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A Checklist for People with Mobility Problems

For the millions of Americans with mobility problems, emergencies such as fires and floods present a special challenge. Protecting yourself and your family when disaster strikes requires planning ahead. This checklist will help you get started. Discuss ideas with your family, friends or personal care attendant, and prepare an emergency plan. Post the plan where everyone will see it.

Emergency Checklist

Call your American Red Cross, National Capital Chapter or emergency management office:

- Ask what kind of disasters could occur in your area and how to prepare for each.
- Ask how you would be warned of an emergency.
- Ask about special assistance that may be available to you in an emergency. Many communities ask people with a disability to register, usually with the local fire department or emergency management office, so needed help can be provided quickly in an emergency.
- Ask your supervisor about emergency plans at your workplace.
- Ask your childrens' teachers and caregivers about emergency plans for schools and day-care centers.
- If you currently use a personal care attendant obtained from an agency, check to see if the agency has special provisions for emergencies (e.g., providing services at another location should an evacuation be ordered).

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Create a Plan

- Meet with household members or your personal care attendant. Discuss the dangers of fire, severe weather, earthquakes and other emergencies that might occur in your community. Determine what you will need to do for each type of emergency. For example, most people head for a basement when there is a tornado warning, but most basements are not wheelchair-accessible. Determine in advance what your alternative shelter will be and how you will get there.
- Post emergency telephone numbers near telephones and teach your children how and when to call for help.
- Learn what to do in case of power outages and personal injuries. Know how to connect or start a back-up power supply for essential medical equipment.
- If you or someone in your household uses a wheelchair, make more than one exit from your home wheelchair-accessible in case the primary exit is blocked in a disaster.
- Teach those who may need to assist you in an emergency how to operate necessary equipment.
- Arrange for a relative or neighbor to check on you in an emergency.
- Learn how to turn off the water, gas and electricity at main valves or switches.
- Plan and practice how to escape from your home in an emergency.

- Consider getting a medical alert system that will allow you to call for help if you are immobilized in an emergency.
- If you live in an apartment, ask the management to identify and mark accessible exits.
- Learn your community's evacuation routes.
- Listen to a battery-operated radio for emergency information.
- Pick one out-of-state and one local friend or relative for family members to call if separated by disaster.
- Pick two meeting places -- a place near your home in case of fire and a place outside your neighborhood in case you cannot return home after a disaster.

Prepare a Disaster Supplies Kit

Assemble supplies you might need in an evacuation. Store them in an easy-to-carry container such as a backpack or duffel bag. Include:

- A battery-powered radio, flashlight and plenty of extra batteries for them
- 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. Identify the storage date and replace every six months.
- A supply of non-perishable food and a non-electric can opener, plus any special foods you require
- If you have a baby, include extra diapers and other infant care items
- Extra wheelchair batteries, oxygen, medication, catheters, food for guide or service dogs, or other special equipment you might need
- A change of clothing, rain gear and sturdy shoes
- Blankets or sleeping bags
- A list of family physicians and the relative or friend who should be notified if you are injured
- A list of the style and serial numbers of medical devices such as pacemakers
- An extra set of car keys

Store back-up equipment, such as a manual wheelchair, at a neighbor's home, school or your workplace.

Escape Plan

In a fire or other emergency, you may need to evacuate on a moment's notice. Be ready to get out fast. Develop an escape plan by drawing a floor plan of your residence:

- Show the location of doors, windows, stairways, large furniture, and of emergency supplies (Disaster Supplies Kit) fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, collapsible ladders, first-aid kits and utility shut-off points. Indicate at least two escape routes from each room and mark a place outside of the home where household members and/or your personal care attendant should meet in case of fire.
- If you or someone in your household uses a wheelchair, make more than one exit from your home wheelchair-accessible in case the primary exit is blocked in a disaster.
- Include important points outside, such as garages, patios, stairways, elevators, driveways and porches.
- If your home has more than two floors, use an additional sheet of paper.
- Practice emergency evacuation drills at least twice each year.

Home Hazard Hunt

In a disaster, anything that can move, fall, break or cause a fire is a potential hazard. Beforehand it is wise if you:

- Repair defective electrical wiring.
- Smell for leaky gas connections. If you smell gas, turn the gas off and call a professional to restart it. Keep the shutoff switch for oxygen equipment near your bed or chair, so you can get to it quickly if there is a fire.
- Fasten shelves securely to the wall. Place large, heavy objects on lower shelves or the floor.
- Hang pictures and mirrors away from beds. Bolt large pictures or mirrors to the wall.
- Secure water heater by strapping it to a nearby wall.
- Repair cracks in ceilings or foundations. Brace overhead light fixtures.
- Store weed killers, pesticides and flammable products away from heat sources.
- Have chimneys, flue pipes, vent connectors and gas vents cleaned and repaired by a professional.

If You Need to Evacuate

Listen to a battery-powered radio for the location of emergency shelters. Know in advance the location of wheelchair-accessible shelters. Follow instructions of local officials. In addition, make sure you:

- Wear appropriate clothing and sturdy shoes.
- Take your Disaster Supplies Kit
- Lock your house.
- Use the travel routes specified or special assistance provided by local officials.

If you are sure you have time ...

- Shut off water, gas and electricity if instructed to do so.
- Let others know when you left and where you are going.
- Make arrangements for pets. Animals other than service animals may not be allowed in public shelters.

Prepare a Car Kit

Include in your kit:

- Battery-powered radio, flashlight extra batteries and maps
- Blanket and first-aid kit
- Shovel
- Tire repair kit, booster cables, pump and flares
- Fire extinguisher (5 lb., A-B-C type)
- Bottled water and non-perishable foods such as granola bars, raisins and cookies

Fire Safety

- Plan two escape routes out of each room. If you cannot use the stairways, make special arrangements for help in advance. Never use the elevators

- Install smoke detectors. Clean and test smoke detectors once a month. Change batteries at least once a year.
- Consider installing home sprinklers
- If there is a fire, do not try to fight the fire. Get out fast.
- Do not stop for pets or possessions.
- Call the fire department after you are outside.
- Never go back into a burning building.
- Feel the bottom of the door with the palm of your hand. If it is hot, find another way out.

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