

Catholic Caregivers

'Caregiving is pro-life!'

In Case of an Emergency or Disaster

It's important that, no matter the emergency (storm, flood, earthquake, heat wave, power-outage, terrorist activity or some other disaster), you have a plan in place that will make sure your care-receiver stays safe, warm (or cool) and well fed.

Power lines may be down, travel restricted, and communications disrupted, leaving your loved one in a dark, cold (or hot) house or apartment with no help in sight. Here are some points to consider to help both of you be better prepared:

- Get current emergency information from your local Red Cross or FEMA office. Being prepared is the best first step to surviving a disaster.
- If at all possible, arrange for help *before* the disaster hits. (If, for example, the weather forecasters are warning that a major storm is on the way.) If you're not going to be able to travel from your part of town to your care-receiver's, or if you live an even greater distance, arrange to have a neighbor, a member of the parish or a volunteer do some grocery shopping for him or her. Even if your loved one doesn't need anything from the store, ask for that person to stop in and make sure he or she is doing all right.
- Remind your care-receiver not to shovel snow or worry about cleaning up debris. Neither activity is something an aging or frail person should attempt. Red Cross and other emergency teams (or a good neighbor or parishioner) will take care of that later.
- Encourage your loved one to stay indoors. Even if he or she plans on walking only a short way, falls lead to broken bones. It's better to suffer a little cabin fever for a few days than spends weeks or months laid up in bed.
- Even the most independent person can feel a little uncomfortable if it means that for days on end, he or she won't be able to get out or for anyone else to get in. After the initial emergency and the phone systems are working, a simple daily telephone call can work wonders in providing that needed reassurance. (This is another reason to be sure to have a list of important numbers (family, friends, neighbors, doctor, parish and community resources) posted by your care-receiver's phone.)
- Have emergency supplies ready at your loved

one's home. Make sure they're stored in a place that's easily accessible. These would include a flashlight with fresh batteries, battery-powered radio, non-electric clock, hand or battery-operated can opener, water, nutritious food that doesn't need to be cooked and a supply of critical medication. (For the most current information on this, check the latest suggested list from the Red Cross or FEMA.)

- Remind your care-receiver food in the refrigerator and freezer might keep for several days if the doors aren't opened frequently or for any long period of time.
- If your loved one is taking medication, be sure there's enough on hand to last through any emergency. Remember that even though he or she might not be able to get out, others may be able to come in. Check with his or her pharmacy for suggestions in cases like this.
- If your care-receiver is on some type of life-support system, such as oxygen, contact his or her doctor and the local electric company ahead of time to see what they recommend.
- Your loved one will stay warmer in a home or apartment without heat by wearing layers of clothing (underwear, pants, light shirt, heavy shirt, sweater, jacket, heavy coat, hat, gloves) rather than one bulky winter coat. (Keeping that hat on really makes a difference!)
- If the fireplace is to be used, be sure the chimney is clean and the screen is in place. Remind your loved one not to try heating a room with a barbecue, hibachi or any type of grill which emits carbon monoxide.
- If the furnace has gone out but the electricity is still on, make sure your loved one:
 - Does not try to heat with an appliance, such as an oven, with the door wide open.
 - Does not overload an electrical outlet or extension cord with an electric heater.
 - Does not have *anything* near an electric space heater. (And don't sit too close, either.)
 - Does not use candles for heating or for light.
- Remind your care-receiver it's all right to call 911 if he or she isn't able to stay warm or fix meals and no one else is available to help. □