

The ABC's of Preparing for a Disaster

By Helen Tilden, RN

When people know what to do when a disaster occurs at home, on vacation, at work or even while driving, there is less injury and illness and less panic. Planning is the key. We plan for everything in our lives and planning seems to “make things easier”. We plan our vacation, our schedule for the day or week, doctor or dentist appointments and even our shopping list to take to the grocery store. Planning also reduces stress making it easier to cope with the changes brought on or created by a disaster whether it is a power outage, flood, tornado or other occurrence that disrupts our daily lives.



Planning for a disaster can take only three simple steps, but, if you have a disability, it is more important to be prepared to act quickly especially if you have a service animal, special medications and/or utilize medical equipment.

The ABCs of Planning:

A.

Make a Kit:

Assemble enough food and water for 3 days to prepare for evacuation or shelter. Plan

enough non-perishable food and water for each member of your family. If your food contains canned goods, remember to include a manual can opener, as the electricity will most likely be interrupted in a disaster. If you have a service animal or a pet, include food and water for them as well.

Add some cash in the kit, as ATMs don't work if the electricity is out. Also include names of your family or friends who are your emergency contacts, names of doctors, pharmacy and a list of each medication you take. Don't forget your eyeglasses even if you add an old pair to your kit.

A few inexpensive items from the “dollar store” such as a first aid kit, a flashlight with batteries and a whistle should be in your kit. The flashlight and whistle are methods of communication if you are not able to be seen or are unable to move when an evacuation is necessary. Lastly, but not least, a portable radio with extra batteries should be in your kit. Batteries last longer if they are not in the radio and inserted when needed.

The price of gasoline is high today, but try to keep the gas tank as full as possible especially during seasons that are high for tornadoes or floods, as you may have to evacuate to a shelter or to a relative’s house. The traffic will be heavy and the gasoline will go quickly if traffic is heavy and the purchase of gas may be difficult with no electricity because the gas pumps don’t work without electricity. Although some stations are equipped with a generator, this is not all gas stations.

B.

Make a Plan:

Plan with your family for an emergency and consider that you may not all be at home when the emergency or disaster occurs, therefore a reunification plan or communication plan is necessary so everyone knows how to contact each other during and after the disaster.

If you live alone, locate the closest shelter to your home and plan how you will get there before any emergency occurs. Ask if they have a generator if you will need to charge your batteries or refrigerate medication. Remember to put a few bottles of water and a map in your car for an emergency for the possibility of being away from your home when you need to go to a shelter rather than return home. Include a practice drive via more than one route to your shelter location to plan ahead for the necessity of alternate routes.

If you do not drive, make plans with a friend or neighbor for a ride to the shelter. Some communities have a disaster transportation plan for people with disabilities. Inquire in your area if there is one and register now, not during a disaster as most communities with this plan require advanced registration.

Shelters accept service animals but not always pets. Inquire ahead of time with the shelters you identify in your area if they accept or board pets at the shelter. Be prepared to help your service animal adjust to the stresses of this new location and disruption of schedule as they may become frightened or confused. Take a leash to be able to keep your service animal close to you.

After you make your plan, share it with your family and friends and practice it every six months.

C.

Be Informed: (before, during and after)

In addition to a fire or power outage, identify the hazards that may occur in your area such as flooding and tornadoes. Listen to the radio and television for guidance of whether you should evacuate to a shelter or shelter in place (stay where you are).

When the power goes out at home, use the portable radio from your kit to stay informed. Local emergency management officials and the local police will give information to the public by radio and television. Some radios will pick up the audio of the local television stations.



If you are in a shelter with a computer and electricity, ask if they are connected to the Internet. If so, email your out of town relatives where you are. The American Red Cross has a web site called Safe and Well. You can register on it where you are and your relatives can go to the site to look for you, but this again is planning in advance. Tell your relatives and friends about the Safe and Well website now as it may be the only method of communication available to you. Go to www.redcross.org to look at the web site.

Emergency management officials will notify you by radio or in the shelter when it is safe to return to your home. However, you may be without power and water when you return home and possibly, will not be able to drink the water from the faucet. Use your emergency kit of food and water until it is safe to drink the water if you return home to these conditions.

Be prepared. It is easier to plan before an emergency than during one.

For additional information go to www.bt.cdc.gov or www.prepare.org to learn more about natural and human-caused disasters.