

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

By: Chris Floyd
Emergency Services Director
Capital Area Chapter
American Red Cross

Senior citizens can protect themselves and cope with disaster by planning ahead. Knowing what to do is your best protection. First of all, it is a good idea to know which kinds of disasters are most common in your particular area. Preparing for a disaster that is likely to happen in your area will help you be prepared for any disaster. Here in Florida, we are prone to severe weather storms, such as tropical storms and hurricanes. Having a Hurricane Survival Plan is absolutely necessary. Even if you have physical limitation, you can still protect yourself by having a plan.

Staying aware of weather conditions is also very important. Listen to daily weather forecasts during hurricane season (June 1 - November 30). You should know your designated Emergency Alert System stations. As hurricanes develop, they are monitored closely by the National Weather Service. You can purchase special NOAA Weather Radios that broadcast National Weather Service warnings, watches, forecasts and other hazard information 24 hours a day. They are available at stores that sell electronics. Call your local National Weather Service office for more information.

It is also a good idea to have a disaster plan so that you can respond quickly and efficiently to an emergency. Plan and practice the best escape routes from your home. Post emergency phone numbers near the phone. Arrange to have a "contact"- someone who will call and check on you in the event of an emergency. Teach those who may need to assist you how to operate necessary equipment such as respirators. If necessary, plan on transportation if you need to evacuate to an American Red Cross shelter. Those who need assistance should register NOW with County Emergency Management. If you require oxygen, check with your supplier about emergency plans. If you evacuate, remember to take medications with you, along with written instructions regarding your care. For those senior citizens living in a nursing home, adult congregate living (ACLF) or boarding home, the administrator should be contacted to learn about the disaster/evacuation plan for that facility.

For your safety and comfort, you need to have emergency supplies packed and ready in one place before disaster hits. You should assemble enough supplies to last for at least three days. Supplies should be stored in an easy to carry container, such as a back pack or duffel bag with an identification tag attached.

General Emergency Supplies

- o Water supply - one gallon per person per day stored in sealed, unbreakable containers that are easy to handle. It is smart to identify the storage date and replace every six months.
- o Non perishable food supply- including any special foods you may require
- o Battery-powered radio and flashlight with extra batteries
- o Change of clothing, rain gear, and sturdy shoes
- o Blanket or sleeping bag
- o Extra set of keys
- o Cash, credit cards, and change for pay phones
- o Personal hygiene supplies
- o Phone numbers of local and non-local relatives or friends
- o Insurance agent's name and number

Supplies for your Medical Needs

- o First-aid kit
- o Prescription medicines, list of medications including dosage, and a list of any allergies
- o Extra eye glasses
- o Extra hearing aid batteries
- o List of style and serial numbers of medical devices such as pacemakers
- o Medical insurance and Medicare cards
- o List of doctors and relative or friend who should be notified if you are injured

Going to a shelter may be necessary, especially if the disaster affects a large number of people and/or the emergency is expected to last several days. Senior citizens can best cope with the conditions in a shelter by, again, having a well-thought-out plan. If you need to evacuate, take your Disaster Supplies kit, and make sure to lock your home. If you receive home care, coordinate with your home care provider for evacuation procedures. Don't forget to notify authorities of any special needs you may have. They will do their best to accommodate you and make you comfortable. And if you are sure you have enough time (in most cases, you should have enough time, if you stay informed), let others know when you left and where you are going. Make arrangements for pets-- they are not allowed in public shelters. And, if time permits, shut off water, gas, and electricity if instructed to do so and if you know how. Gas must be turned back on by a professional.