Emergency Preparedness: Taking Responsibility for Your Safety

Tips for People with Disabilities and Activity Limitations

YOUR KEY TO SURVIVAL

ESP

EMERGENCY SURVIVAL PROGRAM

www.sdcounty.ca.gov/oes
www.espfocus.org

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1. Who Should Read This Guide?

You should read this Guide if you have a disability or just are not as strong and active as you used to be. This Guide is for everyone who has trouble walking, hearing, seeing, breathing, understanding, learning, or responding quickly. These reduced abilities can be temporary or permanent. They can be due to conditions such as allergies, age or disability. Throughout this Guide the terms "people" or "individuals" refer to this varied group of people. If your family member is in a nursing facility or has home hospice care, make sure you contact them regarding their emergency procedures.

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2. How to Use This Guide

Use this Guide with other preparedness guides such as the County of Los Angeles Emergency Survival Program (ESP) and American Red Cross information. You will find information about how to get these items throughout this Guide.

3. Why Prepare?

You are less likely to have problems in either large or small emergencies if you are prepared. A power failure or your pharmacist running out of your medications are examples of small emergencies. Large emergencies affect a wide area, overload emergency services, and may mean that you have to be self-sufficient for a week or more.

Systems that people rely on may not work in a major disaster. Things can be even harder for people with disabilities and activity limitations. For example, your ability to get to exits or to gather up your personal items and emergency supplies may be reduced. People with vision or hearing loss or speech disabilities can have more trouble than usual in communicating, especially when regular systems are down or overloaded. These problems can occur just when communication may be crucial to survival and safety. Planning is important in order to deal with these problems.

Avoid the common tendency to not think about and plan for possible emergencies. You need to plan for all kinds of hazards. These include chemical, biological and radiological events, explosions, transportation accidents, fires, floods, earthquakes, mudslides, tornadoes, power outages, etc. Make your plans, then practice, evaluate and update them.

Preparing takes time and effort. You might want to do a little at a time. The important thing is to start. The more you do, the better you can protect yourself.

Preparedness Checklist

Done?	Activity	Pages
	Conduct an Ability Self-Assessment	4
	Establish a Support Team	9
	Learn to Quickly Give Information on How Best to Assist You	10
	Create Emergency Plans	11
	Practice Plans	13
	Collect Disability-Specific Supplies for Emergency Supplies Kits	14
	Create Emergency Supplies Kits	18-19

4. Ability Self-Assessment

Use this checklist to think about your abilities and what type of help you will need in an emergency. Everyone should read the General Issues section. Then review all the specific sections that apply to you.

Ability Self-Assessment • General Issues

Yes	No	N/A	Do you know where all the fire alarms and extinguishers are in the places where you are regularly?
Yes	No	N/A	• Can you activate the fire alarms?
Yes	No	N/A	• Can you work a fire extinguisher?
Yes	No	N/A	• Have you practiced?
Yes	No	N/A	Do you know where the gas and water shut-offs are at your home?
Yes	No	N/A	• Can you get to them and use the needed tool to turn them off?
Yes	No	N/A	• Do you have instructions and tools available so other people can turn off the utilities if needed?
Yes	No	N/A	Do you have a standard telephone (one that does not need electricity) and do you know where it is?
Yes	No	N/A	Do you know the location of ALL the exits in places you are regularly?
Yes	No	N/A	• Have you evaluated your ability to use them?
Yes	No	N/A	• Have you practiced using these exits?
Yes	No	N/A	Can you make an inaccessible exit accessible by using a portable ramp? If yes, have you considered getting one?
Yes	No	N/A	Have you thought about how you will evacuate if you can't use your own vehicle?
Yes	No	N/A	Have you thought about how you may be able to help others in an emergency? (For example, if you have no or low vision you might be able to guide people through darkened spaces. If you are a calm person you might be able to help others avoid panic.)
Yes	No	N/A	Have you checked with your local city to see if they have a registration for people with disabilities?
Yes	No	N/A	Have you planned for what you will do if your service animal becomes confused, frightened or disoriented? Are there other ways you can get around? (For example, by using sighted guides or members of your support team who can offer emotional support.)

