



EPISODE 47: EMERGENCIES: HOW TO PREPARE FOR THEM AND WHAT TO DO AFTERWARDS

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Presenter: Christy Gilliland Dunaway, Disability Integration Coordinator for the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency & Christine Woodell, ADA Trainer for LIFE of Mississippi

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VOICE-OVER ANNOUNCER: Blog Talk Radio. (Music) Welcome to WADA ADA Live! Talk radio. Brought to you by the Southeast ADA Center, your leader for information, training and guidance on the Americans with Disabilities Act. And here's your host.

MARY MORDER: Good afternoon and welcome to this month's episode of WADA ADA Live!. On behalf of the Southeast ADA Center, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University and the National Network, welcome to episode 47 of WADA Live!

Today we're going to talk about emergencies, how to prepare for them and what to do afterwards.

I am Mary Morder, materials development specialist with the Southeast ADA Center and a member of the Georgia Emergency Preparedness Coalition for persons with disabilities and older adults. I'm your host for today's show

We have two guests for our show today The first guest is Christine Woodell, ADA trainer with LIFE of Mississippi in Jackson, Mississippi and Christine works at the Southeast ADA Center as an information specialist.

Our other guest is Christy Dunaway, a disability integration coordinator with the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, or MEMA, which is a state agency that helps people in Mississippi prepare for and recover from emergencies and disasters.

Christine and Christy will talk about how people with disabilities should prepare for an emergency and what you should do after the emergency.

We will talk about what anyone should do in an emergency situation, but we are also going to talk more specifically about what people with disabilities should do when an emergency or disaster happens

What do we mean by an emergency? It can mean a flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, or other natural disaster.

But an emergency can also be something like a natural gas leak or sudden sink hole in your neighborhood or a tree falling on your house.

Emergency situations usually happen without any warning, so most of us are not prepared for them.

Everyone, whether you have a disability or not, should be prepared for sudden emergencies.

The best place to start is to prepare your personal emergency supply kit.

Sometimes this is called a Go Kit.

A Go Kit is an emergency supply kit with essential items you need and can't do without.

Remember, you may be away from home when an emergency happens. You might be at work or at school or out in the community.

How do you make a Go Kit? It's a good idea to have enough supplies with you to last at least three days.

It's also a good idea to prepare a Go Kit for different situations.

There's lots of information on the internet and elsewhere about preparing a Go Kit. You may need one at home, one at work or at school, and one in your car. You should keep your Go Kit in a water-proof box or bag.

Some of the most important things that everyone should include in a Go Kit are copies of your driver's license or other identification, a list of emergency contacts, including names, phone numbers and addresses, copies of medical and insurance records for your home, your car, and your health care, and their I.D. cards, a whistle, a flashlight with extra batteries, a hand-cranked radio or cell phone charger, at least one complete change of clothes and shoes, a coat, a rain poncho, a hat, gloves, blanket, small tarp, bottled water, non-perishable food, extra medication, sturdy work clothes, pocketknife, multi-purpose tool, and cash.

We will have a list of emergency preparedness information and other information posted on the adalive.org website along with the recording of this show.

The National ADA Network has developed several fact sheets on emergency preparedness You can find them on the website at adata.org.

Now let's talk with Christine Woodell. Hey, Christine, there are a lot of things to think about when preparing for emergencies. What other things do I need to think about as a person with a disability when getting ready for an emergency?

CHRISTINE WOODELL: Well, thank you, Mary. One of the main things we have to consider is that we have to keep things dry, so top of my list is going to be some Ziploc bags.

We don't know how we're going to feel when we're in an emergency situation, so we want to be sure we write some things down that we think we're going to remember

Like the names, numbers, and addresses of families and friends, copies of our prescriptions. Sometimes you can get a whole list from your pharmacy, but we need to know what we take, what dosage we need, how often we take it. We need that written down.

We should have at least three days of medicine with us, because, you know, it's unreasonable to think that they can provide every individual person with their individual needs immediately.

So, having a few days is a good idea.

We need to know who, if -- I'm a powered wheelchair user and other people have different kinds of medical equipment and we really need to have written down our durable medical equipment provider, we need to write down what our durable medical equipment is, and who prescribed it, just in case something has to be replaced.

We should have the name and address of our doctor or doctors -- [clearing throat] -- excuse me -- in case they need to be contacted

These things are just something that we need to do to take care of ourself.

Now, if we have particular medical equipment that we can, just little things, some people, you know, have a special pen or some particular device they need to be able to feed themselves, we need to have those put aside in case we need to take them.

Also, sometimes in an emergency or a disaster, we have to discuss our disability. And

for some of us, it's really hard to succinctly and clearly discuss exactly what our disability is and what our disability-related needs are, and we can't expect people to guess.

