

Disaster Preparedness for People with Disabilities

Tips For People With Life-Support Systems

Secure Equipment

Secure your life-support equipment to prevent damage from falling. If you use a chain, make sure it is welded (not bent).

Alternative Providers

Determine which facilities/providers can serve you if your home system becomes inoperable or your current provider is unable to assist you.

Alternate Power

- Ask your vendor about alternative power sources that will sustain you for up to seven days.
- Could you use manually-operated equipment?
- Can your equipment be powered from a vehicle battery? If yes, obtain any hardware necessary for the hook-up.

Generators

- For all-day use over several days, a gasoline-powered generator is the preferred alternative power source. Test it periodically and operate it only in an open area to ensure good ventilation. If you store an adequate gasoline supply, make sure you do so safely. Keep a siphon kit on hand in case you need to obtain gasoline directly from your vehicle.
- Some generators can be plugged into house wiring systems. Consult your utility company before you do this.

Oxygen Users

- Ask your provider if a reduced-flow rate may be used during a disaster to prolong the life of the system. Record on your equipment the reduced flow numbers so you can refer to them.
- Be aware of oxygen safety; avoid areas where gas leaks or open flames may be present.
- Post "Oxygen in Use" signs.
- Keep the shut-off switch for oxygen equipment near you so you can get to it quickly in an emergency.

Test Backups Regularly

- If your backup power system relies on batteries, be aware that stored batteries require periodic charging, even if they are unused. A charging routine must be strictly followed.
- Test your alternative power equipment regularly to ensure it will function in an emergency.
- Know the working duration of any batteries that support your system.
- Ask your power company about the type of backup power you plan to use and get their advice.

Utility Company Registry

Many utility companies keep a list of names of people dependent on life-support systems and tag their meters. Registering for this service may qualify you for a discount rate; contact the customer service department for more information. Never count on your power being quickly restored. Utility personnel may not be able to reach you right away after a major disaster.

Personal Support Network

- Show your personal support network how to operate and safely move your equipment if necessary.
- Label equipment and attach instruction cards (lamine them for added durability).

Checklist

- Secure all vital equipment.
- Maintain a current list of alternate providers.
- Obtain an alternate power source, such as a generator.
- Know how to use your oxygen safely in an emergency.
- Regularly test your backup power supply.
- Register with your utility company.
- Teach your personal support network how to operate and safely move your equipment.

Excerpted from:

Independent Living Resource Center San Francisco
(<http://www.ilrcsf.org/resources/publications.shtml>)