

PREPARE DENTON COUNTY

A GUIDE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES & OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS



**Provided by: Denton County Health Department's
Health Emergency Alert Response Team**

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS



Emergencies, whether man-made or naturally occurring, often happen without warning. While officials are responding to the larger event, they may not be able to respond to individual needs. You may be asked to stay at your current location (shelter-in-place) or leave familiar surroundings very quickly (evacuation).

The key to managing your self and your household during an emergency is to have a plan and prepare for emergencies that may occur. Your household will cope best by preparing for an emergency before it strikes. Once an emergency hits, you will not have time to shop or search for supplies. If you gather supplies and make plans in advance, your family can cope with an evacuation or shelter in place situation.



In addition to the general preparedness principles, as a person with special needs or a disability, you are less likely to have problems in both large and small emergencies if you take a few extra steps.

PERSONAL SUPPORT NETWORK

Step 1: Establish a Personal Support Network

A personal support network is made up of people who will check with you in an emergency to make sure you are okay and to give you help, if needed. This group is made up of friends, roommates, family members, personal attendants, coworkers or neighbors.

Some people rely on personal assistance services (attendants). This type of service may not be available in a major emergency. It is important that your personal support network is made up of different people than those who are your personal assistants. If you pay for a personal attendant or use a home health agency or in-home service, discuss with these people a plan for what you will do in case of an emergency. How will you get along in an emergency for as long as 10 days?

An important part to consider in your emergency planning is to establish a personal support network. Even if you do not use a personal attendant, it is important to think about having a personal support network to help you in coping with an emergency.

Do not depend on one person. Work out support relationships with many people. On the following page are tips to consider when forming your personal support network. After those tips is an assessment of your personal needs to help you in identifying some areas where you may need help.



PERSONAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

A personal support network can help you prepare for an emergency by identifying people and resources you would need if an emergency was to happen.

TIPS

- Choose at least 3 people for each location you spend the most time, such as home, religious/spiritual meeting places (church or synagogue), work or others.
- Choose those who will be able to help you within minutes.
- Discuss with network members what your needs would be in an emergency. Arrange more than one person to check on you in an emergency.
- Teach network members how to work any special equipment you use, and label your equipment with the instructions.
- If you are comfortable enough, give your networks a key to your home, car, or any other place to find you in an emergency.
- Complete a personal assessment to see what needs you may have (on the following page of this booklet).
- Provide network members with important information such as:
 - *Emergency and medical lists
 - *List of any special equipment and disability-related supplies.
 - *Shelter in place and evacuation plans
 - *Personal disaster plan, including your family communications plan.
 - *Personal assessment results



PERSONAL ASSESSMENT

Completing a personal assessment will help you decide what you can do for yourself and what areas you may need help.

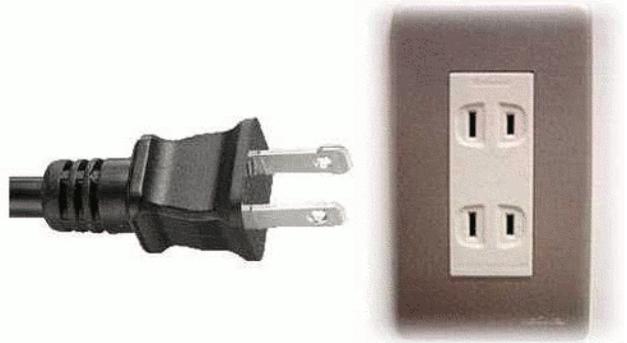
Daily Living Needs

- Personal care needs, such as bathing and grooming
- Food needs
- Are you able to communicate without your usual communication devices?
- Have you labeled equipment with simple instruction cards on how to operate them?



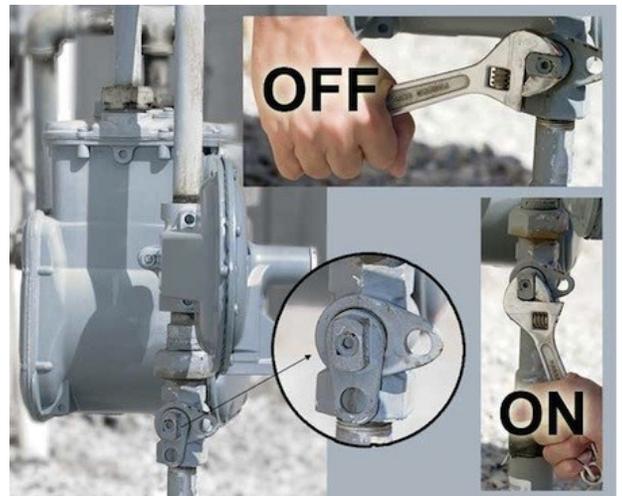
Electricity dependent equipment

- How will you continue to use equipment that runs on electricity?
- Do you have back-up power source?
- How long will it last?



