

Preparedness Inspires Resilience for People with Disabilities

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U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS – Today’s 34th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides us an opportunity to reflect on a law that ensures all people with disabilities have the same rights and privileges as everyone else. As well, the ADA Act reminds us to recall the importance of disaster preparedness for people with disabilities and their families during Disability Pride Month in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

FEMA’s presence at the recent “All Things ADA” Expo held on St. Thomas and St. Croix highlights our focus on our collaboration with the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) on informing people with disabilities, access or functional needs, and older adults to be ready for emergencies and disasters.

The keys to effective disaster preparedness of building a kit, making a plan and staying informed, applies to all of us. But people with unique needs and their families should consider individual circumstances and needs to effectively prepare for emergencies and disasters.

Additional considerations should include the following:

- Create a support network and maintain contact with those who can assist you. Keep a contact list in a watertight container in your emergency kit. Learn more at www.ready.gov/kit .
- Inform your support network where your emergency supplies are kept. You may want to give someone in your support network a key to your home.
- Plan for accessible transportation to evacuate or get to a medical clinic. Work with local services, public transportation or paratransit to identify local or private accessible transportation options.
- If dialysis is part of your health maintenance plan, know where multiple facilities are located.
- Determine how to use medical equipment in the event of a power outage.



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Page 1 of 3

- Wear medical alert tags or bracelets.
- If you have a communication disability, make note of the best way to communicate with you in an emergency.
- Plan how to evacuate with assistive devices or how to replace equipment if it is lost or destroyed. Write down model information and note who provided it, such as Medicaid, Medicare or private insurance. Add this to your watertight container with your other important documents.

If you have a service animal, be sure to include food, water, identification tags and supplies. It is also important to have cash in your kit in case you need to purchase supplies.

Tips for people who are deaf or hard of hearing include having:

- A weather radio with text display and a flashing alert along with extra batteries.
- Extra hearing-aid batteries.
- A headlamp to illuminate people with whom you are communicating.
- Pen and paper in case you must communicate with someone who does not know sign language.

Tips for people who are blind or have low vision include:

- Marking emergency supplies with Braille labels or large print. Keep a list of your emergency supplies on a portable flash drive or make an audio file that is kept in a safe and is accessible.
- Keep a Braille, or deaf-blind communications device in an emergency supply kit.

Tips for people having a mobility disability include:

- If you are using a power wheelchair, have a lightweight manual chair available as a backup. Show your support network how to operate your wheelchair.
- Know the size and weight of your wheelchair and if it is collapsible for transportation.
- Keep an extra mobility device such as a cane or walker, if you use one.

Assess your unique needs, review what you might need to replenish in your emergency kit and practice your emergency plans before peak activity arrives in the Atlantic hurricane season. Find more information for people with disabilities at



www.ready.gov/disability and for older adults at www.ready.gov/older-adults .

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FEMA's mission is helping people before, during, and after disasters.



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