Travel

In hotels/motels/cruise ships and other lodgings:			
Yes	No	N/A	Do you think about whether you want a room on a higher floor, perhaps with a view, or on a floor where evacuation is easier for you?
Yes	No	N/A	Do you tell the staff that you will need help if there is an emergency and tell them what kind of help you may need?
Yes	No	N/A	If you have a significant hearing loss, do you ask for a room with visual alarms that are tied to the fire alarm system, doorbells and telephones?
Yes	No	N/A	Do you check the location of all exit routes (usually posted on the back of the guest room door)?
Yes	No	N/A	Do you track escape routes by counting the number of doors between your room and the emergency exit? Maps may be confusing unless you check them out before you need them.
Yes	No	N/A	If you use self-administered medical treatments, do you carry enough equipment and fluids in case there is a delay when you are traveling?

Evacuating a Site After Usual Business Hours

Determine your risks if you are sometimes in a building after usual working hours (when there are fewer people around to help you).			
Yes	No	N/A	Can you contact other people after hours, including staff in the security or emergency control center?
Yes	No	N/A	Do you know how to reach emergency personnel in case of an emergency?

Sight

Yes	No	N/A	If you rely on sound clues to get around (such as the hum of the copy machine by an elevator), will you be able to get yourself to safety if they are missing? You can't count on these clues if the electricity goes off or alarms are blaring.
Yes	No	N/A	Are there signs with raised and Braille characters that designate exits, direction to exits, and information on exit routes? Are floors designated by raised and Braille numbers or letters, including floor level signs in stairwells?
Yes	No	N/A	• Can you read the emergency signs in print or Braille?

Yes	No	N/A	If you wear contact lenses, do you either keep glasses with you or keep clear goggles in your emergency supply kit in case smoke, dust or fumes become painful or dangerous?
Yes	No	N/A	Can you use the two-way communication devices installed in the elevators and areas of refuge/rescue assistance?
Yes	No	N/A	Have you taught your support team how to serve as "sighted guides" if needed?
Yes	No	N/A	Have you marked your utility shut-off valves at home with fluorescent tape or large print or Braille labels?

Hearing

Yes	No	N/A	Have you practiced having people communicate emergency information to you?
Yes	No	N/A	Does your building have two-way communication devices installed in the elevators and areas of refuge/rescue assistance?
Yes	No	N/A	• Have you practiced using them to make sure the system works?
Yes	No	N/A	Do you know the locations of text telephones or amplified telephones?
Yes	No	N/A	Do emergency alarm systems have audible and visible features (visual strobes)?
Yes	No	N/A	Are newer types of displays (TV monitors or scrolling text signs) available at your workplace? Will they work if the power goes out?
Yes	No	N/A	• Do you know their locations?
Yes	No	N/A	Do you have a portable communication device (PDA, pager, laptop, portable TTY)?
Yes	No	N/A	• Does it have a battery backup? (When buying a portable device consider one that uses standard off-the-shelf batteries.)
Yes	No	N/A	If available, do you know how to use text-messaging to access emergency information?
Yes	No	N/A	How will you communicate if there is no interpreter or if your hearing aids are not working?
Yes	No	N/A	• Do you carry paper and pens with you?

Deaf-Blind

Yes	No	N/A	Do you have a support team? Since the audible alarms or flashing lights won't work for you, it is critical that you have a support team.

Speech

Yes	No	N/A	Have you determined how you will communicate if you do not have use of your usual communication device?
Yes	No	N/A	Do you keep with you a copy of a word or letter board, paper and pens, and pre-printed phrases usable in an emergency?

Memory, Judgment, Learning and Understanding

Yes	No	N/A	Have you practiced how to communicate your needs?
Yes	No	N/A	Have you thought about how you might react in an emergency and how you will cope with any unhelpful reactions? Prepare your support team to help you with these planned strategies.
Yes	No	N/A	Have you prepared emergency information in a way that is easy for you to understand? You may want to break down the information into a step-by-step outline. This will help you remember what to do during a disaster.
Yes	No	N/A	Does your Emergency Health Information (see page 16) explain the best method to help you?

Assistive Device Users

Yes	No	N/A	What will it take to get your wheelchair or other equipment out of the building?
Yes	No	N/A	Have you told your support team how to operate and safely move your equipment if necessary?
Yes	No	N/A	Have you labeled equipment with simple instruction cards on how to operate it (for example, how to "free wheel" or "disengage the gears" of your power wheelchair)? Attach the cards to your equipment. Laminate them for durability.
Yes	No	N/A	• Do you keep a copy of these instructions with you and have you shared copies with your support team?
Yes	No	N/A	Have you thought about your options if you are not able to evacuate with your assistive device?

