



This brochure is designed to help people with sensory disabilities begin to plan. The term “sensory disabilities” refers primarily to persons with hearing or visual limitations, including total blindness or deafness.

Be sure to use the additional resources listed on the back, including N.O.D.’s general brochure, “Prepare Yourself: Disaster Readiness Tips for People with Disabilities.” Identify your resources, make a plan, and create a “ready kit” and a “go kit.” **Start today to become better prepared, safer and more secure.**

### Where to find more information

Many of these agencies provide materials in large font, audio or video cassette formats, and different languages.

**American Foundation for the Blind**  
www.afb.org • (800)232-5463 (voice)

**American Red Cross**  
www.redcross.org • call your local chapter

**Easter Seals (s.a.f.e.t.y. First program)**  
www.easter-seals.org • (800)221-6827 (voice) •  
(312)726-4258 (TTY)

**Federal Emergency Management Agency**  
http://www.fema.gov/plan/ • (800)480-2520 (voice)

**Gallaudet University, Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center**  
www.clerccenter.gallaudet.edu • (202)651-5031  
(voice/TTY)

**Humane Society of the U.S. (Disaster Center)**  
www.hsus.org/hsus\_field/hsus\_disaster\_center/ •  
(202)452-1100 (voice)

**National Association of the Deaf**  
www.nad.org • (301)587-1788 (voice) •  
(301)587-1789 (TTY)

**NOAA Weather Radio**  
www.weather.gov/nwer/special\_needs.htm

**U.S. Department of Homeland Security**  
www.ready.gov • (800)BE READY (voice) •  
(800)464-6161 (TTY)

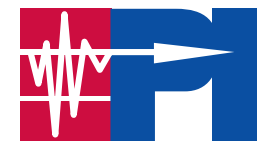
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10/07

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON  
DISABILITY



EMERGENCY  
PREPAREDNESS  
INITIATIVE

## Prepare Yourself

### Disaster Readiness Tips for People with SENSORY DISABILITIES

910 Sixteenth Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20006  
(202) 293-5960 (VOICE)  
(202) 293-5968 (TTY)  
(202) 293-7999 (FAX)  
epi@nod.org

www.nod.org/emergency



**T**o be better prepared as a nation, we all must do our part to plan for disasters. Individuals, with or without disabilities, can decrease the impact of a disaster by taking steps to prepare **BEFORE** an event occurs. Results from focus groups conducted by the National Organization on Disability’s Emergency Preparedness Initiative (EPI), indicate that people with disabilities need to be more self reliant in emergencies.

**You** are in the best position to know your abilities and needs before, during, and after a disaster. There are many sample planning templates and checklists available to guide you. However, **your plans must fit your own unique circumstances.**

## PREPAREDNESS

### Assessment

Learn about hazards that may impact your community (blizzards, earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes, floods, etc.) You can get information from your State and local Emergency Management Agency (EMA) or Homeland Security Office by visiting their website. If you don't have computer access, you can obtain much of this information through brochures from these offices.

If you need these items in an alternate format, i.e., Braille, audiotape, large font, then ask. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) entitles you to this accommodation. The ADA also requires that any video for a public audience be, at a minimum, close-captioned for persons who are deaf. You may have to wait a reasonable time while an alternate-format document is prepared. By making the request, however, you assist a vital arm of government to educate itself about the needs of persons with disabilities.

### Other Emergency Plans

Find out about emergency plans developed at your workplace or by community-based service providers, etc. Review those plans to find out if they include your specific needs. Depending on the size of the organization, the plans might not be as well developed as

those available from your local or state EMA. You may need a reader or an interpreter to assist your review.

### Personal Support Network

Create a network of trusted individuals such as family, friends, co-workers, personal attendants, etc. who can assist you during an emergency. Your networks should be part of your planning process and familiar with your functional abilities and limitations. Establishing a solid relationship with other people is one of the most effective means of surviving a disaster.