So, if that is a problem for anybody, we really should beforehand write down just a brief summary of our disability and our issues and our needs and carry that with us.

So if we have to show an emergency personnel person that document, they can glance at it quickly, that's a really great idea

Also, we need to think about the fact do we have medications that need refrigeration, in which case we need to have some cold packs and an insulated bag in our Go Kit or in a refrigerator so we can put them in our Go Kit.

Also, if you have a medical alert bracelet or necklace, you need to wear it. It's certainly, you know, not required, but we talk about our medical issues in that manner, but sometimes it could be very important in an emergency situation.

Also, of course, all of our insurance cards, copies of those, and put them all in our trusty, friendly Ziploc bags.

Also a great idea to have a notebook, so if you need to write things down, you have someplace to write it down.

Do you have any other thoughts, Christy?

CHRISTY DUNAWAY: No, I think you covered it all. Thank you.

CHRISTINE WOODSELL: [Chuckles].

MARY MORDER: Well, Christine, those were great suggestions and I listed one or two of them that I had not thought of. That's an excellent, specific information for people with disabilities; that's very helpful.

Let's move on to our next question: What about sheltering? What are my options there?

CHRISTINE WOODSELL: Well, you know, we have various options in sheltering I live in the area where Katrina hit, and Hurricane Neil many, many years ago. I put a lot of thought into this.

In the past, I would not have gone to a shelter because they're not accessible. Now many of our shelters are accessible, and so it is a viable option.

Sometimes staying at home is a great solution, a great choice, but occasionally it's not possible to stay in your home.

You have the option of evacuating. If you evacuate, you need to go early, because if you don't go early, you are going to be stuck in horrible, horrible traffic.

You also need to know if you evacuate that you have an accessible place to go when you get somewhere, which sometimes can be a challenge, especially for power wheelchair users.

You also could seek shelter with family or friends in the area. Somebody slightly outside of your area, that is a possibility.

And then now we do have the option of a number of very accessible general population shelters that are required by federal law to provide access to people with disabilities who do not have such a significant medical situation that they need to be in a hospital.

Shelters are supposed to provide enough access, so if an individual can be independent in their home, they should be able to be independent in an emergency shelter.

Christy?

CHRISTY DUNAWAY: Yes, I'd like to add a few things, if I could. This is Christy Dunaway.

First of all, since Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, funding has been made available to a number of states and local counties to build shelters that are hurricane reinforced for hurricanes.

Those shelters are all required to be fully accessible and meet all of the 2010 standards for accessible design or the Americans with Disabilities Act standards.

We recommend that you talk to your county emergency manager's office before an emergency, before a disaster strikes, and find out where those shelters are in your county.

County and state operated shelters should all meet your accessibility needs.

In addition to that, as Christine mentioned, a lot of the -- many of the other shelters are operated by faith-based organizations, volunteer organizations, but most are going to actually be operated by the American Red Cross. The American Red Cross has a

shelter app that you can download on to your Smartphone that shows you where shelters are.

And in the event of an emergency, your state emergency operation center will very likely be distributing information through local media about sheltering, where those shelters have opened, locations of those shelters, et cetera.

Some states have a disability integration advisor, like Mississippi Emergency Management does. Many do not

However, if you contact your local county emergency manager's office, hopefully you can get the information you need regarding where those shelters are and how to get there and make sure that they're accessible.

As Christine stated, all shelters should meet all your accessibility needs and if they do not, then you need to speak with the shelter manager upon arrival Thank you.

MARY MORDER: Thank you, Christy. That's just great information.

Do either one of you have anything else to add? Sheltering is such a difficult topic and we don't like to think about it, but we really need to think about it in advance

Okay.

CHRISTINE WOODSELL: This is Christine. Christy and I have advised many, many, many shelters and it certainly is a vast improvement over what was available years ago. We're making a lot of progress and I feel much more confident that I would have similar options to what other people would have at this point.

Not to say that there aren't occasionally errors, but, you know, we here in Mississippi are trying very hard to get those corrected, certainly with the commitment of the director of the Mississippi Emergency Management organization

MARY MORDER: That's great And that's really encouraging news. And I hope other states are working just as hard as Mississippi is to make their shelters accessible.

Another important issue is transportation to evacuate or to get to a shelter. Christy and Christine, can you talk to us about that, please?

CHRISTINE WOODSELL: Well, certainly making arrangements if you need help with your transportation is a critical, critical part to your plan.

We all need to have a plan and that is a key issue

Some people need to access transportation and there were several horrible tragedies were that linked to not getting proper transportation after Katrina

Basically you need to have more than one plan.

Don't rely on one source and assume that they will come, because all of these people at that point will be overwhelmed with requests.