Physical/Mobility

Yes	No	N/A	Do you know the location of all exits and have you thought about your ability to use them?
Yes	No	N/A	Will you be able to independently evacuate from the site? How long will it take you?
Yes	No	N/A	• Will you need someone to help you walk down stairs quickly?
Yes	No	N/A	• Would it be faster if you used an evacuation device or were carried?
Yes	No	N/A	Do you know where all evacuation devices (used for people who can't go up and down stairs on their own) are stored? Have you practiced using them?
Yes	No	N/A	Can you get in and out of evacuation devices by yourself or do you need help?
Yes	No	N/A	If you absolutely had to, could you bump down the stairs on your buttocks, crawl, etc.? Will you need something to strap on to protect your buttocks, gloves to protect your hands, etc.?
Yes	No	N/A	Do you know where emergency assembly areas and areas of refuge/rescue assistance are located?
Yes	No	N/A	Can you activate a fire alarm?
Yes	No	N/A	Can you give quick instructions about how to safely carry you if needed?
Yes	No	N/A	• Have you included any areas of vulnerability/concern regarding how to remove you safely from your chair?
Yes	No	N/A	Is it realistic for you to ask to be lifted in your chair (how much does it weigh with you in it)?
Yes	No	N/A	Is there a lightweight device you can use if you cannot evacuate with your wheelchair, respirator, or other power device?

Allergies, Multiple Chemical Sensitivities, Respiratory Conditions

Yes	No	N/A	Do you carry supplies with you based on your worst days:
Yes	No	N/A	• Industrial respirator with gas-mist filters?
Yes	No	N/A	• Masks?
Yes	No	N/A	• Gloves?
Yes	No	N/A	• Inhaler?
Yes	No	N/A	• Nicotine gum you can offfer to smokers who will want to smoke around you?

Yes	No	N/A	
			Does your Emergency Health Information (see page 16) clearly explain your sensitivities and reactions and the most helpful treatments as well as those that are harmful? You may not be able to describe your needs, so be specific. Other conditions (disorientation, aphasia, panic) may be diagnosed and treated as something other than chemical sensitivity.

5. Establish a Support Team

Build a support team of people who will help you in an emergency if necessary. They should be people who are regularly in the same area as you. The first people to assist in an emergency are often your neighbors, friends and co-workers. These people, not professional first responders, make 70% of rescues in major disasters.

The support team approach is based on the idea that if everyone is trained, everyone can help! When you train many people, you create a universal team.

Build support teams with many people at every place where you spend a large part of your day: at work, home, school, or volunteer site.
This is especially important when it is hard to predict who will be where you are at any given time.

Practice with different people to figure out who will best be able to help you. Traits to look for may include people who are:

- Strong
- Calm
- Listen well
- Communicate clearly
- Can guide you safely
- Attend to important details

Work with people who are dependable and have the physical and emotional ability to assist you reliably.

5a. Buddy Systems and Attendants: Do Not Rely on One Person

Do not depend on any one person. Buddy systems (choosing and training one person to assist you in an emergency) have weaknesses. You and your buddy may not be able to contact each other quickly in an emergency.

If you rely on personal assistance services (attendants), they may also not be available when you need them. Therefore, it is important that your support team include other people.

5b. Plan Multiple Ways to Give and Get Information

Different communication systems work differently. In an emergency, some may work when others fail. The more systems you have available to you, the more likely it is that you will be able to contact other people. How many of these systems do you have?

- E-mail
- Internet
- Pagers
- Text messaging
- A standard phone that does not need electricity (most new phones, including cordless ones, need to be plugged into an electrical outlet)
- Cell phone
- Low cost two-way radios
- Portable radio and batteries

5c. Master the Skill of Giving Quick Information on How Best to Help You

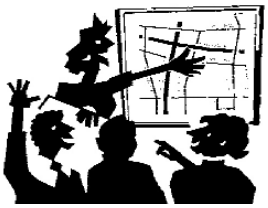
In spite of your best planning, sometimes you have to build a support team on the spot. Think about what you will need, how you want it done, and what kind of people you want to work with if you have a choice. Be ready to give people who may not know you all the information they need to be able to help you without causing injury. Be clear, specific and concise with your directions. Think about how much detail is necessary. Be ready with additional instructions if necessary.

