# Emergency Preparedness
# and
# People who are Blind and Visually Impaired:

# A Handbook for the Consumer

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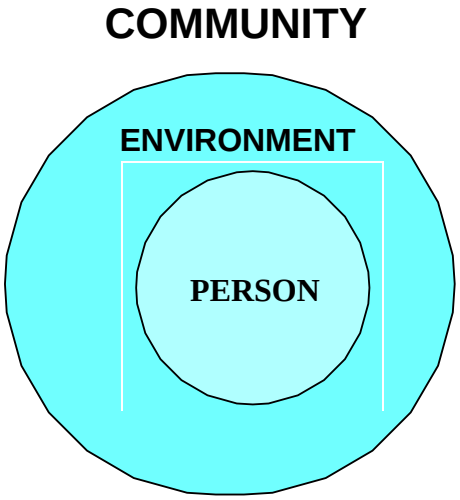


# The Three Rings Analogy

**One of the most difficult issues with regard to pre-event planning for any emergency is the overwhelming amount of information available. The Three Rings Analogy is a simplified means of identifying and explaining disaster preparedness in a manner that encourages step-by-step positive action. It is based on the idea of three concentric rings; each one inside the other.**

**The center-most ring represents you, as an individual. What will you need? During most emergencies, unless it is a burning building or an unsafe or damaged structure, most people are told to shelter in place and wait for further instructions from their local emergency management agency. This center ring is the first step – what basic supplies should you have prepared?**

**The next ring out is an expansion of this concept, and that is person-in-environment. Do you know what to do if you are at work or at a conference or convention? Where is the nearest exit? What will your family do if you are all separated? Who should you all contact?**

**The outer-most ring represents the community and being active in it. First responders, emergency planners, local transportation departments and many other officials involved in emergency management are interested in knowing how best to serve the needs of people with disabilities. This third ring represents us, as blind individuals offering our experience and expertise to aid in their planning process to better serve our neighborhoods and communities.**

## THE CENTERMOST RING: PERSON

**There are a number of simple things that you as a visually impaired individual can do to prepare both yourself and your family in the event of a disaster. One of the easiest things you can do to prepare for the unexpected is assemble a supply kit. This would include basic necessities for 3 to 5 days; many of the items are things that you probably have already in and around your home. Consider marking emergency supplies with large print, fluorescent tape or Braille.**

**1.** ***Three days supply of water (one gallon per day per person)***

You don't have to go out and buy water all at once. Buying a few bottles at a time and storing them is an easy and affordable option.

**2.** ***Five days supply of non-perishable food (don't forget a manual can opener)***

Items such as canned ready-to-eat foods, boxed or canned juices, crackers, cereal, granola bars, or trail mix are all good examples. Be aware of the salt content, as it has the side effect of making you thirsty. If you have specific dietary needs, keep that in mind when making your food choices. Check and replace your foodstuff every 6 months.

3. ***Battery-operated or Crank-operated Radio (don't forget extra batteries).***

It is essential that information gets to you and in times of emergency the radio is often the first source.

4. ***Flashlight and Plastic Emergency Whistle***

A flashlight can be used to alert first responders to your location or assist you or someone else with orientation and navigation through debris. The flashlight and whistle are both imperative for visibility and signaling purposes. The human voice can only shout at the highest volume for about 4 minutes. As long as you can breathe you can sound the whistle to alert responders to your location.

5. ***First Aid Kit***

First aid kits are available in many locations, but owning one isn't enough. Make sure that you are familiar with the contents and their placement in the kit. You might consider adding a blanket, non-latex gloves and antiseptic wipes.

6. ***Toiletries and a Change of Clothing***

These can include items as simple as toothbrush and toothpaste, hairbrush, toilet paper and garbage bags with ties.

7. ***Medications, Special Needs & Assistive Devices***

Make sure you have 14 days of medication. On a separate sheet of paper note all medication you take – both prescription and over-the-counter. Provide contact information for your physician and indicate any allergies or dietary needs you might have. Also include prescription eyewear and hearing aids information. If you need an assistive device or an interpreter, include it on the paper. Specify your particular needs. For example: "I use ASL (American Sign Language). Because of my vision impairment I need an interpreter skilled in restricted field interpreting." It may also be a good idea to include a description of how someone can use your assistive device to communicate with you especially if you have

difficulty voicing when under stress.

Portable assistive devices (e.g. magnifiers, assistive listening devices, communication devices): Be very clear that these items are assistive devices and not just “baggage.” If you use a laptop computer or notetaker to facilitate communication, you may want to clarify this in writing. This information can be shown to a shelter manager to prevent any problems with space restrictions. For example: “I need my (name of device). It will enable me to write down information to be able to refer back to. This is equivalent to a pen and paper for me.” Or “I am deaf-blind and I use (name of device) to facilitate communication.”

**8. *Cane***

Even if you have some usable vision or are a guide dog user, a cane can be essential for mobility to help maneuver around obstacles and negotiate and identify barriers.