There may be areas where certain transportation cannot access your area or your home, so it is certainly critical to have more than one source to try to arrange prior to a storm or needing it.

CHRISTY DUNAWAY: And this is Christy, if I can add, if I could, often the transportation that you typically use if you're using para-transit transportation in your county, that transportation may already be utilized by county emergency management offices, the state, for instance, are using it to evacuate people.

So, while it's a good idea to -- it's always a good idea, as Christine said, to make your own transportation arrangements, but keep in mind this: If your only option is your para-transit that you typically use, I highly recommend that you try and locate other opportunities out there.

If you are a Medicaid recipient, for instance, or even if you are not, there are non-emergency Medicaid transporters out there, many of them, you might want to look for those

And in addition to that, let me just say this: If you are concerned about transportation to evacuate, if you're concerned about sheltering, one thing that we always recommend as a person with a disability, contact your county emergency manager's office and find out how you can get involved and determine what's currently available.

And if things are not available in your area, what can you do as a person with a disability to advocate that those -- that better sheltering, better transportation become available. Thank you.

MARY MORDER: That's great. Thank you, Christy, thank you, Christine, for this wonderful and valuable information that everybody needs

ADA Live! listening audience, if you have questions about preparing for emergencies and what to do after an emergency, please submit your questions at any time on our online forum at adalive.org.

Now let's pause for a word from our sponsor.

>> ANNOUNCER: The Southeast ADA Center is your leader in providing information, training, and guidance for the Americans with Disabilities Act and disability access in businesses, government, and individuals at local, state, and regional levels, the Southeast ADA Center located in Georgia is a member of the ADA network and serves eight states in the Southeast region. For answers contact the ADA network at 1-800-949-4232.

MARY MORDER: Welcome back to our show We're talking about Christine Woodell and Christy Dunaway about how to prepare for emergencies and what to do afterwards.

We've discussed both transportation and sheltering during an emergency.

Now we're going to turn to another important topic. Where do I find help I need after a disaster? Christine?

CHRISTINE WOODELL: Well, in the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster, a tornado, a flood, help will first come from our first responders, local fire departments, police departments, family, friends, and neighbors.

But it's very important that we need to have a system, an idea, a plan, because the first 72 hours are basically on you. The first 72 on you.

There is just no way that there are enough personnel to meet everybody's needs immediately, so we need to do the very best we can to figure out how we can take care of ourselves for 72 hours, at least.

Christy?

CHRISTY DUNAWAY: Yeah, a couple of things to keep in mind. The level of support and the assistance that you can receive after a disaster and where that support comes from, whether it's local from your county or local faith-based volunteer-type organizations, state resources or federal resources, it's gonna depend on the magnitude of the disaster, on how large the disaster was How many people have been affected? How much damage has been done?

Disaster assessment starts immediately after a disaster has hit. And typically a declaration for state or federal assistance can be determined within just a matter of a couple of days, if not sooner than that.

So, if a disaster is declared a disaster by the President of the United States, there are several ways that you can apply for federal assistance. There are four different ways, in fact And all this information, I think, will be available on some resource sheets on

ADA Live!

But you can apply by phone, by calling an 800 number, you can apply on the internet by going to fema.gov, disaster assistance, you can apply by disaster assistance teams who will often come by into the neighborhoods that have been affected and it's a team of people, they will be -- you will know who they are by their dress and they will have badges stating that they are reservists or they are employees of other FEMA or MEMA -- or, excuse me, FEMA or your state Emergency Management Agency.

And when a disaster is declared, other recovery service centers will open locally in your area.

Typically, at least in Mississippi, each county will have at least two recovery centers depending where the disaster hit or where the damage is. They try to place those recovery centers in the neighborhoods that have received the most damage, if they can find a good location that has not incurred damage and is accessible, of course.

So, four places to apply for assistance: By phone, by internet, through the disaster survivor teams that may come by your neighborhood, and through the disaster recovery centers.

I recommend you apply by phone first, if at all possible.

But I also recommend that when those disaster recovery centers open, if the disaster has been declared, I recommend that you go by those disaster recovery centers as well, because there will be a number of different agencies and organizations at those disaster recovery centers and a number of different people you can speak to about receiving the assistance that you may need.

So, all of that information will be distributed through your local media. All the counties, the states have got good external affairs teams that put together this information and get it out through local media.

So, tune in to your local news, if at all possible, because the services that are available to you will be announced often and locations will be announced often So....

MARY MORDER: That's great information. Boy, there's a lot to remember and I'm glad that this show will be archived so that people can listen to it later and take notes. What do we do if we're turned down for services after we try to apply?

