

Emergency Preparation for People With Hearing Loss

By Shari Eberts

After the disheartening events of Sept. 11, 2001, my family decided to have an emergency plan in place. But after attending an emergency preparedness session, I realized that our emergency plan did not consider my hearing loss. *How would I make sure I had my hearing device during an emergency? What's my backup communication strategy should I lose my device?* Here are tips in making an effective emergency plan for people with hearing loss.

STAY INFORMED

While you can prepare for some emergencies like blizzards or hurricanes, you can never be sure about unexpected crises like fire, waterline damage, or terrorist attacks. In either case, the more information you have, the safer you will be. Sign up for email or text alerts for upcoming weather events, transportation disruptions, etc. Find local emergency alert systems and programs that send out timely and written alerts, which work well for people with hearing loss.

CREATE AN EMERGENCY NETWORK

Designate at least two people (friends, family, caregivers, neighbors, coworkers) to be part of your emergency network. You may want different networks for home and work depending on how far apart they are. Consider including somebody from out of town to act as a communication relay in case the local phone lines are jammed.

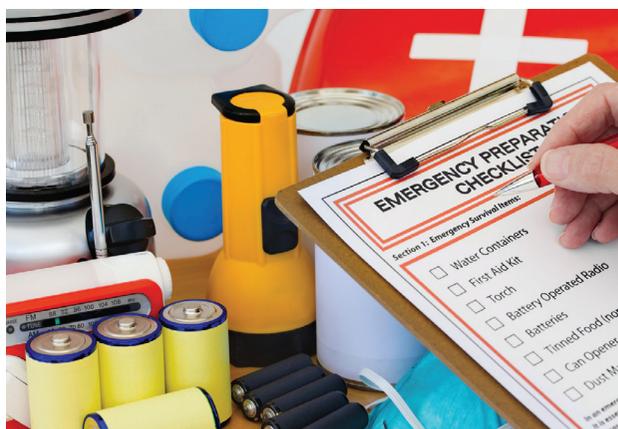
The people in your network will stay in touch during an emergency, have spare keys to each other's homes, and know where to find emergency supplies. Your network must be familiar with your hearing loss as well as your hearing devices (e.g., hearing aids, CIs, Roger pens, FM systems, etc.) and the batteries or chargers required to operate them.

PLAN YOUR COMMUNICATION OPTIONS

For people with hearing loss, this may be the most critical step. How will you communicate with your emergency network or medical personnel? In an emergency, your usual



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modes of communication may not be available so preparation is critical.

- Prepare index cards with important phrases like, "I wear hearing aids," or "Please face me and speak as clearly as possible." Have a notepad and pen available as well.
- Use social media to stay in touch. Facebook Safety Check, for example, lets you indicate your status during an emergency, and updates you on the status of others.
- Install personal safety applications (apps) on your smartphone. Explore iTunes or Google Play for popular apps that show your emergency contacts, blood type, and details about your hearing loss/devices on your phone's lock screen, making it visible without a password.

PREPARE EMERGENCY SUPPLY KITS

You will need two—one kit for your home and one portable kit should you need to evacuate. Both kits will contain similar items, but some (like water and snacks) will differ in quantity. Include:

- Copies of important documents like insurance cards, photo IDs, contact details of your family/emergency network, and a medication list with dosages. Keep these items in a waterproof container.
- Flashlights with extra batteries to help you navigate and lipread. Bring a whistle or bell to get someone's attention.
- First aid supplies, including an antiseptic cream, painkillers, bandages, and cleansing wipes.
- Hearing devices with spare batteries in waterproof containers. Include available backup devices and portable battery chargers, but make sure they are charged!

Preparation is the best defense in any emergency. Start making your emergency plan using helpful templates and add contingencies for your hearing loss (NYC gov, 2017). Hopefully, you will never need to use it.