

Emergency Preparedness Guide For People Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision

**Emergency Preparedness & Response
Service**

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Oklahoma State
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Creating a State of Health

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Introduction

People are less likely to have problems in either large or small emergencies if they are prepared.

A power outage in a selected area is considered a small emergency. Large emergencies affect a wide area, overload emergency services, and may mean that you have to be self-sufficient for a week or more.

The systems that people rely on may not work in a major disaster. The situation can be more difficult for people with disabilities and activity limitations.

For example, the ability to reach exits, gather up personal items and access emergency supplies should be part of your disaster preparedness planning.

People who have low vision or who are blind can have problems when infrastructure systems (utility companies) are down or overloaded during natural, human-caused or technological disasters.

To help reinforce the importance of planning for functional needs (people who are blind or who have low vision) populations, the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) is providing this document to assist during the planning process.

This emergency preparedness planning tool is intended to help individuals that have low vision or who are blind become better prepared. People who have low vision or are blind comprise 3.2 percent of Oklahoma’s population according to 2010 figures¹.

Common emergency situations in Oklahoma include:

- a. Human caused
- b. Natural (floods, tornados, wildfires, and winter storms)
- c. Technological (power outages)

There are a number of simple things that a blind person or a person with low vision can do to prepare for an emergency.

There are two primary things that can assist in emergency preparedness for all types of disasters, complete the self assessment and emergency preparedness plan below:

Ability Self-Assessment

Use this checklist when considering your abilities and what type of help you will need in an emergency. Read the general issues, and then review all steps for your personal emergency preparedness plan.

Ability Self-Assessment- General Issues

Yes	No	N/A	Do you know where all the fire alarms and extinguishers are in the places where you are regularly?
Yes	No	N/A	Can you activate the fire alarms?

¹ Annual Disability Statistics Compendium 2010.

Yes	No	N/A	Can you operate a fire extinguisher?
Yes	No	N/A	Have you practiced?
Yes	No	N/A	Do you know where the gas and water shut-offs are at your home?
Yes	No	N/A	Have you marked your utility shut-off valves at home with fluorescent tape, tactile glue, large print, or Braille labels?
Yes	No	N/A	Can you access them and use the proper tools to turn them off?
Yes	No	N/A	Do you have instructions and tools available so other people can turn off the utilities if needed?
Yes	No	N/A	Do you have a standard telephone (one that does not need electricity) and do you know where it is?
Yes	No	N/A	Do you know the location of ALL the exits in places where you are regularly during the day?
Yes	No	N/A	Have you evaluated your ability to use them?
Yes	No	N/A	Have you practiced using these exits?
Yes	No	N/A	Are there security lights along the path for exit identification? These lights plug into wall outlets and light automatically if there is a loss of power.
Yes	No	N/A	Have you thought about how you may be able to help others in an emergency? (For example, if you have no or low vision, you might be able to guide people through dark

			spaces. If you are a calm person, you might be able to help others avoid panic.)
Yes	No	N/A	Have you planned what you will do if your service animal becomes confused, frightened or disoriented? Are there other ways you can get around? (For example, by using sighted guides or members of your support team who can offer emotional support?)
Yes	No	N/A	If you rely on sound clues to get around (such as the hum of the copy machine by an elevator), will you be able to get yourself to safety if they are missing? You can't count on these clues if the electricity goes off or alarms are blaring.
Yes	No	N/A	There are signs with raised and Braille characters that designate exits, directions to exits, and information on exit routes? Are floors designated by raised and Braille numbers or letters, including floor level signs in stairwells?
Yes	No	N/A	Can you read the emergency signs in print or Braille?
Yes	No	N/A	If you wear contact lenses, do you either keep glasses with you or keep clear goggles in your emergency supply kit in case smoke, dust or fumes become painful or dangerous?
Yes	No	N/A	Can you use the two-way communication devices installed in the elevators and areas of refuge/rescue assistance?

Yes	No	N/A	Have you taught your support team how to serve as “sighted guides” if needed?
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A. Create a Disaster Plan. Meet with family, friends, neighbors, or coworkers (support group) to discuss and plan for disasters that occur in your area.

- a. Discuss the types of disasters that are most likely to happen. Explain what to do in each case.
- b. Pick two places to meet:
 - Outside your home in case of a sudden emergency like a fire.
 - Outside your neighborhood in case you can’t return home. Everyone must know the address and telephone number for emergency backup.
- c. Ask an out-of-state friend or relative to be your “back-up” contact. After a disaster, it’s often easier to call long distance. Other contacts should call this person and tell them where they are and where you are for exchange of essential information. Everyone must know your contact’s telephone number.
- d. Discuss what to do in an evacuation. Plan how to take care of your service animal or pet.