Practice giving these instructions using the least amount of words possible. For example:

- "Take my oxygen tank; right side of green bookcase. I can breathe without it for 15 minutes."
- "Take my communication device from the table by the wall."
- "Take my manual wheelchair."
- "I can use steps independently, carry my other crutch and walk in front of me."
- "I'm blind. Let me take your left arm above the elbow and I'll follow you out."
- "The traditional 'firefighter's carry' is hazardous for me because of my respiratory condition. Carry me by…"
- "You have to carry me out. Get an evacuation chair hanging at the top of 'stairway two' and I will tell you what to do next."

If communicating may be a problem, consider carrying preprinted messages with you, for example:

- I am deaf and do not speak, I use American Sign Language. Use gestures or write instructions using simple words.
- I cannot speak, but I do hear and understand. I use a communication device. I can point to simple pictures or key words. You will find a communication sheet in my wallet.
- I may have trouble understanding what you tell me. Speak slowly and use simple words.
- I have a psychiatric disability. I may become confused in an emergency. Help me find a quiet place and I should be fine in about 10 minutes.
- Diesel exhaust can kill me. Do not put me in or near idling emergency vehicles.



6. Create Emergency Plans

Keep a list of out-of-state friends or relatives that household members can call if you are separated during a disaster. It is often easier to call outside the affected area after an emergency, because long distance phone lines are often not jammed when local phone lines are. List contacts in priority order (the first person reached should call others on the list to let them know you are ok). Give each person on your contact list a copy. (See Section 8, page 17.)

Also see:

American Red Cross

- *Your Evacuation Plan,* www.redcross.org
- *Family Disaster Planning,* www.redcross.org
- *Food and Water in an Emergency*, www.redcross.org
- *Get Prepared,* www.redcross.org

National Organization on Disability

- *Prepare Yourself,* www.nod.org/emergency

County of Los Angeles

- *ESP Family Steps to Survival,* www.espfocus.org
- *Emergency Preparedness Tips For You And Your Family*, www.espfocus.org

6a. Life-Support Devices That Depend on Electricity

- Contact your local electric company about your power needs for life-support devices (home dialysis, suction, breathing machines, etc.) in advance of a disaster. Some utility companies will put you on a "priority reconnection service" list. However, even with this "priority reconnection service", your power could still be out for many days following a disaster. It is vital that you have power backup options for your equipment.
- Talk to equipment suppliers about your power options (backup batteries, generators, etc.).
- Let your fire department know that you are dependent on life-support devices.

6b. Devices That Use Rechargeable Batteries

- Plan how you will recharge batteries if the electricity is out. Check with your vendor/supplier to see if there are alternative ways to charge batteries (for example, by connecting jumper cables to a vehicle battery or by using a converter that plugs into your vehicle's cigarette lighter).
- Plan for other options. For example, sometimes you can substitute a car battery for a wheelchair battery but it will not last as long as a wheelchair's deep-cycle battery.

6c. Home Plans

- Houses or apartment buildings are often less safe than high-rise office buildings. People are more likely to die in a fire at home than at work, and that risk is even greater for people with disabilities.
- Identify all the ways you can exit your home.
- Use the ideas about making your home safer in the self-assessment check-list.

6d. Work, School, Volunteer Site Plans

- Plan how you will evacuate and where you will go if an evacuation is ordered.
- Tag devices (wheelchairs, walkers, etc.) with your name, address and phone number in case you have to leave them behind.
- Learn and understand the emergency plans for family members and significant others in schools, day care centers and residential, assisted living, and nursing home facilities.

6e. Practice Your Plans

- Practice is important. It increases skill and confidence in your ability to cope in an emergency.
- Practice dealing with different conditions and unexpected situations, such as blocked paths or exits.

6f. Practice Your Plans with Your Support Team

- Make time to talk about and practice parts of your plan with your support team. This allows you and your team to focus on the parts of the plan that need more practice.
- Don't assume you'll know how to use an evacuation device when you need it. Make sure you and your support team practice using it.

