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## Emergency Preparedness for Elderly People

### TIPS FOR PREPAREDNESS FOR THE SENIOR POPULATION:

Local officials and relief workers will be on the scene after a disaster, but they cannot reach everyone right away. Take responsibility--Save your life! Keep in touch with your neighbors and look out for each other.

- Prepare NOW for a sudden emergency.
- Learn how to protect yourself and cope with disaster by planning ahead.
- Even if you have physical limitations, you can still protect yourself. Knowing what to do is your best protection and your responsibility.

### Your Disaster Checklist

- Assemble a disaster supplies kit. (See Related Link below entitled Disaster Supplies Kit)
- Arrange for someone to check on you.
- Plan and practice the best escape routes from your home.
- Plan for transportation if you need to evacuate to a Red Cross shelter.
- Find the safe places in your home for each type of emergency.
- Have a plan to signal the need for help.
- Post emergency phone numbers near the phone.
- If you have home health care service, plan ahead with your agency for emergency procedures.
- Teach those who may need to assist you in an emergency how to operate necessary equipment. Be sure they will be able to reach you.

### Medical Emergency Supplies

For your safety and comfort, you need to have emergency supplies packed and ready in one place before disaster hits. You should assemble enough supplies to last for at least three days.

- Assemble the supplies you would need in an evacuation, both medical and general supplies.
- Store them in an easy-to-carry container, such as a backpack or duffel bag.
- Be sure your bag has an ID tag.
- Label any equipment, such as wheelchairs, canes or walkers that you would need.

### For Your Medical Needs

- First-aid kit
- Prescription medicines, list of medications including dosage, list of any allergies
- Extra eyeglasses and hearing-aid batteries
- Extra wheelchair batteries, oxygen
- List of the style and serial numbers of medical devices such as pacemakers
- Medical insurance and Medicare cards
- List of doctors and relatives or friends who should be notified if you are injured

- Any other items you may need

#### If You Need To Evacuate

- Coordinate with your home care provider for evacuation procedures.
- Try to car pool if possible.
- If you must have assistance for special transportation call the American Red Cross or your local officials.
- Wear appropriate clothing and sturdy shoes.
- Take your Disaster Supplies Kit.
- Lock your home.
- Use the travel routes specified or special assistance provided by local officials. Don't take any short cuts, they may be unsafe.
- Notify shelter authorities of any need you may have. They will do their best to accommodate you and make you comfortable.

#### If You Are Sure You Have Enough Time...

- Shut off water, gas, and electricity if instructed to do so and if you know how. Gas must be turned back on by a professional.
- Let others know when you left and where you are going.
- Make arrangements for pets. Animals other than working animals may not be allowed in public shelters.

#### Extreme Heat

In a normal year, approximately 175 Americans die from extreme heat. Elderly people, and those who are sick or overweight are more likely to become victims. You should be aware of heat disorder symptoms, know where to seek help. For more information click on "Hot Weather Tips" below under Related Links.

#### Fire

One emergency we could all face at any time is a home fire. A home fire could be a special challenge for one with physical limitations. However, there are some things we can do to improve our safety:

#### Before a Fire

- Plan two escape routes out of each room. If you cannot use stairways, make special arrangements for help in advance. Never use elevators.
- Sleep with the bedroom door closed. This gives you extra minutes of protection from toxic fumes and fire.
- Test your smoke detector battery regularly, and as a reminder, change batteries on the same day each year. Vacuum it occasionally to remove dust.

#### In Case of Fire

- Remain calm.
- Drop to the floor and crawl. Most fire fatalities are due to breathing toxic fumes and smoke. The cleanest air is near the floor. Breathing toxic fumes

and smoke is more dangerous than the risk of injury in getting to the floor quickly.

- Feel any door before you open it. If it is hot, find another way out.
- If your smoke detector goes off, never waste time getting dressed or collecting valuables or pets. Get out of the house immediately.
- Do not try to fight the fire! Call for help from a neighbor's phone.
- Never go back into a burning building for any reason.
- If your clothes catch on fire, drop to the floor and roll to suffocate the fire. Keep rolling (running from the fire only "fans" the flames and makes it worse).
- If you are in a wheelchair or cannot get out of your house, stay by the window near the floor. If you are able, signal your need for help.

