



Safe Environments

Healthy Workers

GUIDELINES FOR COPING WITH A CRISIS IF YOU ARE A DISABLED PERSON

Often strategies for coping with emergency situations are directed toward non-disabled people who would, for example, have the ability to take stairs to evacuate an apartment building during a power outage, easily carrying a flashlight and an emergency kit. But what if you are elderly, disabled, visually impaired or who need mobility aids? For you, the guidelines for preventing and coping with a crisis are different.

HERE ARE STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO PREPARE

- Keep a list of your network of friends, relatives, health care providers and neighbours who understand your particular needs.
- Keep a list of facilities that provide life-sustaining equipment or treatment.
- Keep the list in an emergency kit that also includes a flashlight and a fully charged cell phone.
- Enrol in a medical alert program that will signal for help if you're immobilized.
- For people who are blind or visually impaired, keep an extra collapsible cane by your bed. Attach a whistle to the cane in case you need to attract attention.
- For people who are hearing impaired, include extra batteries for your hearing aids in your emergency kit.
- If you are not evacuating and it is safe to stay in your apartment, make sure someone knows you are there and that you are safe.
- If you have a service animal make sure that you have a prepared “go bag” to ensure that they are also cared for in a crisis



PLANNING AHEAD IS CRITICAL

Preparing for an evacuation is critical for those with mobility issues. Keep a list of your network of friends, relatives, health care providers and neighbours who understand your particular needs. Make a list of those needs, including details about medical conditions, medications, any allergies, blood type, accommodation needs and specific mobility needs. A first responder who does not know you may be the first on the scene, and will need to understand your situation. Also, keep a list of facilities that provide life-sustaining equipment or treatment. You will need a place to go.

Keep this information in an emergency kit that also includes a flashlight and a fully charged cell phone. Include paper, pen and even pre-printed key phrases, particularly if you have communication challenges. Enrol in a medical alert program that will signal for help if you are immobilized. If you live in an apartment building, advise the property management that you may need assistance, whether you are staying in your apartment or evacuating. This will help them to brief first responders, who must perform triage for an evacuation plan. If you are not disabled, and emergency responders are ascending or descending a staircase with mobility aids or evacuees, give them the right of way.

If you are not evacuating and it is safe to stay in your apartment, make sure someone knows you are there and that you are safe. Arrange for someone or a service group to look in on you and to bring groceries or medications if necessary. Remember that if you have no power, the food in your freezer will remain safe to eat only for the next two days.

HELPING YOUR PETS OR SERVICE ANIMALS

It is important to also plan for your pet or service animal in a time of crisis or emergency. Keep a list of neighbours or friends who could take your pets temporarily until the crisis has abated. Also, keep a record of local veterinary clinics and animal shelters. If you are evacuating your home, do not leave your pets behind. Have an emergency kit or “go bag” for your pet prepared in advance. It should include the following:

- Collar, ID tags and leash
- Enough food to last at least a week
- An appropriate carrier, box or cage
- A muzzle for dogs
- Any medications
- A manual can opener and a plastic lid
- Plastic bags, litter box and litter
- Current photos of your pet, for reunification purposes
- Pet First Aid kit and handbook
- Portable fencing or baby gates.

Outside your home, keep service animal crated or securely leashed. Animals act differently under stress: ordinarily, calm pets may panic and try to escape. Consider having your pet microchipped in case you become separated. Microchipping makes your pet easily identifiable at any veterinary's office through a national registry.

If you see a stray pet during a crisis and you can safely take it to any vet's office; the vet will be able to reunite the pet with its owner if the pet is microchipped,

BEING PREPARED AT WORK

It is good to make plans at your workplace to ensure that your needs are considered in an emergency. Employers are required by Ontario's Accessibility Employment Standard to provide individualized emergency response information to disabled employees to ensure their safety. Some things that your employer will want to discuss with you include reviewing evacuation plans, fire safety plans, alarm systems and procedures to ensure that notification procedures are established which address your specific needs. For example, if you have low vision you may need assistance during a blackout to find escape routes or stairs; if you have hearing loss you may not hear the alarms systems; if you have asthma, you may want assistance using stairs or walking long distances particularly if there is smoke, dust or fumes. Your employer should then provide you with emergency information and if required get your consent to share this information with your coworkers so that they can assist you in an emergency. ¹

OTHER RESOURCES, REFERENCES AND INFORMATION

How to provide accessible emergency information to staff: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-provide-accessible-emergency-information-staff>

Government of Canada Emergency Preparedness Guide for People with Disabilities/Special Needs
<https://www.getprepared.gc.ca/cnt/rsracs/pblctns/pplwthdsblts/index-en.aspx>

Ontario Emergency Management Office Emergency Preparedness Guide for People with Disabilities
https://www.emergencymanagementontario.ca/english/beprepared/diversegroups/peoplewithdisabilities/disability_guide_english.html

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¹ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-provide-accessible-emergency-information-staff>