B. Assemble a Go-Bag. This would include basic necessities for **3 days (72 hours)**; many of the items are things that you probably have already around your home. Consider marking emergency supplies with large print, tactile, fluorescent tape or Braille. This bag is used

for all hazard preparedness. If you have a fire, leave as quickly as possible; with or without your go-bag.

Go-Bag List

1. Three days' supply of water (three gallons per person).
2. Three days' supply of non-perishable food such as the following:
 - a. Baby items if needed
 - b. Boxed or canned juices
 - c. Candy bars
 - d. Canned ready-to-eat foods
 - e. Cereal
 - f. Crackers
 - g. Granola bars, trail mix, or nuts
 - h. Manual can opener
 - i. Peanut butter
 - j. Service animal or pet items if needed (food, toys, and water)

Note: Be aware of the salt content, as it has the side effect of making you thirsty. Check and rotate your food every **6 months**.

3. Battery Operated or Crank Operated Radio

- a. Don't forget the extra batteries.

4. Flashlight and Plastic Emergency Whistle and other emergency alert items. Even among people with visual disabilities or people with low vision; having a flashlight is very important for emergency preparedness. The flashlight can provide visual assistance and the whistle can provide another audio

clue for emergency location during the disaster. The human voice can only shout at the highest volume for about **four minutes**. The flashlight can also assist a person that is following you during the emergency situation. A white distress cloth and/or glow sticks can also be seen by first responders.

5. **First Aid Kit.** Make sure that you are familiar with the contents and their placement in the kit. Consider adding a blanket, pillow and plastic bags to the kit for personal use during times of disasters.
6. **Toiletries and a Change of Clothing.** These can include items as simple as a toothbrush, toothpaste, hairbrush, toilet paper, and garbage bags with ties. Clothing should reflect the season. Change clothing when the season changes for appropriate weight and comfort.
7. **Prescriptions & Assistive Devices.** Make sure you have the medication name, dosage, the number of times you take the medication and the contact information of the doctor. Also, include prescription eyewear, non-prescription hearing aids, and communication devices. Stress to everyone that these items are assistive devices and not just “baggage.” A quick and efficient way to have the correct medical information is to use the extra labels that are provided by your pharmacist.
8. **Cane.** Even if you have useable vision or are a guide dog user, a cane can be essential for mobility to help maneuver around obstacles, identify of barriers and negotiate around other possible obstacles in the shelter.

9. **Work Gloves and Sturdy Shoes.** After auditory cues, touch is the most heavily relied upon sense for someone who has a visual disability. A pair of heavy work gloves and sturdy shoes can offer safety and security in exploring an unfamiliar environment while residing in the shelter.
10. **Safety Glasses.** Safety glasses will protect your eyes from falling objects or objects floating in the air during the disaster.
11. **Identification and Important Papers.** Photocopy all important documents into a plastic bag or fire proof safe. Make sure all papers are in an accessible version for identification of information. This may include the following: photograph identification, social security card, health insurance or Medicaid/Medicare cards, home/auto insurance papers, deeds, bank account numbers, contact telephone numbers for your emergency contacts, and local emergency telephone numbers.
12. **Cash, Coins, Credit Cards, Checkbook, and ATM card.** Cash and coins will always work during emergencies. The ATM card will not work during power outages.
13. **Service Animal or Pet.** Make sure you have included food and water for your animal. Also include their bedding, cage, veterinarian contact information, and a favorite toy. You should assemble a go-bag for your service animal or pet for easy access in emergency situations.

Note: There are different organizations that sell disaster kits, pre-packaged for the public.

- C. Equip your home** with automatic fire sprinkler systems or retrofit your residence with such protective devices such as smoke alarms and fire alarms.

Safety Equipment in Your Home

Fire Safety

The only thing a person that has a visual disability cannot do is see. Fire safety education is important for those with low vision or those who are blind. He or she is capable of hearing an audible smoke alarm and crawling low on the floor to escape to safety during a fire. These steps are just a few that can save your life or your family's life in case of an emergency. Basic fire safety involves the following procedures:

Before the Fire

Identify the nearest emergency exit. Whether you are at home or elsewhere, you always should know the location of the nearest exit.