### Grandchildren's Safety

It is estimated that 3.4 million children live in a household headed by grandparents. And many children visit their grandparents often. The following safety advice for children can help grandparents prepare a safe environment at home for children:

- Store matches and lighters up high, away from children.
- Move cleaning chemicals like cleansers, soap, drain cleaner, and other poisons to high cupboards OR install a child-proof lock if you must keep these items in low cabinets.
- Store prescription medicines and over-the-counter drugs like aspirin, cough medicines, and stomachache remedies in a cabinet out of reach of children.
- If children are playing outside or in a pool when skies grow dark or you hear thunder, ask them to come indoors right away.
- Install plastic covers over all exposed electrical outlets.

### Children Can Help Grandparents, too:

- Have children test each smoke detector in your home to make sure it is working by using a broom handle to push the test button. See that the battery is changed in each detector that doesn't work.
- Ask children to draw a floor plan of your home and show two ways out of every room in case of fire.

### Disaster Recovery

In the unsettled days and weeks following a disaster, people whose lives have been disrupted must make many decisions that may be confusing and difficult to sort out. People of all ages can be overwhelmed by the mounds of information thrown at them in a short period of time. In disaster situations, scam artists are often ready to take advantage of the misfortunes of others. The elderly are perhaps the most vulnerable to strangers presenting a range of services. If you are affected by damage from disasters, you should be aware that dishonest contractors might take advantage of you. Victims who receive offers that seem "too good to refuse" should: ask for references, get a second estimate, and check with relatives or friends. Ask for advice before signing anything. It is suggested that you should not sign a contract or make payment in advance. The elderly are also at high-risk for emotional stress from disaster. Common reactions caused by or aggravated by disasters can include depression, irritability, anger, trouble sleeping or eating, family discord, restlessness and substance abuse. Identifying these problem areas and getting help now will help prevent larger debilitating problems in the future.

Studies show that older people:

- Are often slower to register for disaster assistance, and once they are registered, may not follow through and complete the necessary applications to obtain assistance.
- May be at higher nutritional risk in the aftermath of a disaster and may forget to take necessary medications.
- Are often targeted by fraudulent contractors and “con men” that follow disasters and financially exploit disaster victims.
- May be susceptible to physical and mental abuse as family stresses increases in later stages of the disaster.
- Are less likely than younger generations to use formal aid sources such as FEMA or the Red Cross.
- Have slower economic recovery.
- Suffer a pattern of neglect in the receiving social support after a natural disaster.
- Have more health problems after disasters.
- Do not necessarily comply with disaster warnings.

Because of these, and other potential problems, funds and support services are prioritized to help identify and assist older people in registering and applying for loans, and linking older people to local, state or federal disaster advocacy services. If additional funds are available, other services may be provided to fill “gaps” or to strengthen local service delivery systems.

The elderly population may experience a number of common ailments which may become worse in a disaster situation, including heart disease, cancer, stroke, arthritis, poor vision and hearing, depression and dementia. Understanding the high risk in the elderly population is paramount. Particular attention should be paid to possible vision deficit, hearing loss, cognitive changes, and acute illness. Precautions should be taken to prevent new or further injuries from falling during relocation.

The Administration on Aging (AoA) responds to the special needs of older disaster victims. Older people often have difficulty obtaining necessary assistance because of progressive physical and mental impairments and other frailties that often accompany aging. Many older people who live on limited incomes and sometimes alone often find it impossible to recover from disasters without special federal assistance services.

Recognizing this, Congress addressed disaster response for older people in the Older Americans Act, authorizing the AoA to provide limited financial assistance for services through State Agencies on Aging.. When a disaster strikes, the AoA’s National Disaster Preparedness and Response Office coordinates activities with FEMA and State Emergency Management Agencies, and works closely with private disaster response organizations such as the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army. Together these organizations obtain exchange information on the impact of the disaster on older people in their communities. AoA’s national aging network is poised to assist older people, providing critical support such as meals and transportation, information about temporary housing and other important services upon which frail older adults often rely.

Beware of Dishonest Repairmen- this advice is especially important for elderly citizens.

Older people and their family can call the AoA’s National Eldercare Locator toll-free number at 1-800-677-1116 to learn about available services.

