

## Preparedness Buddy Initiative Helps Vulnerable Delawareans Prepare for Emergencies

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Hazardous weather events can occur suddenly and without warning, forcing Delawareans to shelter in place or evacuate. The Division of Public Health (DPH) recommends that Delawareans who live alone or have access and functional needs plan ahead and designate a “preparedness buddy” to help them plan for, and respond to, emergencies.

Preparedness buddies can help prepare a household emergency kit and an evacuation plan in case of fires, hurricanes, floods, extreme heat or cold events, snowstorms, and disease outbreaks. The buddy system ensures that vulnerable Delawareans have helpers, and that they have enough medication, oxygen, medical supplies, food, and water.

People with access and functional needs are those that have visual, hearing, mobility, cognitive, emotional, or mental limitations. They may need help maintaining independence, communicating, and getting medical care and taking their medications. They may need supervision and might rely on translation, sign language interpreters, or transportation services. People with access and functional needs should ask someone dependable to serve as their preparedness buddy and another to be their alternate buddy.

DPH’s Preparedness Buddy brochure<sup>1</sup> is an important tool to get started. The brochure is available in seven languages: English, Spanish, French Creole, Vietnamese, Simplified Mandarin, Traditional Cantonese, and Brazilian Portuguese. The brochure’s step-by-step template makes it easy to develop a personalized emergency plan in case individuals must evacuate or shelter in place.

The Preparedness Buddy brochure includes a list of essential emergency items: drinking water, food, eyeglasses, flashlights, wheelchairs, hygiene items, a first-aid kit, and important documents. It provides spaces on which to list the primary care physician, allergies, medication and supplies, and transportation requirements.

Include in the personal emergency plan what to do in case of interrupted utilities (electricity, gas, phone, and garbage disposal) and interrupted transportation (medication deliveries, transportation to and from work, and caregiver and family visits). Home health care clients should contact their providers to ask how bad weather impacts their schedule and their ability to reach clients. Include contact names, street addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses. It is important to review and update emergency plans each year or during peak disaster seasons.

A helpful resource for completing the brochure is the “Emergency Preparedness” section of the Guide to Services for Older Delawareans and Persons with Disabilities,<sup>2</sup> pages 82 to 84. Also read the emergency planning instructions for your region:

- o New Castle County Emergency Operations: 302-395-2700 or <http://nccde.org/154/Emergency-Management>
- o Kent County Emergency Operations: 302-735-3465 or [www.co.kent.de.us/public-safety/emergency-management.aspx](http://www.co.kent.de.us/public-safety/emergency-management.aspx)

- o Sussex County Emergency Operations: 302-855-7801 or [www.sussexcountyde.gov/emergency-operations-center](http://www.sussexcountyde.gov/emergency-operations-center)

Finally, register Delawareans with access and functional needs with the Smart 9-1-1 website.<sup>3</sup> Smart 9-1-1 is a service that allows residents to create a free household safety profile that 9-1-1 and first responders can use during an emergency. It is in a secure database held by SMART 911 which is accessible only after a call is placed and for a limited timeframe. Whenever anyone in a Smart 9-1-1 household dials 9-1-1 from a phone associated with the profile, it is displayed to the 9-1-1 call taker. All three counties use Smart 9-1-1.

For more information on items to keep in a disaster kit and evacuation planning, visit:

- Preparede.org - The State's central site for emergency planning and preparedness, created jointly by the DPH Emergency Medical Services and Preparedness Section, the Delaware Emergency Management Agency, and the Delaware Citizen's Corps.
- Allreadyde.org - The University of Delaware's webpage for Emergency Readiness Planning for Delawareans with Disabilities.
- Ready.Gov – The Federal Emergency Management Agency's planning site for individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs.
- [The American Red Cross's People With Disabilities planning page](http://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/disaster-safety-for-people-with-disabilities#Plan-Ahead), <http://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/disaster-safety-for-people-with-disabilities#Plan-Ahead>. The website includes how to assemble a survival kit and offers additional tips about managing communications, equipment, service animals, pets and home hazards.

## References

1. Delaware Division of Public Health. (2018). Preparedness Buddy. Retrieved from: <http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/php/preparednessbuddy.html>
2. Delaware Division of Public Health. (2018). Guide of Services. Retrieved from: <http://www.delawareadrc.com>
3. Smart 9-1-1. (2018). Retrieved from: <https://www.smart911.com>

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