

## **Disaster Preparedness Tips for Families Affected by Autism**

With the help of renowned emergency preparedness expert Dennis Debbaudt, who has a son with autism, and ASA Board Member Ruth Elaine Hane, ASA - with support from NASCAR driver and ASA friend Jamie McMurray - is committed to helping families with special needs prepare for emergencies. During any emergency, whether it be weather-related or man-made, we want those in the autism community to be prepared.

Should you have access to a video recorder or camera, it is strongly recommended that you videotape your property and important possessions. Then, send copies of those photos or videos to a friend or family member in another location for safe keeping.

### **Tip #1. Practice calm**

Parents and care providers need to project a demeanor of calm during a disaster or emergency, even if we're not! Children and adults on the spectrum may sense your emotional state - and mimic it. Practice for and prepare to project a sense of calm.

### **Tip #2. Prepare for immediate needs before disaster**

Be ready to evacuate. Have a plan for getting you and your loved ones out of your home or building (ask family or friends for assistance, if necessary). Also, plan two evacuation routes because some roads may be closed or blocked in a disaster.

Create a self-help network of relatives, friends or co-workers to assist in an emergency.

If you think you may need assistance in a disaster, discuss needs with relatives, friends, and co-workers and ask for their help.

Give a key to a trusted neighbor or friend who may be able to assist you in a disaster.

Contact your local emergency information management office now. Many local emergency management offices maintain registers of people with disabilities so they can be located and assisted quickly in a disaster. For a list of state offices and agencies, visit [www.fema.gov/about/contact/statedr.shtm](http://www.fema.gov/about/contact/statedr.shtm).

Wearing a medical alert tag or bracelet to identify your disability may help in case of an emergency.

If you have a severe speech, language, or hearing disability:

1. When you dial 911, tap space bar to indicate TDD call.
2. Store a writing pad and pencils to communicate with others.
3. Keep a flashlight handy to signal whereabouts to other people and for illumination to aid in communication.

4. Remind friends that you cannot completely hear warnings or emergency instructions. Ask them to be your source of emergency information as it comes over their radio.
5. If you have a service dog, be aware that the dog may become confused or disoriented in an emergency. Store extra food, water and supplies for your dog (as well as yourself).

Plan to take care of your pets in advance, particularly if sheltering is necessary, so you can concentrate on the rest of the family.

Have a disaster supply kit prepared that you can use at home or in an evacuation setting. Kits should include:

1. Flashlight with extra batteries
2. Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries
3. First aid kit and manual
4. Emergency food and water for at least two days (per person)
5. Manual can opener
6. Essential medicines for three to seven days
7. Cash and credit cards (withdraw cash in advance if possible)
8. Sturdy shoes

Also, in case of evacuation, pack a safety & comfort kit, which can include:

1. Blanket
2. Pillow
3. Folding chair
4. Sleeping bag or cot
5. Personal hygiene items
6. Identification and valuable documents (insurance, birth and marriage certificates, and special-needs forms)
7. Change of clothes
8. "Comfort" items such as a CD player and CDs (with extra batteries) or a DVD player and DVDs
9. Ear plugs or eye shades
10. Storage boxes to store small items (could be plastic with fitted lids)
11. A drawing of the building layout and map of the area to give an orientation of where you are in relation to your home.
12. An ID bracelet and autism information cards to explain behaviors to others.

Some of these helpful tips are provided in part by FEMA's report, "Disaster Preparedness for People with Disabilities." To view the FEMA report in its entirety, go to [www.fema.gov/library/viewRecord.do?id=1442](http://www.fema.gov/library/viewRecord.do?id=1442).

**Tip #3. If disaster strikes:**

Look for items that may have broken or been displaced that could cause a hazard, particularly electrical lines.

Beware of carbon monoxide poisoning. People have died or been poisoned by carbon monoxide in times of disaster due to the use of generators, grills, camp stoves, or other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices inside the home, basement, garage or camper or even outside near an open window. The CDC warns that you should never use these devices inside.

Follow instructions for disaster supply kit and safety & comfort kit outlined in Tip #2.

Last updated: 16 December 2008