



## Emergency Preparedness

By Max Barrows

Have you given any thought on what you would do if a disaster occurred? As a person with Autism, what accommodations do you need to prepare for ahead of a disaster?

Here in the U.S, we have our share of natural and man-made disasters. Natural disasters include hurricanes (Irene), tornadoes, flash floods, and ice storms. Man-made events have been terrorist attacks (9/11), nuclear power plants (3 Mile Island), and bridge collapses (Minnesota).

When disasters strike, there are two basic possibilities. First, you may have to stay put (shelter in place) for an inconvenient period of time. Or, you may have to get out in a hurry (evacuate). In either case, you need to prepare! So, what do you need to be thinking about?

When you have to shelter in place, what are your basic needs? If the power is out for several days, would you be able to stay warm, have enough food and water, or be able to communicate with others? As a person with Autism, I don't handle surprises well. I prefer to know ahead of time. For example, I try to maintain my calendar a month in advance. Of course, the future is unpredictable, but what can you do in advance?

For me, one thing that would be very important would be a battery operated radio. Getting the real information about what's going on can be challenging when you are stuck in one place. Feelings of isolation can kick in, and not knowing what's going on can be frightening. For example, when 9/11 occurred, some people with disabilities in Vermont were afraid that New York City was much closer than it actually is. They needed accurate information so they wouldn't feel as scared!

What would you need to prepare for the power being out for several days?



Without power, usually your water doesn't work. First you need to fill jugs of water to drink and cook with. Another suggestion is fill your bathtub with water to flush your toilet with. Another thing you lose without power is lights. So, you should have extra batteries for flashlights and a good supply of candles. Some people like having kerosene lanterns on hand as well. Refrigerators and freezers should be kept closed as much as possible. It might be a good idea to keep some big bags of ice in your freezer to keep your refrigerator cool.

If you had to get out in a hurry (evacuate), what would you need to think about? One idea is to have an emergency backpack ready. This might include matches, candles, flashlights, batteries, blankets, water, your medications, canned or dry foods, cash, and a cell phone. One thing that seems very important is having identification with you. For example, a passport or drivers/non-driver ID, and a Medicare/Medicaid card could be crucial. Persons with Autism have various ways of communication, including talking devices. If they didn't have their device, how could they communicate who they are? Another tool to include might be a pre-written plan, with contact numbers for family and friends. This is in case you get separated.

Before disasters occur, it would be a great idea for local self-advocacy groups to meet with emergency first responders. This would be helpful in educating first responders to know how to assist persons with disabilities respectfully. What if suddenly someone came to your house, and told you to evacuate? I, for one, would deeply appreciate them taking the time to accurately explain what is going on. As a person with Autism, it might take a little bit of patience to let my mind process this information. When too much information comes at me too fast, it just bounces off my head on to the ground.

There are a lot of States that have been working on emergency preparedness for persons with disabilities. Check with your local and state self-advocacy organizations to see what's been done already. For a national resource, you can visit: [www.disabilitypreparedness.gov](http://www.disabilitypreparedness.gov). If you still end up in a disaster, there are

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) programs that are available to persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities can also register with FEMA by applying online at: [www.DisasterAssistance.gov](http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov), or call **800-621-FEMA (3362)**. Hopefully, we can all be better prepared and be more in charge of ourselves in the event of a disaster!

### **Emergency Supplies When You're Stuck At Home**

Supplies are expensive! Just buy a few things at a time and put them away in a dry

place.

### **Food and Water**

- Water: 1 gallon per person per day
- Ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits and vegetables, juices and soups
- High energy foods—peanut butter, jelly, crackers, granola bars, trail mix
- Comfort foods: Cookies, hard candy, instant coffee, tea bags
- Special diet foods if needed

### **Tools**

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Battery operated radio or TV
- Manual can opener
- ABC-type fire extinguisher
- Shut-off wrench to turn off household gas or water if necessary
- Matches in waterproof container

### **Other Important Items**

- Books, cards, games (*to keep you busy & calm*)

- Extra eyeglasses
- Extra batteries for wheelchair, medical equipment, hearing aids, etc.
- Wheelchair patch kit
- Gloves for manual wheelchair
- Cards listing key phrases you would use in an emergency
- Extra medical supplies like dressing materials, catheters, syringes

### **Sanitation Supplies**

- Toilet paper and feminine hygiene products
- Soap, hand sanitizer, disinfectant
- Plastic garbage bags and plastic bucket with tight lid

### **First Aid Kit and Medicines**

- Non-prescription medicines like pain relievers, stomach remedies, etc.
- Extra prescription medicines
- First Aid Kit and manual

## **Pack A Bag To Go With You In An Emergency**

Put these things in a bag but don't make it too heavy

- Change of clothing and shoes

- Personal care products (toothbrush, etc.)
- Cash
- Towel
- Prepaid phone card
- Blanket or sleeping bag
- Extra eyeglasses
- Flashlight and batteries
- Copies of *Emergency Information Sheet and Emergency Contact List*
- Copies of important documents like (birth certificate, driver's license, passports, bank account and insurance information, etc.)

**Make a note *that says "Don't Forget Your Medications!"***

**Pin the sign on the outside of your bag.**

Checklists adapted from:

<http://dail.vermont.gov/dail-resources/emergency-preparedness-assistance/view?searchterm=emergency%20preparedness>