

Evacuating the Elderly, Disabled

Wildfires, like other natural disasters, can happen at a moment's notice, creating evacuation emergencies for communities. It's a frightening time for anyone, but for the elderly and disabled, evacuating creates special challenges that require special planning.

These individuals may require extra time and assistance, special vehicles, medications and medical supplies that can create emergencies themselves without advance preparation. In addition to making those with special needs aware of an evacuation plan, caregivers should ask these questions supplied by the Red Cross to customize evacuation plans.

DAILY LIVING

Personal care: Do you regularly need assistance or use adaptive equipment to help with personal care, such as bathing and grooming?

Water service: What will you do if water service is cut off for several days or if you are unable to heat water?

Personal care equipment: Do you use a shower chair, tub-transfer bench or other similar equipment?

Adaptive feeding devices: Do you use special utensils that help you prepare or eat food independently?

Electricity dependent equipment: How will you continue to use equipment that runs on electricity, such as dialysis, electrical lifts, etc.? Do you have a safe back-up power sup-

ply and how long will it last?

GETTING AROUND

Disaster debris: How will you cope with the debris in your home or along your planned exit route following the disaster?

Transportation: Do you need a specially equipped vehicle or accessible transportation?

Errands: Do you need help to get groceries, medications and medical supplies? What if your caregiver cannot reach you because roads are blocked or the disaster has affected him or her as well?

EVACUATING

Building evacuation: Do you need help to leave your home or office? Can you reach and activate an alarm? Will you be able to evacuate independently without relying on auditory cues that may be absent if the electricity is off or alarms are sounding?

Building exits: Are there other exits (stairs, windows or ramps) if the elevator is not working or cannot be used? Can you read emergency signs in print or Braille? Do emergency alarms have audible and



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visible features (marking escape routes and exits) that will work even if electrical service is disrupted?

Getting help: How will you call for the help you will need to leave the building? Do you know the locations of text phones and phones that have amplification? Will your hearing aids work if they get wet from emergency sprinklers? How will you communicate with emergency personnel if you don't have an interpreter, your hearing aids aren't working, or if you don't have a word board or other augmentative communication device?

Mobility aids/ramp access: What will you do if you cannot find your mobility aids? What will you do if your ramps are shaken loose or become separated from the building?

Service animals/pets: Will you be able to care for your animal during and after a

disaster? Do you have another caregiver for your animal if you are unable to meet its needs? Do you have the appropriate licenses for your service animal so you will be permitted to keep it with you should you choose to use an emergency public shelter?

GATHER INFORMATION

Community disaster plans: Contact your local emergency management office or American Red Cross Chapter to learn about community response plans, evacuation plans and designated emergency shelters.

Assistance programs: Ask about assistance programs. Many communities ask people with a disability to register with the local fire or police department or emergency management office so needed help can be provided quickly in an emergency.

MAKE AN EMERGENCY PLAN

Meet with caregiver/building manager: Review the information you gathered about community hazards and emergency plans.

Escape routes and drills: If you or someone in your household uses a wheelchair, make exits from your home wheelchair accessible. Practice emergency evacuation drills at least two times a year, any time you update your emergency plan or change the layout of your home's furniture. Be sure to include family and/or your personal care attendant in the drills.

Prepare for different hazards: Include in your plan how to prepare for each hazard that could impact your community and how to protect yourself. Determine in advance what your alternative shelter will be and how you will get there.