7. Disability-Specific Supplies for Emergency Supplies Kits/Go Kits

Prepare different kits for different places and situations (See Section 9, page 18):

- A "carry-on you" kit is for the essential items you need to keep with you at all times.
- "Grab-and-go kits" are easy-to-carry kits you can grab if you have to leave home (or school, workplace, etc.) in a hurry. They have the things you cannot do without but are not so big or heavy that you cannot manage them.
- A "home kit" is your large kit with water, food, first aid supplies, clothing, bedding, tools, emergency supplies, and disability-specific items. It includes all the things you would most likely need if you had to be self-sufficient for days either at home or in an evacuation shelter.
- A "bedside kit" has items you will need if you are trapped in or near your bed and unable to get to other parts of your home.

Tailor the contents of these kits to your needs and abilities. It is ideal to plan for supplies for up to two weeks (medication syringes, ostomy bags, catheters, padding, etc.). Do what is realistic for you. Know what you are able to carry in a fanny pack, backpack or drawstring bag hung from a wheelchair, scooter or other assistive device. If you can only carry a 3-day supply of insulin in your grab-and-go kit then that is what's right for you. Plan for what you can do.

7a. Medications

- Plan for a possible 3 - 14 day disruption in your ability to get prescriptions refilled.
- Ask your doctors which of your medications are critical or life sustaining and which ones you can do without for a few days or weeks. Ask your doctors how you can get an emergency supply of medications. If you cannot get an emergency supply, ask if it would be safe to go without one dose periodically until you have saved enough for an emergency.
- Get extra copies of prescriptions and put them with your emergency documents in all your kits.
- Rotate your medications. Take older ones out of your supply kit and use them before the expiration date. Replace them with a fresh supply.
- Ask your pharmacist about the best way to store your medications. Some are heat or cold sensitive.
- If you get medications or treatments (such as methadone, dialysis, infusion, chemo or radiation therapy, etc.) from a clinic or hospital, ask your health care provider what you should do in case of an emergency.
- If you are a smoker, be aware that smoking is not allowed in shelters. Consider putting nicotine gum or patches in your evacuation kit if getting to an outside smoking area might be difficult for you.
- Life in cramped, unheated shelters can increase the chances of pneumonia, influenza and colds. Stock your kit with any vitamins or medications you take to guard against getting sick and to cope with being sick.

7b. Emergency Food

(See American Red Cross, Food and Water in an Emergency, http://www.redcross.org)

Choose emergency food that:

- You like
- Is ready-to-eat (does not need to be kept cold, prepared, or cooked)

- You are able to open (no breakable containers; if it is in cans, be sure you have a manual can opener that you are able to use)
- Is in containers you are able to pick up and drink from (not too heavy)
- Has a long shelf life

7c. Emergency Documents

Store your emergency documents in sealed plastic freezer bags to keep them dry:

- Copies of prescriptions
- Contact list
- Emergency Health Information. This gives rescuers information about you if they find you unconscious or unable to give them information. It includes data about your medications, equipment, allergies, communication limitations, preferred treatment, medical providers, and important contact people.
  (See "Emergency Health Information: Savvy Health Care Consumer Series", www.cdihp.org/products.html)
- A list of model and serial numbers of your equipment (pacemakers, hearing aids, communication devices, scooter, wheelchair, batteries, etc.)
- Insurance and benefits cards (health insurance, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income [SSI]). If you get benefits from Social Security (SSI or Social Security Disability Insurance), include a copy of your most current award letter
- Send copies of these documents to your out-of-state contact person (seal and mark them "open in an emergency for [name] only")

7d. Service Animal Supplies

Keep a current photo of your service animal in the event that you are separated. Pack supplies in a pack that your animal can carry.

- Bowl for water and food
- Food
- Blanket for bedding
- Plastic bags and paper towels for disposing of feces

- Neosporin ointment for minor wounds (Ask your veterinarian if there is anything specific you should include for your animal.)
- A favorite toy
- Extra harness leash (important items for managing a nervous or upset animal)
- Pad protectors (for hot asphalt, hot metal stairs, broken glass)
- Current identifications and licenses (Make sure the animal's tag has your telephone number and that of an out-of-state contact person.)

8. Out-of-State Contact List

Out-of-State Contact List

This list identifies out-of-state friends or relatives that household members should call if separated during a disaster. List contacts in priority order (first person reached needs to call others on this list to let them know you are ok). Give each person on your contact list a copy.