Utilities

- Do you know how to turn off your water, electricity, gas, or other utilities during an emergency?
- Could you do it by yourself?
- Do you have the tools necessary to turn off your utilities during an emergency?
- What would you do if your water, electricity, gas or other utility sources were cut off for several days?



PERSONAL ASSESSMENT (CONTINUED)

Mobility/Getting Around

- Can you get around your home by yourself?
- Are you able to move around disaster debris (bits and pieces of broken homes, buildings and trees) in or around your home during or after an emergency?
- Are you able to create a way out of your home using a portable ramp?



Evacuating

- Could you leave your home very quickly by yourself?
- Could you carry your evacuation or “go kit”?
- Do you know where the building exits are in your home, work or school?
- Do you need help leaving?
- Do you have transportation or would you need someone to pick you up to evacuate?
- Do you have mobility aids (walker, cane, wheelchair, etc.) and is ramp access necessary?
- Do you have service animals that would also need to evacuate?



BASIC HEALTH INFORMATION CARD

2. Create a Health Information Card.

An emergency health card tells emergency response personnel what they need to know about you if they find you unconscious or incoherent, or if they need to quickly help evacuate you.

An emergency health information card should contain information about medications, equipment you use, allergies and sensitivities, communication difficulties you may have, preferred treatment, treatment medical providers and important contact people.

Make multiple copies of this card to keep in emergency supply kits, car, work, wallet (behind drivers license or primary identification card), wheelchair pack, etc.

The Prepare Denton County: Guide for Individuals and Families has example worksheets that will help you gather this information.

Please check with your local fire department to see if there are other locations you should put this health card. Some local fire departments suggest residents put the health card and other important information in the freezer for emergency responders.

HEALTH INFORMATION CARD FOR _____
Medication List (including dosage): _____ _____
Equipment: _____
Allergies/Sensitivities: _____
Communication Difficulties: _____
Preferred Treatment: _____
Health Care Provider (Name and Contact Info.): _____
Contact Person: _____
Back-up Contact Person: _____

DETAILED HEALTH INFORMATION CARD

It may be a good idea for you to think about preparing a more detailed health information card. A detailed health information card may be several pages in length, but would provide a more comprehensive or detailed picture of your help for emergency response personnel.

Like the basic health information card, please include this card in each of your emergency supply kits and provide a copy to members of your personal support network.



On the Front of the Card include:

- Name, Address, Phone Number
- Birth date
- Blood type
- Social Security Number
- Health Insurance Information (name of company, ID number, group number)
- Health Care Providers and Contact Information

On the Back of the Card include:

- Emergency Contacts
- Conditions, Disabilities
- Medications
- Assistance Needed
- Allergies and Sensitivities
- Immunization Dates
- Communication/Equipment/Other Important Needs



DETAILED HEALTH INFORMATION CARD (CONTINUED)

Instructions for Filling out the Card:

Make sure to list any conditions that rescuers might need to know about. If you are not sure whether or not they need to know about a condition, list it. Examples of possible conditions include: diabetes, epilepsy, heart conditions, high blood pressure, respiratory conditions, HIV/AIDS, specific disabilities, etc.

- 1. “My disability, which is due to a head injury, sometimes makes me appear drunk, I’m not!”*
- 2. “I have a psychiatric disability, in an emergency I may become confused. Help me find a quiet corner and I should be fine in 10 minutes; if not give me one green pill, (name of medication) located in my (purse, wallet, etc.)”*
- 3. “I take Lithium and my blood levels need to be checked every ____.”*
- 4. Multiple chemical sensitivities-these conditions may not be commonly understood therefore explanation may need to be detailed. “I react to _____, my reaction _____ do this _____”.*

If you take medication that cannot be stopped for even a short time without serious consequences, make sure this is stated clearly and include: prescriptions, dosages, times taken, other details regarding specifications of how you take the medication.