Install smoke alarms. A working smoke alarm can make a vital difference in the event of a fire; it has the potential to reduce the risk of death in a fatal fire by 60 percent. Place alarms next to each sleeping area and on every floor of your home. You can also have a smoke alarm with a vibrating pad placed under your pillow as a safety device for fire alert. Test your batteries monthly. Your local fire department can assist you in testing your smoke alarms and replacing your batteries. They do not charge

for this public service. If your smoke alarms are hardwired (connected to the electric circuitry of your residence), make sure they also are equipped with battery backups.

Note: Fire Safety Solutions for People with Disabilities, a state wide organization that assists people with disabilities: will distribute and install free smoke alarms, and provides fire safety messages to Oklahomans' with disabilities. The Fire Protection Publications and Oklahoma ABLE Tech located at Oklahoma State University have created a partnership to provide specific fire safety messages to people who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, have low vision, or have mobility disabilities.

Live near an exit. If you live in an apartment building or condominium, try to get a unit on the ground floor. If this is not possible, know where the exit stairwell is located and how to get there. Plan to wait there for help if you also have a disability that prevents you from walking the stairs. Having a designated person(s) in your apartment building or condominium to assist you down the stairs is part of your general safety plan for all hazards preparedness. Having a telephone near your bed within arm's reach along with emergency telephone numbers can assist you in emergency calling with disaster planning.

Plan and practice escape plans. Know at least two exits from every room. Make sure you can unlock all your doors and windows. Be sure you know how to open all of your windows. Practice this during your fire drills in your home.

Exit indicators. The confusion and disorientation of a fire in the home can be difficult to overcome. You may be forced to crawl along the floor to avoid smoke. It can be very disorienting to crawl where you are used to walking (especially if you count steps to locate doors and hallways); it is recommended that you place tactile markers or security lights along the baseboard of exit routes inside your home. These will help to identify where to go in case of a fire.

Involve the fire department. Ask the fire department help you plan an escape route and inform them of your functional needs. Ask the fire department for help in the identification of all hazards in your home and to explain how to correct them. Learn the fire department's limitations and make fire officials aware of your limitations.

During the Fire

Get out and stay out. Leave your home as soon as possible. Do not try to gather personal possessions. Your go-bag should be by your door or by your bed. If your go-bag is not handy during your exit from a fire in your home, leave it. Your life is more important than the bag. Do not attempt to extinguish a large fire. Do not use the elevator.

Test the doors before opening them. Using the back of your hand, reach up high and touch the door, the doorknob, and the space between the door and the frame. If anything feels hot, keep the door shut and use your second exit. If everything feels cool, open the door slowly and crawl out low to the ground if smoke is present.

Stay low and go. Crawl and keep under the smoke if you can. If not, try to cover your mouth and to avoid breathing toxic fumes and make your way to safety as quickly as possible.

What to do if you are trapped. Close all doors between you and the fire. Stuff cracks in doors and cover all vents with a damp cloth to the best of your ability to keep smoke out. If possible, call the fire department and tell them where you are located. Signal first responders from a window with a flashlight, whistle or cloth that you keep with you for safety purposes. Call 9-1-1 on your cellular telephone.

Stop, Drop and Roll. If any part of you catches fire, do not run or try to extinguish the flames with your hands. Cover your face with your hands. Drop to the ground, rolling over and over. If you have another disability preventing these actions, try to keep a flame-resistant blanket or rug nearby to smother any flames.

After the Fire

Contact all friends and family to let them know you are okay. Many organizations can assist you in temporary housing in the event your home is damaged or destroyed due to fire. Secure your service animal or pet for transportation to new housing. Contact your insurance agent to start paper work for filing claims on personal items.

Environment

Become knowledgeable about your surroundings in the event of all emergencies that occur in your area.

Understand the **3 days (72 hours)** rule of emergency preparedness. Being informed and prepared will help you in the development of your emergency plans.

- a. **Know your alternate transit**, transportation and pedestrian routes in your neighborhood and work environment.
- b. **Know your exits of buildings** that you are in such as office buildings, apartment/ condominium complexes and hotels. Have someone explain and demonstrate where the exits are located when you attend conferences, schools, faith-based activities or other social engagements.
- c. **Have a designated family contact** or check-in person, preferably who is out of state. Local telephone lines may be overwhelmed but long distance lines may still operate. Ensure that all family members know the telephone number of the contact person(s) or have the number in their possession. Make sure the contact person does not have an unlisted telephone number, in case you are forced to look up the telephone number.
- d. **Create and implement a buddy system.** Have a reliable designated driver for your home, school, work, or place of worship in case you need a ride in during an emergency. Note: Seventy percent of all assistance after an emergency is made by neighbors, friends, or other “buddies”.

