

Not My Fault: Special considerations in planning for disaster

Lori Dengler/For the Times-Standard
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Responding to a disaster often requires the ability to move. Whether it's dropping down to the floor and getting under a table during an earthquake, walking to high ground to get out of a tsunami hazard zone, or evacuating because of a fire, flood or other hazard warning, people with limited mobility or other special considerations may wonder how they can keep safe.

Before you say – I can move just fine and this doesn't apply to me, just keep in mind that most of the points here apply to everyone and sooner or later you may experience mobility issues. Here are few things to consider if you or someone near to you has access issues. The most important step is to start planning NOW, before disaster strikes. Involve family and caregivers in your discussion. The good news is that the process is the same whether or not you have special needs and begins with talking, making a plan and reducing hazards.

Before a disaster:

- Make sure you or your relatives and caregivers have signed up to receive emergency notifications.

Humboldt County: humboldt.gov/alerts, (707) 268-2500

Del Norte County:

<https://preparedelnorte.com/resources/Everbridge> or (707) 464-7213.

When you enroll, you can identify mobility or other special needs so that county officials will be aware of your situation.

- Identify your needs or those of others in your family. Make a list and include everything you can think of. Do you require medications or need adaptive equipment? Do you require equipment that runs on electricity, such as dialysis and electrical lifts? Do you have a back-up power supply? Do you need help to leave your home or office? Will you be able to evacuate without relying on auditory cues that may be absent if the electricity is off or alarms are sounding?

- Reduce hazards. For many disasters, sheltering in place in your home or residence is the best option. Ask a friend, relative or caregiver to help you identify hazards and fix them. Create safe spaces by securing bookshelves

and items that might fall or topple. This is especially important near your bed or in areas where you spend much of the day.

- Keep medications, spare glasses and any special equipment in a safe place that can be easily reached and label them with your name in case they become misplaced if you need to evacuate. If possible, request an emergency supply of medications from your doctor to last for two weeks. Make sure caregivers know where they are stored.
- Keep a notebook, pencils, a whistle and flashlight in several locations if you have difficulty in communicating. Include important contact names and phone numbers.
- Organize disaster supplies including food, water, medications (with instructions on how to use them), hygiene supplies, and other special needs you have identified. Put together a grab-and-go kit in case you need to evacuate quickly with copies of important documents, essential medications and emergency contact information. Be sure to include the needs of service animals.

During a disaster:

The North Coast is earthquake country. If you are unable to drop under a table or desk while the ground is shaking, stay where you are, even in bed, and cover your head and body with your arms, pillows and blankets. Whenever you use a wheelchair, secure your seatbelt. If you are in a wheelchair or a walker when an earthquake strikes, lock the wheels of the chair. If you can safely bend over, get as low as possible and cover your head/neck with your arms, a book, or a pillow. **HOLD ON** until shaking stops. Moving during the shaking will expose you to additional hazards. Use your whistle to call for help and signal others if you need it.

Very large earthquakes may pose a tsunami threat. If it is difficult for you to easily walk, consider choosing a residence outside of a tsunami zone if at all possible. If you live within a tsunami area, make sure you are signed up for emergency notifications and have arranged for someone in your household to assist you in evacuating to a safe area. If an earthquake occurs, especially one that lasts a long time, evacuate immediately. Don't wait for first responders to assist you – there won't be enough time.

Other disasters such as fires or floods may also require you to leave quickly. Pay attention to emergency notifications for your area. Red Flag warnings issued by

the National Weather Service mean fires could erupt at any moment in your area. If it takes time for you to evacuate, consider doing so when voluntary evacuation alerts are issued – don't wait until they become mandatory.

Overwhelmed? Take it one step at a time. There are many online resources available to assist you in planning: <https://www.ready.gov/individuals-access-functional-needs> or <http://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/disaster-safety-for-people-with-disabilities#Plan-Ahead>. Tri-County Independent Living offers a variety of services to people with disabilities including disaster planning – call (707) 445-8404 to see if you qualify. Your County Office of Emergency Services can assist you as well. And please visit the Earthquake – Tsunami Room at the Humboldt County Fair August 16 – 26 for handouts and other free information.

Preparedness tip for this week: Find out if you live, work or play in a tsunami zone. Look for the Entering and Leaving Tsunami Zone signs on local streets, or visit <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=5156b8b743594570bfec281cd62c40d5> for an interactive tsunami hazard map. The map currently shows Humboldt County, but Del Norte and Mendocino Counties should be added soon.

Lori Dengler is an emeritus professor of geology at Humboldt State University, an expert in tsunami and earthquake hazards. Questions or comments about this column, or want a free copy of the preparedness magazine "Living on Shaky Ground"? Leave a message at (707) 826-6019 or email Kamome@humboldt.edu <http://www.times-standard.com/opinion/20180808/lori-dengler-consider-special-needs-in-planning-for-disaster>