Assistance you think you may need should also be listed. “I need specific help with: walking, eating, standing, dressing, transferring”; “I need specific help with walking. The best way to help me is to let me to hang on your arm for balance.”

DETAILED HEALTH INFORMATION CARD (CONTINUED)

Instructions for Filling Out Card (continued)

Include information on any allergies or sensitivities to any medications or other chemicals. Include history of skin or other reaction of sickness following injection or oral administration of:

- antibiotics (ex: penicillin);
- tetanus, antitoxin or other serum;
- narcotic medication (morphine, codeine, Demerol, etc.);
- adhesive tape or latex products;
- Novocain or other anesthetics;
- iodine or methiolate;
- over-the-counter pain relievers (ex: aspirin);
- food allergies (ex: eggs, chocolate);
- sulfa drugs;
- sun exposure; or
- insect bites/stings.



SPECIFIC COMMUNICATIONS NEEDS EXAMPLES:



1. “I speak using an artificial larynx; if it is not available I can write notes to communicate.”

2. “I may not make sense for a while if under stress, leave me alone for 10 minutes and my mind should clear.”

3. “I speak slowly, softly and my speech is not clear. Find a quiet place for us to communicate. Be patient. Ask me to repeat or spell out what I am saying if you cannot understand me.”

4. “I use a word board, augmentative communication device, artificial larynx, etc. to communicate. In an emergency I can point to words and letters.”

5. “I cannot read. I communicate using an augmentative communication device. I can point to simple pictures or key words which you will find in my wallet or emergency supply kit.”

6. “I may have some difficulty understanding what you are telling me, please speak slowly and use simple language.”

7. “My primary language is ASL. I am deaf and not fluent in English, I will need an ASL interpreter. I read only very simple English.”

EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

3. Create an Emergency Contact List.

Ask a relative or friend who lives outside your immediate area (at least 100 miles away) to act as a clearing house for information about you and your family during and after a disaster. It may be a good idea to select a back-up out-of-area contact in case your primary person is unavailable. It is often easier to place an out of state long distance call from a disaster area, than to call within the area. All family members should know to call the contact person to report their location and condition. Once contact is made, have the contact person relay messages to your other friends and relatives outside of the disaster area. This will help to reduce calling into and out of the affected area once the phones are working. It will also limit call traffic to allow emergency response calls to be made without competition.



EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST (CONTINUED)

3. Create an Emergency Contact List. (Continued)

Besides emergency out-of-town contacts, your emergency contact list should include members of your personal support network, equipment vendors, doctors or other health care providers, pharmacies, utility companies, employers, schools and daycare centers, household members and other important family members.

Do not rely on information and phone numbers stored in cellular/mobile phones; have all important phone numbers and contact information written down and stored in each of your emergency kits and your wallet or purse.

Worksheets designed to help collect needed contact information is located in the “Prepare Denton County Guide for Individuals and Families”.

Other Important Phone Numbers and Information:

Emergency Contact Card

Contact Name: _____ Telephone: _____

_____ Out-of-State Contact Name _____

Telephone _____ Neighborhood Meeting Place: _____

Meeting Place Telephone: _____

DIAL 9-1-1 FOR EMERGENCIES

EMERGENCY DOCUMENTS

4. Gather emergency documents/papers.

Gather important documents and papers that would be needed during and after an emergency. Include important information that may be needed after a disaster.

Store emergency documents in your home emergency supply kit (Stay Kit). Copies of life saving information (i.e., information about adaptive equipment or medical devices and medications with dosages) should be stored in all of your emergency kits (Stay Kit and Go Kit).

Important documents include:

- ❑ Family Records
- ❑ Wills
- ❑ Deeds
- ❑ Social Security Numbers for entire family
- ❑ Charge and Bank Account Information



EMERGENCY DOCUMENTS (CONTINUED)

4. Gather emergency documents/papers. (Continued)

Important documents include:

- Family Records
- Wills
- Deeds
- Social Security Numbers for entire family
- Charge and Bank Account Information

These should be stored in sealed freezer bags with a copy of the documentation sent to your out-of-state or out-of-area contacts.

Contact emergency response providers, such as the fire department in your city or town to ask if there are other locations they suggest storing these important documents. Some municipality responders have additional suggestions.



