

Disaster Readiness for People with Disabilities

The Committee for Persons with Disabilities serving as Prince William County Disability Services Board had a special presentation on Disaster Readiness for People with Disabilities by Patrick Collins, Emergency Services Coordinator, PWC Department of Fire and Rescue. See document below for information on how to prepare in the event of a Disaster.

Disaster Preparedness for Persons with Disabilities, Pat Collins, Dept of Fire & Rescue

There are four things to look at in planning for a disaster. First you need to understand what kind of disasters that can happen here in this county. There are Natural Disasters and Man- Made Disasters. Natural Disasters are things like hurricane, flooding, and occasional tornados that have spun off of hurricanes. Man-Made Disaster are train derailments, hazardous materials, and terrorism. It is important to know what kind of things we can see and obviously one of the biggest things we can see are weather related.

Secondly, we need to look at what can happen after a disaster. You need to look at your house and think about what your environment is going to look like after a disaster - is your telephone going to work? Think about how you would normally take care of yourself whether it is getting prescriptions, getting medical supplies – there may not be any groceries store open or you might not be able to get to the store. Do you have enough medication to last you through the recovery period. Because most prescription are written for thirty days and the insurance companies will only pay a thirty day supply, will need to sit down with your doctor and your insurance company and work out a plan. Utilities, transportation and communication (no power - no radio) the normal way we get information may not work.

Thirdly, you will need to develop a personal assessment of what you may need. You will need a disaster kit for 7 days worth of food, water and medicine. It needs to be the kind of food that doesn't need to be cooked, something that can be readily prepared, (think about how you are going to get along in an emergency for 7 days). Think as though you were on a camping trip out in the woods for 7 days – what will you need to survive?

Finally you need to establish a personal support network. These are individuals who will check with you in an emergency and give assistance when needed. It needs to be more than one person because that person may also be affected. There are several things you need to discuss with your network. a) make arrangements that they check on you during a disaster, b) exchange keys so that they can get into your house, c) make sure they know where you keep your emergency supplies and d) notify your network when you are going to be out of town – the relationships should be mutual. Every person not just people who

are disabled need to have an emergency health card. Also, if you have a cell phone you need to put in an “ICE” (in case of emergency) – somebody’s name and phone number. If you were ever to become unconscious a healthcare provider can find your cell phone and contact your IEC. You need a health care card with information about your medication and things that you are allergic to - not just the name but the dosage. You should make multiple copies of this, a copy in your car, a copy of it on your person and a copy with your network. You also need an emergency contact list - not just in town but make sure you have people on there that are at least 100 miles away. You will need people at least 100 miles away in the event that a disaster impacted this area - the National Capital Region DC is 35 miles away. You will need emergency documents such as insurance information - if something happen to your house do you know all those account numbers and credit card numbers? All of these are important things to have during or after a disaster. Communication is very important as well. If you are disabled do not expect whoever is coming to help you whether it is the Police Department or Fire and Rescue to know anything about your disability. You need to be assertive! If you need something you better tell them. Take everything you need to a public shelter such as food and water – if your medication needs to be refrigerated you will need to bring a cooler. To view a copy of the presentation visit our website at www.pwcgov.org/dsb