding on your out-of-neighborhood meeting place, consider where your family members spend large amounts of time, like work, school and other activities.

If someone in your household would be unable to get to a meeting place on his or her own, you should take this into account when choosing the location. You may

choose a location nearby where the person spends a lot of time, or you may include plans for how to help that person get to the family meeting spot.

Out-of-Town Contact and Other Communications

Read: As I mentioned earlier, it is important to designate an out-of-town contact. This person would be able to relay messages between those who are in the affected area. Make sure the designated person is someone who is relatively easy to get in touch with. Also, discuss with them their role in your plan.

Text messages may also be a good way to get information to people following an emergency. This is because the system is able to keep trying to send a message. If you have family members who aren't familiar with texting, you may want to pre-program some messages and show them how to send messages.

You should still maintain the other aspects of your communication plan.

Practice your Plan

Read: Once you have developed your evacuation and communication plans, your family should practice once every six months and revise as necessary. You should practice your plan at different times of day or night, because emergencies occur at different times of day. After you have completed your practice, your family should discuss if there are changes that need to be made to make the plan work better.

Be sure to involve your personal support network when you practice.

Pets and Service Animals

Ask: How many of you have pets or service animals? *Show of hands.*

Read: It is important to include your pets and service animals in your emergency plan. You should have food and supplies for them in your kit, and you should take them with you if you need to evacuate. However, it is important to know that pets aren't allowed in emergency shelters (except for service animals), so you should have a plan for your pets, such as going with a family member, friend or your vet. If you have a service animals, in order to make it easy for you service animal to be allowed into a shelter, make sure you have the vest and copies of your animal's paperwork. This isn't required, but will ensure the process goes smoothly.

Part 4: Get a Kit

Read: It is important to compile an emergency preparedness kit for your family. The kit should contain supplies for at least three days. It is also recommended that you

should store up to two weeks worth of additional supplies in your home in case you are stuck in your home for an extended period of time.

Ask: When you are putting together your kit, what are some things you should include?

Again, if board available, write down appropriate suggestions from audience.

Answers should include:

- **Water.** *Have at least one gallon per person per day for three days.*
- **Food.** *Pack non-perishable, high-protein items, including energy bars, ready-to-eat soup, peanut butter, etc. Select foods that require no refrigeration, preparation or cooking, and little or no water.*
- **Flashlight.** *Hand-crank and alternative energy options are available. Include extra batteries, if applicable.*
- **Radio.** *Include extra batteries or use a hand-crank radio.*
- **First aid kit.** *Include a first aid reference guide, as well as supplies.*
- **Medications.** *Don't forget prescription and non-prescription items. You should have a seven day supply of prescription medication. If it needs to be refrigerated (i.e. insulin) a note can be taped to the top of the kit as a reminder to get it from the refrigerator.*
- **Adaptive Equipment** *Mobility aids, transfer devices, etc.*
- **Hearing Aid Supplies.** *Batteries for hearing aids or cochlear implants, a hearing aid dehumidifier kit or jar.*
- **Personal items.** *Eyeglasses, contact lenses and solution are some examples of personal items.*
- **Tools.** *Gather a wrench to turn off gas if necessary, a manual can opener, screwdriver, hammer, pliers, knife, duct tape, plastic sheeting, and garbage bags and ties.*
- **Clothing.** *Provide a change of clothes for everyone, including sturdy shoes and work gloves. Also include seasonal items as needed.*
- **Copies of important papers.** *Store in a waterproof container like a zip-lock bag. Papers include identification cards, insurance policies, birth certificates, passports, etc.*
- **Comfort items.** *Toys, stuffed animals, books, and cards can serve as entertainment.*
- **Hygiene supplies.** *You may need toilet paper, towelettes, feminine supplies, personal hygiene items, bleach, etc.*
- **Money.** *Have cash. ATMs and credit cards won't work if the power is out.*
- **Contact information.** *Carry a current list of family phone numbers and e-mail addresses, including your out-of-town contact.*

- **Pet supplies.** For each pet, include food, water, a collar, a leash/cage/carrying case, litter box or plastic bags, tags, any medications and vaccination information.
- **Map.** Consider marking an evacuation route from your local area.

Fill in gaps of supplies that are not mentioned, although you don't need to name every supply item. Make sure that food, water, radio, flashlight, first aid kit and copies of important papers are mentioned.

Read: You may already have many of the items for an emergency kit in your home; it's just a matter of putting them together in a central location. You can store these items together in backpacks, rolling suitcases, plastic tubs, or whatever works best for your family. Some people may prefer to purchase a kit, which you can from the Red Cross. Either way you may still need to gather some items, such as copies of important documents or comfort items. It's important to remember to check expiration dates on supplies in your kit, and to make sure that you have a three-day supply of what you need. To ensure that nothing goes to waste, remove items like food and water from your supply kit and add them to your everyday supplies.

For people with kids, it is great to mention that having kids help put the kit together is a great way to get them involved. Kids can choose some of the food they want, and also things like a stuffed animal and things to do. Families may want to also consider having kids have their own bag/backpack which contains the items the kids want to have in the kit. This gives the kids buy-in to the emergency plan.

Read: You may also want to consider having smaller kits in places where you spend a lot of time, like work or in your car. That way even if you aren't at home when an emergency occurs you have some supplies available.

Read: If you use adaptive equipment, you need to make a list of what you must take with you. Plan ahead of time what could be left behind if necessary and what is most critical. Also take into consideration what needs power and make sure you have safe back-up power and know how long it will last. If it is possible to have back up of some things (such as a non-electric wheel chair) have those items in an easily accessible location and make sure that your personal support network is aware of those items and the location. Make a list of what you need to take with you, power needs, and instructions on how to use all these things – make sure your personal support network knows these things.

Read: In order to make sure that your disaster plan continues to meet your needs it is important to look over it at least every six months or so.

- Check kit every 6 months
- Test smoke alarm every month; change batteries at least 1x per year

- Check with network to see if they are still able to be involved
- Have there been any changes to your equipment or medications? Insurance? Contact information?
- Have you tested parts of your plan? Have you practiced evacuation, using out of town contact, going to your meeting place, and other parts of your plan?

Part 5: Conclusion

Read: This is a good foundation of general things that you can do to be better prepared for any emergency; however, these will not be comprehensive or customized to meet your personal needs. Find additional resources in the supplemental inserts for varying disabilities, the *Preparing for Disasters for People with Disabilities and Other Special Needs* booklet, and in conversations with people in your personal support network.

If you have any questions, please contact the Red Cross Preparedness Specialist at (314) 314-2753.