- e. **Have a means of retaining information** to assist you with communication during emergency. Cellular telephones have voice messages that can be recorded for future references, which is ideal for emergency situations.
- f. **Keep a copy of the local emergency numbers** other than 9-1-1 easily available for your use. During an emergency 9-1-1 will probably be overwhelmed with calls.
- g. **Practice emergency plans and procedures with family, friends, and support network.** This will ensure other people will know how to contact you and where you will be in case of an emergency.

Shelter-In-Place

The appropriate response depends on the type of emergency. If you hear a warning signal, listen to local radio or television stations for further information. You will be told what to do, including where to find the nearest shelter if you are away from your “shelter-in-place” location.

If you are told to “**shelter-in-place**,” act quickly. Follow the instructions of local authorities. Basic steps include:

- a. Enter your home immediately. Bring children or pets indoors immediately. If your children are at school, do not try to bring them home unless told to do so. The school will shelter them.
- b. Close and lock all outside doors and windows. Locking may provide a tighter seal.

- c. Get your disaster supply **go-bag** and make sure your radio is working.
- d. Call your emergency contact (support group) and keep the telephone handy in case you need to report a life-threatening condition. Otherwise stay off the telephone, so that lines will be available for use by emergency responders.
- e. Keep listening to your radio or television until you are told all is safe or you are told to evacuate. Do not evacuate unless instructed to do so by local authorities.
- f. If you are at work or in another facility; follow the directions and plans of the facility. Do not attempt to go home.

Evacuation

Several types of disasters may force you to be evacuated from your home. If you are told to evacuate, take the following steps:

- a. Listen carefully to instructions given by local officials. Evacuate immediately if told to do so.
- b. Leave a voice message with your “buddy,” friend, or neighbor so someone will know that you are waiting in your designated location.
- c. If you have time, grab your **3 day (72 hours)** go-bag kit. Make sure you include any last-minute items, such as prescription medication, that you may need.
- d. Wear appropriate clothing and sturdy shoes.
- e. Lock your door.

- f. Ask your buddy, neighbor or support group to assist you in the evacuation of your home. When possible have a “**buddy**” or strong support system, close to your home for immediate evacuation. You can always meet the other members of your support group in your pre-designated area for pick-up.

Be Prepared to Leave Your Home If

- a. Your area is without electrical power or water for an extended period of time.
- b. There is a chemical emergency affecting your area.
- c. Flood water is rising.
- d. A wildfire is burning near your home.
- e. Your home has been severely damaged.
- f. Local officials tell you to evacuate.

Plan Your Escape

Plan your escape around your capabilities:

- a. Know at least two exits from every room.
- b. If you use a walker, wheelchair or a cane, check all exits to be sure you can get through the doorways.
- c. Make any necessary accommodations, such as providing exit ramps and widening doorways, to facilitate an emergency escape.
- d. Keep all exits clear of objects for safe evacuation.

Service Animal

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a service animal as any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal individually trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability. If they meet this definition, animals are considered service animals under the ADA regardless of whether they have been licensed or certified by a state or local government.

Service animals perform some of the functions and tasks that the individual with a disability cannot perform independently. Guide dogs are one type of service animal, used by some individuals who are blind. This is the type of service animal with which most people are familiar. But there are service animals that assist persons with other kinds of disabilities in their day-to-day activities. A service animal is not a pet.

If you need to evacuate, you can take your service animal with you to the shelter. Bring your go-bag and your service animal go-bag for your stay in the shelter. If you cannot bring your service animals' go-bag, the shelter will provide food and water for emergency care. It is important to have a current photo of your service animal in the event that you are separated during the evacuation.

Service Animal Go-Bag List

- a. Blanket
- b. Food and water (remember to pack bowls for each)
- c. Leash or harness

- d. Medication
- e. Toys

References

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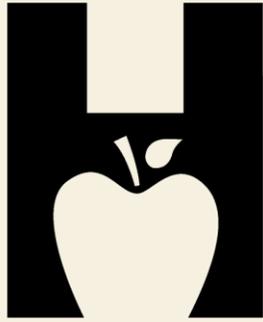
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