COMMUNICATION SKILLS

5. Practice Assertive (FIRM) Communication Skills.

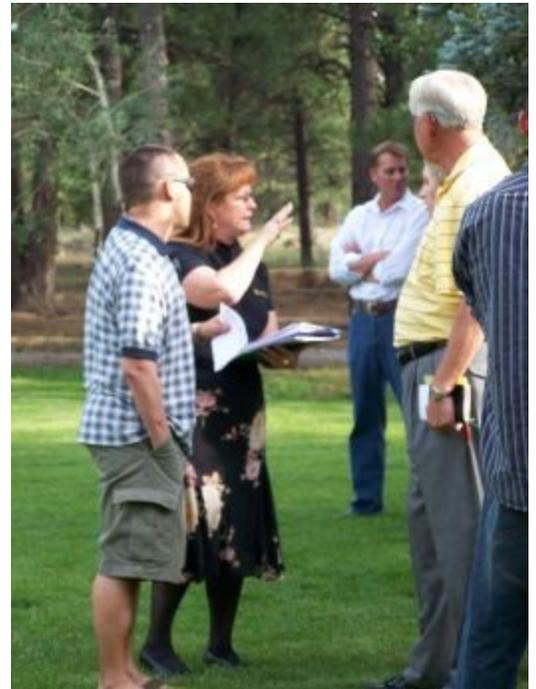
Take charge and practice how to quickly explain to people how to move your mobility aids or how to move you safely and quickly. Be prepared to give clear, specific, and concise instructions and directions to rescue



personnel, i.e., “take my oxygen tank”; “take my wheelchair”; “take my gamma globulin from the freezer”; “take my insulin from the refrigerator”; “take my communication device from under the bed”.

Practice giving these instructions with the least amount of words in the least amount of time.

Be prepared to request anything you need from the emergency response personnel. For example, if you are unable to wait in long lines for extended periods of time, for such items as water, food and disaster relief applications, practice clearly and concisely explaining why you cannot wait in line.



BE POLITE, BUT ASSERTIVE!

EMERGENCY SUPPLY KITS

The information provided in this section is an addendum (in addition to) to the Emergency Supply Kit section in the “Prepare Denton County Guide for Individuals and Families. Please also consult the guidebook for additional recommendations.

6. Create Emergency Supply Kits.

In addition to the contents of a regular emergency supply kit or “Stay Kit”, make sure to add things that you need. Store supplies in areas you think will be easy to reach after a disaster. Store personally needed supplies on top of the emergency kit in a separate labeled bag. If you have to leave something behind, make sure to get this bag.

Plan for enough personal supplies for up to **10 to 14 days** in the event of a public health emergency.

These personal supplies could include medication syringes, colostomy supplies, respiratory apparatus, catheters, padding, distilled water, etc. If you have a respiratory, cardiac or multiple chemical sensitivities condition, store towels, masks, industrial respirators or other supplies you can use to filter your air supply. Do not expect the shelters or first aid stations to meet your supply needs. In an emergency, supplies could be limited.



EMERGENCY SUPPLY KITS (CONTINUED)

Medication

It is best if you are able to keep at least a 10 to 14 day supply of required medications and keep the supply with you at all times. If this is not possible, even keeping a 3-day supply may prove helpful. Work with your health care provider to obtain an extra supply of medications, as well as extra copies of your prescriptions. Make several copies of your prescriptions and put one copy in each of your emergency kits.



Ask your provider or pharmacist about the shelf life (how long the medicine is good for) and storage temperature sensitivities of your medications. Ask how often you should get new stored medication to make sure that the medication is still good. If you are on medications that are given to you by a clinic or hospital (such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy or methadone) ask your provider how you should plan for 3-14 days without the treatment.

If you are a smoker, be aware that smoking will not be allowed in a shelter. If getting to an outside smoking area may be difficult for you, consider stocking your evacuation kit (Go Kit) with nicotine gum or patches available by prescription.



Make sure to stock your kits with over-the-counter basic medications that you normally have on hand such as pain relievers, cold medication, cough medicine, stomach discomfort or diarrhea medication, etc.

EMERGENCY SUPPLY KITS (CONTINUED)

Equipment and Assistive Devices



Keep important equipment and assistive devices in a consistent, convenient and secure place so that you can quickly and easily locate them after the disaster. Make sure these items such as teeth, hearing aids, prosthesis, mobility aids, cane, crutches, walkers, respirator, service animal harness, augmentative communication device or electronic communicator, artificial larynx, wheelchair, sanitary aids, batteries, eye glasses, contacts including cleaner, etc. are secured.

