

TORNADO SEASON: EMERGENCY PREPARATION FOR CAREGIVERS:

Arkansas can have tornadoes at any time of year, but spring can be a particularly dangerous time. The weather service keeps us informed when storms are coming and also gives us information about how to prepare for emergency situations. It is particularly important to have a plan when you live with someone who has dementia. This article is a compilation of information from several different sources.

Emergency Planning includes making double copies of identification, medical and contact information - one for you and one for someone outside your area. Make sure your loved one is wearing medical ID jewelry. Carry a photo of the person with dementia in case he or she gets lost. Keep important documents in a waterproof, portable container that you can easily take with you.

Develop a disaster plan. Do not depend on one person for help. Establish a network with family or others who can check on you. Make sure they know your emergency meeting spots. Also designate someone out-of-state to touch base with. If you have in-home help, include them in your plan and know their agency's emergency policies.

Assemble an emergency supply kit of first aid, a flashlight, batteries, crank radio, nonperishable food, a manual can opener, a whistle and iodine tablets should you need to purify water. Include health, doctor and pharmacy information, and serial numbers with instructions for any medical devices.

Have a "To Go Bag" of toiletries, two changes of comfortable, protective clothing, several changes of underwear, rain gear, a travel pillow, Mylar blanket, bottled water, energy bars, meal shakes, snacks, a pen and paper, a small regional map and contact info for your emergency network. Be sure to include all medications, along with a list of the medications, why they are taken and their dosages.

Weather emergencies can keep people homebound or without power. If a storm is headed your way, plan to be self-sufficient for several days without help or emergency services. Have plenty of medication, food, water (2 gallons per person) and supplies on hand. Alert your local fire department in advance if someone is bedridden or dependent on life-sustaining equipment. Following a severe storm there may be gas leaks, do not use stoves until you are sure they are safe. Never run a generator inside your home.

If an emergency happens, remain calm. Do not call 911 regarding power outages unless you see a life-threatening situation. Stay tuned to your local emergency station and follow the advice of trained professionals. If you are home, stay home unless told to evacuate or you are in immediate danger.

Be prepared to evacuate. Create an escape plan, and practice different circumstances to identify complications. Determine in advance if you need assistance, how you will get to your safe location and have alternate transportation plans ready. If you must leave home, tell someone where you are going. A shelter is a last resort for someone with dementia. The change of location, plus unfamiliar noises and activities, may cause them increased stress and confusion. If possible try to locate a shelter that can meet your special needs.

Any change of routine for someone who has dementia can be upsetting. Make him or her feel as comfortable as possible. Use pillows, blankets and perhaps something familiar that can have a calming effect. Snacks, games or activities can keep your loved one occupied and distracted. Add a few favorite photos or a magazine to your "To Go Bag".

The Final Word: A person who does not know how to respond in an emergency should **never** be left alone.