

PREPARE, PLAN, STAY POSTED

By Beth M. Snyder

In the October 2019, AARP magazine posted information on a recent University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging which asked 2,200 adults ages 50 to 80 how prepared they were for a severe emergency such as a forced evacuation, the need to shelter in place or a long-term power outage. The article highlighted some low percentages; such as 55% didn't have a portable battery or solar cellphone charger, to illustrate that older adults are not well prepared for a disaster.

The reality of a disaster situation is that you will likely not have access to everyday conveniences. To prepare in advance think through the details of your everyday life. The first place to start is to develop a communication plan. Make a list of family, friends and others who will be part of your plan. Talk to these people and ask them to be part of your support system. Share your plan with these people. Post this plan where EMS/law enforcement will look for it, usually on or in your refrigerator. Most pharmacies and county health departments provide "vials of life;" containers where you list your medications, medical needs and contacts. These can be placed in your refrigerator's butter compartment or on a shelf in your refrigerator door. It is important to keep your information updated.

Being prepared and having a plan allows all of us to be less anxious. There are Emergency Supply list basics (www.ready.gov) that everyone needs; such as a first aid kit, water (one gallon per person per day) and a three to five day supply of food, but older adults need to consider other items. Add to the basics a seven-day supply of medications, hearing aids and batteries, wheelchair batteries, oxygen, copies of important documents including medical insurance, Medicare and Medicaid cards. If you don't have a generator you can't shelter in place if your needs include oxygen, CPAP mask or you are on home dialysis.

Every county in this country has an emergency management office and most of the local offices maintain a register of older adults so they can be located and get assistance quickly in case of a disaster. If you live alone, have mobility or other special needs, please contact this office and provide them with your information. Also contact your utility companies and they will put you on their list for immediate restoration of services.

Whether you decide to stay put in an emergency or evacuate to a safer location, you will need to make plans in advance for your pets or service animals. If you must evacuate take your pets with you. If that is not possible, work out a plan with family, friends or neighbors who will take care of your pets in an emergency.

Finally, stay informed, stay calm, be patient and think before you act. Follow instructions you receive from your local authorities. With basic preparations, you will be ready for the unexpected.

Beth Mary Snyder has worked on the PC(USA) staff in Louisville, KY for 18 years, four years as PW program assistant and for the past 14 years serving with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA). Beth's title is Associate for Program Administration. She is in contact with mid-council leadership following natural and human-caused disasters offering financial and volunteer support. She administers national and refugee grants. She caters to the needs of over 100 national PDA volunteers. In 2015, she initiated the collaboration between Presbyterian Women and PDA training in disaster preparedness. Four years later, 115 PW-DP trainers are serving their congregations and presbyteries.

Since 1988, Beth has served on the Presbytery of Ohio Valley PW coordinating team, currently as moderator. As an active elder she serves as clerk of session at First Presbyterian Church in Jeffersonville, IN. She has four exceptional children, two excellent sons-in-law and five amazing grandchildren.