Examples: keep hearing aids or eye glasses in containers attached to the bedside table or bedpost using string or Velcro, oxygen tank attached to the wall, wheelchair locked and close to the bed. This helps prevent them from falling, flying or rolling away during a disaster.

If you use a laptop computer to communicate, think about getting a power converter. A power converter lets most laptops run from a cigarette lighter of a vehicle.



FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

Tips for People with Visual Impairments

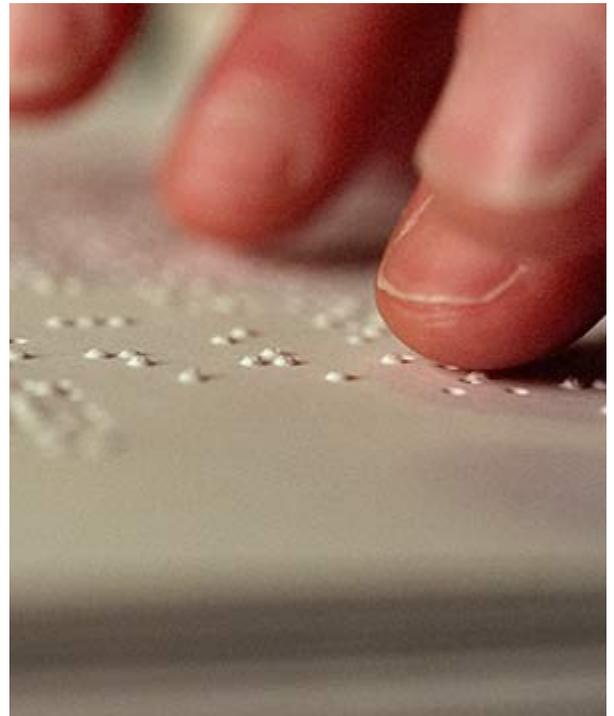
- If you use a cane, keep extras in strategic, consistent and secure locations and work, home, school, volunteer sites, etc. to help you get around obstacles and hazards.
- Keep a spare cane in your emergency kits.
- If you have some vision, place security lights in each room to light paths of travel. These lights plug into electrical wall outlets and light up automatically if there is a loss of power. They will, depending on type, continue to operate automatically for 1 to 6 hours and can be turned off by hand and used as a short-lasting flashlight.
- Mark your designated exits and utility shut-off valves with fluorescent tape, large print or Braille labels.



FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS (CONTINUED)

Tips for People with Visual Impairments (Continued)

- Store high-powered flashlights with wide beams and extra batteries.
- If you rely on sound clues to get around, create an alternate system in case those are missing.
- If you wear soft contact lenses, plan to have an alternative because you may not be able to work the cleaning unit without power.
- Service animals may become confused, panicked, frightened or disoriented during and after a disaster. Keep them confined or securely leashed or harnessed. A leash/harness is an important item for managing a nervous or upset animal. Be prepared to use alternative ways to get around. If helpful, mark emergency supplies with large print, fluorescent tape or Braille.
- Anchor special equipment, such as computers. Create a back-up system for important data and store it off site.
- Advocate for TV news not only to post important numbers, but also to announce them slowly and repeat.



FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH HEARING AND COMMUNICATION DISABILITIES

Tips for People Who are Hard of Hearing or With Communication/Speech Related Disabilities.

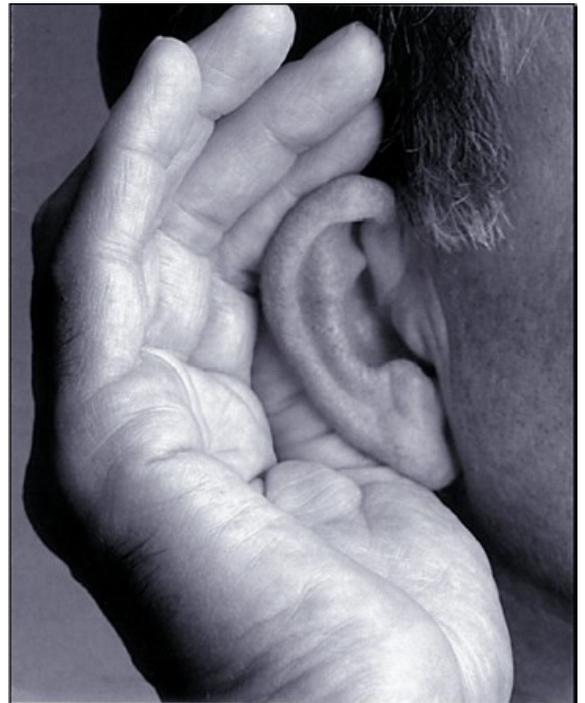
- Store extra batteries for hearing aids and implants. If available, store an extra hearing aid with emergency supplies.
- Maintain TTY batteries.
- Store extra batteries for your TTY and light phone signaler.
- Obtain an alternative power source if you use a computer or laptop computer as a means of communication.
- Store hearing aids in a strategic, consistent and secure location.
- Install both audible alarms and visual smoke alarms. At least one should be battery operated.



FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH HEARING AND COMMUNICATION DISABILITIES (CONTINUED)

Tips for People Who are Hard of Hearing or With Communication/Speech Related Disabilities (Continued)

- ❑ Decide how you will communicate with emergency personnel if there is no interpreter available, if you do not have your hearing aids or communication device.
- ❑ Store copies of a word or letter board, paper and writing materials, pre-printed materials and key phrases specific to possible emergencies, in your emergency kits, wallet, purse, etc.
- ❑ Make sure emergency health information card explains the best way to communicate with you.
- ❑ If possible, get a battery operated television that has a decoder chip for access to signed or captioned emergency reports.
- ❑ Figure out which broadcasting systems will be accessible in terms of continuous news that will be captioned or signed. Advocate so that television stations have a plan to secure emergency interpreters for on camera.



FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH COGNITIVE OR PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITIES

Tips for People with Cognitive or Psychiatric Disabilities *Before, During and After a Disaster*

Practice what to do during and after a disaster. Practice leaving places where you spend time until you feel comfortable and confident that you will know what to do during and after a disaster.

Emergency Plan

- Keep a written emergency plan with you and in several locations. Make sure your emergency plan is easy to read and understand.
- After a disaster, information will come at you quickly. Think through ways to do things you will need to do after a disaster. Small tape recorders, calendar with room for notes, to do lists, etc. will help you remember things.
- Give copies of your written emergency plan to your personal support network.



FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH COGNITIVE OR PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITIES (CONTINUED)

Emergency Plan (Continued)

- There are a number of emotional reactions that may occur or become more severe after a disaster. These reactions include: confusion, thought processing and memory difficulty, frustration, paranoia, crying, fear, panic, pacing, shouting, depression, withdrawal, irritability, anxiety, shaking, and sleep disturbance.
- Think through the types of reactions you may have and plan ways for coping with these reactions.
- Consider getting input from your friends, family, therapist or service provider(s).
- Be prepared to have members of your personal support network offer emotional support so you can acknowledge and express feelings about the disaster.

Communication

- Think through what a rescuer might need to know about you and be prepared to say it briefly, or keep a written copy with you.
- You may need medical assistance. You may even need temporary hospitalization. Keep with you instructions for your care and treatment, or a copy of a durable power of attorney for health so that someone you have chosen may intervene for you.



TIPS FOR PEOPLE WHO USE LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- Secure any life support equipment to prevent damage from falling. If you use a chain to secure equipment, make sure it is a welded (not bent) chain.
- Determine which facilities or providers would serve you in the event that your home system does not work or your provider is unable to provide your service.
- Discuss with your vendor alternative power sources that will provide you with support for ten days. (i.e. could you use a generator?, could you use manually operated equipment; can your equipment be powered from a vehicle battery?)

Generator use, if appropriate and feasible:

- To run generators in an emergency, fuel must be safely stored. Generators need to be operated in an open area to get good air flow. A 2,000 to 2,500 watt gas-powered portable generator can power a refrigerator and several lamps. (A refrigerator needs to run only 15 minutes an hour to stay cool if you keep the door closed. If you need to use the microwave or other appliances, unplug the refrigerator to plug in and operate).
- For 24 hour use over several days, a gasoline powered generator is probably the preferred alternative power source. A generator needs to be tested periodically to make sure it will work when needed. The challenge with generators comes when you live in an apartment and have to figure out how to store enough gasoline supply safely. Store a siphon kit if you need to get gasoline directly from your vehicle.
- Some generators can be plugged into house wiring systems. It is important to first ask your utility company before you plug a generator into house wiring.