**Tip: Set up this network at important locations (e.g. home, work, school) making sure you have at least three people at each place.**

## WARNING AND RESPONSE

### At Work

You could be anywhere when disaster strikes. If you're at work, an alarm may sound or an automated message may be heard. People who are blind can hear these alarms with no difficulty, but the noise is often so loud that it drowns out audio cues, such as the sound of people running. People who are deaf should find out if fire alarms at their work site are visual (flashing strobe lights) as well as audible. A support network will be especially critical for deaf persons who work alone in offices far from visual alerts.

Here are a few items of particular interest to people with sensory disabilities:

- Pad of paper with pens or pencils for writing notes
- Extra batteries for tape recorders, portable TTYs, etc.
- Extra pair of dark glasses, if medically required
- Folding mobility cane
- Food, medicine, and favorite toy for your service animal
- Plastic bags, disposable gloves, and other items for the animal's care

**In a 2004 survey of emergency managers around the U.S., 42% said they had a public awareness campaign directed at providing emergency information to people with disabilities. However, only 16% of those provide information in accessible formats (i.e. Braille, cassette, large type, etc.)**

### At Home

At home, nearly everyone relies on radio or TV for emergency information. Generally, persons who are blind will find radio more useful, because information is read rather than flashed on the TV screen without narration. However, radio stations in smaller communities sometimes close after sunset, or run automated programming with no staff present.

**Tip: Consider purchasing a National Weather Radio (NWR).**

The radio turns itself on and emits an audible alarm in response to a message from the National Weather Service about both natural and man-made hazards. To assist persons who are deaf, the NWR radio can emit a visual strobe alarm, and connects to other devices to shake a pillow or bed.

### Emergency Information on TV

Regulations issued by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) require that spoken emergency information on TV also be presented in a visual form. The information is shown either on a special line on the screen, or through a superimposed text crawl. A sign-language interpreter may stand next to the speaker.

### Emergency Technology

Modern technology now offers a variety of alternatives to TV. Text-messaging pagers with broadcast weather alerts can be connected to the EMA for one or more counties to provide immediate warnings. Individuals who use telecommunications relay services may now have different options to use as an emergency backup including: dialing 711

(nationwide), CapTel (captioned telephone), internet-based relay (through computer, text pager, PDA, etc.), and/or video relay services (through broadband). These services may fail in a major disaster, so it is still important to establish a network of hearing friends, family, and coworkers.

## SHELTERING

**During Hurricane Katrina 80% of shelters did not have TTY access and only 30% had access to an ASL interpreter.**

### General and "Special Needs" Shelters

Unless you have other severe disabilities, you should have little or no difficulty as a person who is deaf or blind staying in a public shelter for a short time. People with more serious needs might be directed to use the nearest "special needs" shelter, where medical issues can receive appropriate attention.

Conditions in a general shelter (usually a school building or an auditorium) are crowded, noisy, and boring. But these facilities, operated by the local American Red Cross chapter or faith-based agencies, can save your life. Persons with hearing or vision impairments or who are blind or deaf have a right under the ADA to use general public shelters. A person who is blind or visually impaired will need assistance finding a place to sit and the location of the restroom and food line. A person who is deaf or hearing impaired can get oriented relatively easily, but may need to communicate with others without an interpreter.

**Tip: Be prepared to tell shelter operators what your needs are.**

### Service Animals

Federal law also allows your guide dog or service animal into the shelter. Be prepared to explain this to the staff, some of whom may be unfamiliar with this fact. You also have the responsibility to care for your companion animal while the two of you are in the shelter.

## Ready Kit and Go Bag

A Ready Kit is a supply of items that you will need if you should have to shelter in place, or rely on your own resources for a few days. A Go Bag has fewer items, but they are the most essential items to take with you in case you must evacuate quickly.

See the N.O.D. guide, "Prepare Yourself: Disaster Readiness Tips for People with Disabilities," for a list of suggested supplies. The American Red Cross also has a comprehensive checklist of supplies.