NAME 1.	PHONE (HOME)	CELL	E-MAIL	ADDRESS
	PHONE (WORK)	FAX		
NAME 2.	PHONE (HOME)	CELL	E-MAIL	ADDRESS
	PHONE (WORK)	FAX		
NAME 3.	PHONE (HOME)	CELL	E-MAIL	ADDRESS
	PHONE (WORK)	FAX		
NAME 4.	PHONE (HOME)	CELL	E-MAIL	ADDRESS
	PHONE (WORK)	FAX		
NAME 5.	PHONE (HOME)	CELL	E-MAIL	ADDRESS
	PHONE (WORK)	FAX		
NAME 6.	PHONE (HOME)	CELL	E-MAIL	ADDRESS
	PHONE (WORK)	FAX		
NAME 7.	PHONE (HOME)	CELL	E-MAIL	ADDRESS
	PHONE (WORK)	FAX		

TIP: If you use telephone relay services, be sure your out-of-state contacts know that 7-1-1 is the universal code for these calls. You and they can use it anywhere in the country for voice-to-TTY calls.

9. Emergency Supplies Kits

Carry on You	Home	Bedside	Grab-and-Go	Item
x	x	x	x	Store kits securely in a set place so they are easy to find.
	x	x	x	Keep important items in a consistent, convenient and secured place, so you can quickly and easily get to them. (Items such as teeth, hearing aids, prostheses, canes, crutches, walkers, wheelchairs, respirators, communication devices, artificial larynx, sanitary aids, batteries, eye-glasses, contact lens with cleaning solutions, etc.)
x	x	x	x	Emergency health information
x	x	x		Cell phone
	x	x		Standard telephone (that does need to be plugged into an electric outlet)
x		x	x	Essential medications
	x			Other medications
	x	x		Flashlights and extra batteries. (People with limited reach or hand movement should consider low cost battery-operated touch lamps.)
x	x		x	Extra batteries for oxygen, breathing devices, hearing aids, cochlear implants, cell phone, radios, pagers, PDAs.
x	x		x	Copies of prescriptions
	x	x	x	Emergency food
	x	x	x	Assorted sizes of re-closeable plastic bags for storing, food, waste, etc.
	x	x	x	Sturdy work gloves to protect your hands from sharp objects you may try to lift or touch by mistake while walking or wheeling over glass and rubble
x				Lightweight flashlight (on key ring, etc.)
	x	x	x	Small battery-operated radio and extra batteries
x	x	x	x	Signaling device you can use to draw attention to you if you need emergency assistance (whistle, horn, beeper, bell(s), screecher)
		x		A container that can be attached to the bed or nightstand (with cord or Velcro) to hold hearing aids, eyeglasses, cell phones, etc., oxygen tank attached to the wall, wheelchair locked and close to bed. This helps prevent them from falling, flying or rolling away during a earthquake or other jarring, jolting event

Carry on You	Home	Bedside	Grab-and-Go	Item
Wheelchair or scooter users				
x			x	A patch kit or can of "sealant" to repair flat tires and/or an extra supply of inner tubes for non- puncture-proof wheelchair/scooter tires
		x		Keep needed equipment close to you so you can get to it quickly
	x			If available, keep a lightweight manual wheelchair for backup
Speech or communication Issues				
			x	If you use a laptop computer for communication, consider getting a power converter that plugs into the cigarette lighter of a vehicle
Hearing Issues				
x	x	x	x	Have a pre-printed copy of key phrase messages handy, such as "I use American Sign Language (ASL)," "I do not write or read English well," "If you make announcements, I will need to have them written simply or signed"
	x	x		Consider getting a weather radio, with a visual/text display that warns of weather emergencies
Vision Issues				
x	x	x	x	Mark your disaster supplies with fluorescent tape, large print, or Braille
	x	x	x	Have high-powered flashlights with wide beams and extra batteries
Multiple Chemical Sensitivities, Breathing Conditions				
x	x	x	x	Towels, masks, industrial respirators or other supplies you can use to filter your air supply
	x	x	x	N95-rated particulate filter mask (protects against dust, radiological dust and biological agents)

See also: American Red Cross, *Disaster Supply Kits,* http://www.redcross.org