TIPS FOR PEOPLE WHO USE LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS (CONTINUED)



Oxygen Users:

- You will need to check with your health care provider to decide whether a reduced flow rate may be used in the event of an emergency to prolong the life of the system. Write down the reduced flow numbers on your equipment so that you can easily see them.
- Be aware of oxygen safety; avoid areas where gas leaks or open flames may be present.
- Post “Oxygen in Use” signs.
- Keep the shut-off switch for oxygen equipment near you so you can get to it quickly in case of an emergency.
- If your power back-up system works on storing batteries, be aware of the drawbacks. Stored batteries require regular charging even when they are unused. If your survival strategy depends on storing batteries, you need to make a battery charging routine and stick to it.
- Regularly check back-up or alternative power equipment to make sure it will work right during an emergency.
- Know how long any batteries that support your system will work.
- Discuss with your power company the type of back-up power you plan to get; get their advice and permission.

TIPS FOR PEOPLE WHO USE LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS (CONTINUED)

Utility Company Registry

- Register with your local utility companies if this service is available in your community. Many utility companies keep a list and map of where you live in case of an emergency. Contact the customer service department for additional information.
- In order to restore power as soon as possible to those who need it most when there are power outages, many power utility companies keep a list of names of people who need powered life support systems and tag their meters. Sometimes this list is prioritized by how long a person is able to be off a life support system. Information is given to local power stations. Never count on your power being quickly restored. Utility personnel may not be able to get to you after a major disaster.



Personal Support Network

- Inform your personal support network how to work and safely move your equipment, if necessary.
- Label equipment; add instruction cards, laminate instruction cards for added durability; attach to equipment.



ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. When staying at a hotel/motel, identify yourself to the registration desk staff as a person who will need help in an emergency and state the type of help you may need.
2. Write instructions on how to turn off utilities and create color code or label these for quick identification

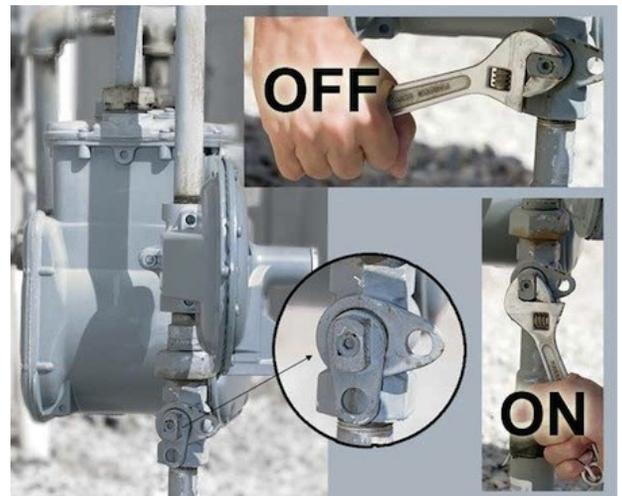


A. Main Gas Valve, located next to the meter-blue

B. Electrical power circuit breaker box-red

C. Main water valve-green

D. If you have a reduced or limited sense of smell, alert your personal support network to check gas leaks.



3. Remind anyone who assists you to practice strict cleanliness and keep fingers out of their mouth. With limited water and increased health hazards, the possibility of infection increases. Keep a supply of latex or non-latex gloves in your emergency kit and ask people assisting you with personal hygiene to use them.



ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

4. List all personal care assistance needs (dressing, bathing, bathroom, etc.) with instructions on the best way to help you.
5. Make a map of where to find medication, aids and supplies to share with your personal support network.
6. Use back pack or draw string bag for “Go Kit” so that you are able to hang it on your wheelchair, scooter, walker or other assistive devices.
7. If you have a physical disability or mobility concern, provide quick instructions on how to safely carry you, if needed.
8. If you have service animals, make sure you think about how you are going to care for them during an emergency. You should also have a specific person in your personal support network who can care for your animal. Make sure you have appropriate license(s) for your animal service so that you will be allowed to keep the animal with you in a shelter situation.



TAKE TIME TO PLAN!
YOU'LL BE GLAD YOU DID!



Information brought to you courtesy of
Health Emergency Alert Response Team (HEART)
Denton County Health Department
(940) 349-2909
www.dentoncounty.com/heart