

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A DISASTER

The Unforeseen and the Unthinkable

By now you must have heard about the experiences with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita: computers, cell phones and all manner of communications devices, failed. Communities did not take seriously orders to evacuate, nor were they adequately prepared to protect citizens who remained at home.

Unfortunately, many organizations have not fully assessed the impact of this far-ranging problem. There is an obvious and immediate need for everyone to fix their own computers and equipment. The threat of interruptions in basic services presents a risk to both organizations and the community in general. Many organizations have already reviewed and made redundancy plans for their computers and other electronic systems. Your Regional Center has provided this self-assessment and checklist to help you plan for the many sources of potential disaster problems.

Preparedness

Because the possibility of widespread and varied problems exists, families, Day Care programs, Residential Care providers, Transportation services, Supported Living and Independent Living providers, Respite and Day Care Programs, and Regional Centers must work as partners to address and resolve the DDS community issues and concerns, and assure solid community-level planning. This involvement of the entire DDS community will ensure a comprehensive and effective plan.

This will require a significant effort by the community to work together to promote *personal* preparedness and to minimize risk by conducting emergency and contingency planning. The California Office of Emergency Services (OES) suggests that all households be prepared to be self-sufficient for three to seven days. In other words, *How would you function without electricity, gas, running water? What if gas stations or grocery stores were closed?*

Are you ready?

Before preparing your DDS consumers, it is important for *you* to be personally prepared. This will assure your comfort and understanding in dealing with the disaster preparedness of others. Once you feel comfortable, complete a Consumer Contingency Plan for each consumer. Consider the following guidelines:

Medical Preparations

1. List all medications (over the counter and prescription) for each consumer.
2. List any medical supplies used, such as needles, alcohol swabs, lancets, etc.
3. List all medical conditions, allergies, predispositions, surgeries, etc.
4. List all devices used at home or at a medical facility (e.g. dialysis machine, pacemaker, glucose testing, equipment, inhalers, respirators, etc.). This includes wheelchairs (and if they are battery powered), stair lifts, automatic door openers, etc.

Once you've made your lists, discuss with your doctor (or the ACRC Service Coordinator), if appropriate:

1. How to order enough medication and supplies in advance and store them safely
2. How to handle medical conditions, etc., in an emergency. Do you need to purchase additional equipment, or get training
3. Contact your service coordinator at your local Regional Center to determine if medical devices will work without error through a power failure. Also, find out from your doctor what you can do if the device doesn't work properly or fails. There may be alternatives you can use in an emergency.
4. Make sure to have spare parts and the proper tools on hand, so that you're ready to fix minor problems.
5. Discuss preparations with family members. Even children as young as 8 can take and learn first aid classes, and know what to do in an emergency.
6. Practice fixing equipment, and test any emergency plans and training.
7. According to FEMA, anyone requiring any type of life support that uses electricity should register with their local Emergency Management Office - regardless of possible circumstances.
8. If you take medication regularly, ask your doctor for a paper copy of your prescription and keep it in a safe place in case your regular pharmacy has a problem.

Checklist

The following checklist is based on recommendations from Red Cross, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the California Office of Emergency Services (OES). For more complete information please contact these organizations.

- A Communication Plan in case of emergencies
- Individual Disaster Preparation Plan for each consumer
- Contact Service Coordinator at local RC to check continuous operation status of medical equipment
- One gallon of water per person per day (2 qts for drinking, 2 qts for food prep and sanitation)
- Food for 3-5 days (nonperishable basics-try to buy items that require no refrigeration, preparation or cooking, and little or no water-i.e. ready to eat canned meats, fruits and vegetables). Don't forget pet supplies
- Formula or powdered milk for babies and small children
- Non-electric can opener
- Paper plates and plastic utensils
- Flashlights with fresh batteries
- Matches (keep out of reach of children)
- Battery operated smoke alarms
- Toilet paper, towelettes
- Personal hygiene items
- Waterless antibacterial hand soap
- Disinfectant
- Freshly stocked first aid kit
- Antiseptic
- Non-prescription drugs you use regularly
- Full supply of prescription medication (when purchasing prescriptions after 12/31/99, check your prescription information carefully)
- Automobile fuel tanks full on 12/30 or 12/31/99
- Extra cash for emergencies
- Wood for a fireplace, extra blankets and coats to keep warm
- Sturdy trash bags and containers for garbage

Tips

Prepare a bit at a time each month. Don't panic. Start planning now!

Recommendations

The following information is based on recommendations from Red Cross, FEMA, and OES. For more complete information please contact these organizations.

Water

1. *Storage*

Store 2 gallons per day per person in sound plastic containers (thoroughly washed, such as soft drink bottles). Never use containers that contained a toxic substance. Avoid using containers that will decompose or break. Rotate stored water every 6 months.

2. *Boiling*

Boiling is the safest method for purifying water. Bring the water to a rolling boil for 10 minutes. Some water will evaporate. Let the water cool before drinking or storing. Boiled water will taste better if you put oxygen back into it by pouring it back and forth between two containers.

3. *Disinfection*

Add 4 drops of bleach per quart of water and stir. Use liquid bleach that contains 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite and no soap.

4. *Other sources of water*

For other sources of water, refer to the complete listings from FEMA or the Red Cross.

Food

1. *If the electricity goes off...*

- FIRST, use perishable food and foods from the refrigerator.
- THEN use foods from the freezer. Keep a list of freezer contents on the freezer door to minimize opening and closing.
- FINALLY, begin to use non-perishable foods and staples

2. *Storage tips*

- Keep food in the driest and coolest spot possible
- Keep food covered at all times
- Keep all opened food in tight plastic bags or containers if possible.
- Inspect all food regularly for signs of spoilage
- Use foods before they go bad and replace them with fresh supplies, dated with ink or marker

3. *Preparation*

If you plan to use a propane or kerosene stove, make sure you have enough fuel and plenty of ventilation. Keep one or more multi-use fire extinguishers close at hand. Charcoal or propane grills may also be used, as well as candle warmers, non-electric chafing dishes and fondue pots. Most canned foods can be eaten without heating.