CHRISTY DUNAWAY: This is Christy. Appeal. When you do apply for services, you will be given an I.D. number It's really important that you keep up with that I.D. number, because that I.D. number is -- you will have to use it any time you call, any time you go

by the disaster recovery center, any time you may get on the internet looking for information about stuff.

If you've been given that I.D. number, you will need it from that point forward. So keep up with that. You're given it as soon as you apply. So we always recommend that you appeal. Because a lot -- here's what happens: Your insurance has got to -- if you have insurance on your home, it will pay out a certain amount depending on your coverage. So, when you go ahead and apply for state or federal assistance, first you've got to deal with your insurance.

We recommend you go ahead and apply for that, but your insurance has got to determine what they are going to pay first before the state or federal government will determine what you're eligible for in terms of their assistance that they can offer.

So, get the ball rolling by applying first, but it's possible that if you have insurance coverage or if, depending on your income and many other various factors, you may be turned down for assistance.

Always appeal that decision, because often people may be turned down for assistance because they don't have all the information that they need for the employees and the reservists working the assistance to determine whether or not you're eligible.

Often they will ask you to come back with more information. You know, bring us back your medical documentation, bring us back, you know, documentation from a registered contractor, for instance, that tells us and shows us exactly how much damage was done to your home and that type of thing.

I always tell people if you're turned down for assistance, appeal that decision. And it's important that you keep up with every piece of paper, if at all possible, during clean-up, before a disaster strikes, during the clean-up process, and after a disaster has hit, and during your recovery process, keep up with all of your paperwork. Thanks.

MARY MORDER: Great. Thank you, Christy That is so important. All of these steps are just crucial and it's so hard to think of them when an emergency is happening.

As we wrap up the show, what are one or two points either one of you would like to share with the audience out there?

CHRISTINE WOODSELL: Well, this is Christine. I think we just need to keep in mind that disaster can strike at any time. The most important thing we need to do is think about it beforehand and have a plan, have a backup plan, and another backup plan

It is just so important to have options And as the information comes in, you may need

to change your plan. There was a hurricane that was headed toward Mississippi years ago and a lot of people evacuated to New Orleans and New Orleans was where the hurricane hit

So, you just have to listen to your news, listen to your weather And you need to remember to write down things that you think you know, because in the middle of an emergency when you're upset and everybody is rushing, you might not remember what you think you would remember. So write down things and have them with you that you think you know. It's just a good plan.

CHRISTY DUNAWAY: And this is Christy, I would add, Christine is absolutely correct. Know ahead of time how you plan to evacuate, if needed, where you're planning on going. In the event of a no-warning disaster, having those plans in place, have somebody make sure there's somebody out there who can come and check on you [chuckles], that's perhaps the first and most important thing you can do.

If you're -- you know, in your local area, you've got local fire departments that are in your neighborhoods, these precincts that are in your neighborhood, go and meet them, let them know that you're living there in their neighborhood, that you're a person with a disability, you may need additional assistance in the event of a no warning disaster such as a flash flood or a tornado that you can't prepare for, necessarily.

So, make sure that your local first responders know who you are and know that you're out there, because they will, you know, they will be the first ones on the scene in the event of a tornado or a flash flood or a type of disaster like that that's considered a no-notice event, basically. So, let them know that you're out there and where you are.

Keep your plan ready. Keep your Go Kit ready. It's important to check that Go Kit Remember if the doctor changes your medication, to make the changes you need to within your Go Kit and on your medication list and things like that. We can't always remember everything, and so I completely agree with Christine, the more you can write down and have in a Ziploc bag that can't get wet, the better off you'll be.

But, really, the most important thing, the first responders are going to be neighbors, family, and your local fire and police departments, let them know that you're out there and that you may need assistance in the event of a disaster.

MARY MORDER: Great, great information, Christy and Christine Thank you so much for being with us today!

I want to let our audience know that this episode and all previous ADA Live! episodes are available on our website at adalive.org. We've also created a resource sheet and

valuable information with websites and tips and other information regarding what to do in an emergency before, during, and after.

All of our episodes are archived in a variety of formats, including streamed audio from our website, accessible transcripts of the audio broadcast, and also available to download are podcasts to listen to at your convenience from your mobile device. Just select the download podcast from our home page and all episodes will be downloaded to your iTunes or preferred podcast manager.

I want to thank you all for listening today. We are thankful for your great support in listening to the series of ADA Live! broadcasts. You can submit your questions on any of these topics by going to adalive.org. Join us on September the 6th for our next episode of ADA Live! We will be talking about the LEAD center staff about transition and what is required under pre-employment transition services of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, or WIOA.

If you have questions about the ADA, the Americans with Disabilities Act, contact your ADA Center at 1-800-949-4232. And remember, all calls are free and confidential.

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