**9. *Work Gloves and Sturdy Shoes***

After auditory cues, touch is the most heavily relied upon sense for someone who is visually impaired. A pair of heavy work gloves and sturdy shoes can offer safety and security in exploring an unfamiliar environment in addition to the use of a cane.

10. *Identification and Important Papers*

It is a good idea to put photocopies of important documents, and an accessible version of important numbers, in a plastic pouch or bag. This could include: state or federal photo identification (non-driver ID card or passport), Social Security card, health insurance or Medicaid/Medicare cards, home/life/auto insurance papers, deeds, bank account numbers, contact numbers for your emergency contact person and local emergency numbers.

***Note:*** **If you have a service animal or pet, make sure that you have included food and water for your animal as well as bedding and a favorite toy. An extra leash to give your dog more leash if needed or to replace one that has become damaged is also a**

**consideration. Also be certain that your service animal has appropriate identification. For specific needs relating to a service animal or pet, please see the separate handout, "Emergency Preparedness and Your Service Animal or Pet."**

**No doubt there are many other items that are of utility but the goal of this brochure is simplicity and a focus on items specifically useful for people with visual impairments.**

***HOT TIP:*** **If putting together your kit seems overwhelming, it is possible to purchase "ready-made" Disaster Kits. However, make sure you are familiar with all the items in the kit. Keep in mind that these kits will not**

# The 2nd RING: PERSON-IN-ENVIRONMENT

**This ring deals with the person-in-environment, being aware of your surroundings and making plans so that wherever you are, you are informed and prepared.**

1. **Know alternate transit, transportation and pedestrian routes in your neighborhood and work environments.**

2. **Know emergency exits of buildings that you are in such as office buildings, apartment/condo complexes and hotels, as well as at conferences and events that you attend.**

3. **Have a designated family contact or check-in person, preferably someone who is out of state.**
   Local phone lines may be overwhelmed but long distance lines may still operate. Ensure that all family members know the phone number of the contact person or have the number in their possession. Make sure the contact person does not have an unlisted number, in case you are forced to look it up.

4. **Create and implement a buddy system.**
   An example: having a reliable designated driver for home, school and work in case you need a ride in the event of an emergency. 70% of assistance after an emergency is made by neighbors, friends or other "buddies."

5. **Have a means of writing and taking down information to assist you with communication in the event of an emergency.**
   Have paper, pens and markers, or slate and stylus in your possession in addition to assistive technology and back-up power supplies for your technology. Example: if you are an individual who is deaf/blind, have index cards with pre-printed phrases that you will need to use when communicating with first responders.
6. **Keep a copy of local emergency numbers (other than 911) easily**

**available.**

7. **Practice emergency plans and procedures with your family.**

8. **If you must evacuate your home, post a message inside at a designated location indicating where you have gone. Take your emergency kit that contains vital documents and supplies, and make sure that you have a plan for the care of your pets. For health and safety reasons, shelters are not permitted to allow pets.**

## RING 3: PERSON-IN-COMMUNITY

1. Ask about specific vulnerabilities for your community: hurricane, tornado, blizzard, toxic spill etc.

2. Contact your local Office of Emergency Management to learn about their planning to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

   For example: How is transportation to shelters being provided? What provisions are made for guide dogs? State and local governments generally have emergency evacuation plans in place for their jurisdictions. They may or may not be aware of the needs of people with visual impairments.

   Ask what plans they have for before, during and after a disaster. Keep in mind that response efforts after a disaster are just as important as pre-event planning.

3. **Talk to your local office of Emergency Management or 911 coordinating agency to explore the creation of a voluntary registry of people with disabilities located within their jurisdiction.**

   Such a directory would give first responders the ability to contact or assist local residents during emergency situations and would alert them as to specific needs such as transportation, medical, communication or the use of a service animal.

4. **Demand pre-event emergency planning information in accessible formats at the same time printed materials become available.**

5. **Encourage your community to disseminate information through creative alternatives, such as radio reading services.**

6. **Work with your own neighborhood to develop a neighborhood evacuation plan.**

   A Neighborhood Emergency Watch could function much like Neighborhood Watch, where neighbors inform each other of emergencies and work with each to ensure the safety of all.

7. **Help prepare yourself by contacting your local Red Cross for information and classes.**

   In an emergency, you may need to provide first aid or other assistance, and the Red Cross can provide you with that training.

8. **Ask your local media to make sure that all emergency contact information is captioned for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and read slowly and repeatedly for people who cannot see the screen.**

9. **Ask local emergency responders and the Red Cross to ensure they maintain TTY service.**

***HOT TIP:*** **Your local Office of Emergency Management is responsible for coordinating emergency preparation and response. If you are unsure of who to contact in your community regarding emergency preparedness and people**

*NOTE: ACB does not endorse any one specific plan or program for emergency preparedness. The information provided in this brochure is intended to assist you in beginning your\ personal planning efforts. However it is not intended to be comprehensive. For further information, please contact your local emergency management official and local Red Cross.*

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**f/tFRIEND**
**MATTER**

**To:**