



the beat



Safety Begins at Home: *Emergency Escape Plan for Loved Ones with Mobility Challenges*

Knowing how to evacuate a loved one or how a loved one can take shelter during an emergency may not be as easy as just stepping out a door, or crawling out a window, especially if your loved one has mobility challenges and physical issues. Not only do you have to consider how you yourself will get out of the house during an emergency, but how will you get to your loved one to make sure they get out? How realistic is it for you to assume that your loved one will be able to assist themselves in order to evacuate the house or to take shelter some place other than their room? Once a safety plan has been created, it is wise to rehearse it, making sure that there are no other problems that might be incurred during an emergency. It's also a good idea to discuss a finalized evacuation plan with other family members who may not live with you, as well as with neighbors, friends, and any other personal care attendants that may be a part of the in-home caregiving team. Talk about the dangers of fire, severe weather, earthquakes and other emergencies. This way, people other than the caregiver will know where to locate a loved one in a timely manner and assist with anything they may need at that moment.

Many communities extend special assistance to those who have mobility problems by registering these people with a local fire department or emergency management office. Professional help will then be administered quickly and with priority in an emergency to people with physical limitations and mobility challenges. If you are the caregiver of a special-needs child who is mainstreamed into the public school or daycare system, ask the teachers or directors about emergency plans for the school, and how it will include and effect your young loved one. Also, if

you currently utilize a personal care attendant from an agency, find out whether the agency has special provisions during an emergency; will they continue to provide care and services at another location if your loved one needs to be evacuated from their current environment?

It's important to determine what will be needed for each type of emergency. For example, most people head for their basements during a tornado warning, however, most basements are not wheelchair-accessible. In this case, what modifications will you need to make, or will you be able to utilize an alternative shelter that's easier for your loved one to get to? Another good idea is for you to create more than one exit for a loved one who is confined to a wheelchair, in case the primary exit of your home is blocked in a disaster. In case of a power outage, make sure you know how to connect or start a loved one's back-up power supply that may be needed for important medical equipment. Make sure to teach others who might assist your loved one in an emergency how to operate this type of equipment as well. It's also good to know which emergency shelters near your home are wheelchair-accessible.

If your loved one lives on their own in an apartment complex, be sure to ask the building's management to identify and mark all accessible exits. It's also a good idea to arrange for a relative or neighbor to check on your loved one should they live on their own. Not only should you have emergency phone numbers posted near telephones and/or kept in wallets or pocket books



at all times, but it's also a good idea to select one out-of-state and one local friend or relative for you or your loved one to call if you're separated in a disaster. Select one place near your home to meet-up together in case of a fire, and another place to meet outside your neighbourhood in case you can't return home after a disaster. If you are at home when a disaster strikes, know how to quickly access and turn off the water, gas, and electricity at main valves or switches. If your loved one is able to do so, it is a good idea that they also know how to turn these things off as well, should they be home by themselves when disaster strikes.

During a disaster, anything that can move, fall, break or cause a fire is considered to be an added hazard. Before an emergency situation happens, it's a good idea to go around your home and look specifically for items that might pose a danger to you and your loved one during a disaster. Make sure that shelving is securely fastened to the walls, and that any large, heavy objects are placed on lower shelves or on the floor. Also, hang pictures and mirrors away from beds; larger pictures or mirrors should be bolted to the wall. Observe electrical wiring around your home, and repair any wires found to be defective or hazardous. Have a shut-off valve or switch for oxygen equipment near your loved one's bed or chair, so they (or you) can turn it off quickly if there is a fire. It's a good idea to secure your water heater by strapping it to a nearby wall in order to keep it from falling over during a disaster. Repair cracks found in the ceilings or foundation and brace any overhead light fixtures. If you have a chimney, have a professional inspect it for any cracks or weak spots, and have the appropriate repairs made; this will make it more difficult for it to come crashing through your roof during a disaster. Invest in fire extinguishers and smoke detectors. You may even consider installing home sprinklers for your loved one.

Preparing a disaster supply kit is a definite must when you are caring for a loved one whose life may depend upon certain medications and other such items. When appropriate, some of these things can be stored in easy-to-carry containers like backpacks or duffel bags. Larger items like a manual wheelchair or back-up equipment may be stored in a "safe-room" in your house, or at a neighbor's house, school, or workplace. Other important items to remember include:

DISASTER SUPPLY KIT

- a battery-powered radio, flashlight and plenty of extra batteries
- a first-aid kit, prescription medicines, and an extra pair of glasses
- a supply of water (one gallon per person per day); store water in sealed, unbreakable containers and replace every six months
- a supply of non-perishable food and a non-electric can opener, plus any special foods your loved one may require - include extra products like adult diapers, wipes, lotion, and other hygiene items that don't need water in order to use
- have extra wheelchair batteries charged and ready to go
- have on-hand full, oxygen tanks, extra medications, catheters, food for guide or service dogs, and any other special equipment needed
- a change of clothing and rain gear for your loved one, and sturdy shoes for you
- extra blankets or sleeping bags - the list of family physicians, relatives or friends who should be notified if you or your loved one are injured
- a list of the style and serial numbers of medical devices such as pacemakers or special batteries for essential medical equipment - an extra set of car keys



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