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# Planning for and Replacing Assistive Technology or Durable Medical Equipment after an Emergency or Disaster

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After an emergency or disaster, repairing and/or replacing an assistive device comes with many challenges and can be a lengthy process. Much can be done ahead of time with the proper planning to ease the stress of the situation and reduce the amount of ‘down time’ of being without a personal device. Depending on the type of equipment and complexity of the modifications, this process can take anywhere from 60 to 120 days.

## **BEFORE AN INCIDENT**

1. **Create a list of all assistive devices and medical equipment** (See *Assistive Technology and Durable Medical Equipment List* handout). To ensure you have access to all your assistive technology after an emergency or disaster, it is good to have a list of all your equipment and identify which ones require power. This will aid in planning for the loss of power and in the replacement process.
2. **Have pictures of equipment.** When working with your therapist, vendor or supplier make sure, you have a picture of your device and a picture of you with it. This helps others know specifically what your device looks like and shows ownership/possession if it is ever stolen.
3. **Know equipment model and serial number.** Keep a record of this information so it can be included in all potential reports. This can be included in your equipment list.
4. **Know your vendor/supplier.** Keep a record of who provided your equipment and their contact information. If the equipment is in need of repair or replacement, they should have a record of you and your device along with all the specifications. They may be able to provide



a temporary replacement or loaner and help expedite the replacement process.

5. **Know who paid for the equipment.** Keep a record of the payer and their contact information. If a third party purchased the equipment, (i.e. Medicaid, Medicare, and private insurance) they are ultimately responsible for the maintenance and replacement, and they need to be notified immediately to provide the approval for the repair or replacement of the device and assist in the overall process.
6. **Label equipment.** Make sure your name and both in state and out-of-state contact information is on the device in case you are separated from your equipment. Also label with the type of backup batteries used, how long they last, and location of the stored batteries.
7. **Provide instructions on equipment use.** Instructions should also be attached to the equipment on how to manually use the equipment and how to safely evacuate it in case of an emergency.
8. **Know operating specification of electrical power equipment.** Label equipment with how long the internal battery lasts on a full charge and how long the power back-up option will last. This helps in determining how much power the devices require, and in developing a charging schedule and maintaining a charge during a power outage.
9. **Install alarm for electrical service interruption.** This will assist in notification of power outages during the night.
10. **Have a low-tech back-up solution.** Always have an alternate backup solution in case you are not able to utilize the original device due to breakage, loss of power or total loss.
11. **Keep backup replacement batteries on hand.** This will help during an extended power outage in maintaining power to the equipment. If possible, choose equipment that uses batteries that are easily purchased from nearby stores. If using rechargeable batteries, develop a plan to recharge them when power is out.
12. **Determine alternate charging systems.** Check with the equipment vendor/supplier to determine alternate ways to charge internal batteries without causing damage to the equipment (i.e. vehicles).



Also determine if an external battery will work in an emergency and the type to be used.

13. **Consider purchasing a back-up generator.** To ensure power is available a generator is a possible option. Caution should be taken NOT to use a gas-powered generator around oxygen equipment. If finances are not available contact CIDE for potential funders.
14. **Develop a schedule to regularly check backup or alternative power equipment.** To ensure equipment will function when needed, check it and rechargeable batteries on a monthly basis to confirm they are operating properly.
15. **Create a power outage plan.** Know the power requirements of your equipment and make a plan for alternate sources of power. Contact the local power company to discuss your plan and get advice on type of backup power to use to ensure its feasibility.
16. **Register with your local power company.** For life-sustaining/medical equipment, request a “medical alert flag” so you can be contacted during an unplanned outage and before a planned outage. This does NOT put you at the top of a list for your power to be restored but alerts them you have special needs.
17. **Keep a list of alternate power providers.** Know what non-hospital facilities will allow you to use their facility to charge your equipment if nothing else is available.
18. **Have an evacuation plan.** Make a plan to evacuate for extended power outages and to go where power is available (i.e. family, friends, and hotel).
19. **Plan alternate methods for transporting equipment.** When your primary form of transportation is not available during an emergency or disaster, plan for other ways to safely transport equipment.
20. **Develop alternate storage locations for backup equipment.** Find alternate locations across town or across the county to store low-tech backup equipment in case original equipment cannot be evacuated.
21. **Know local equipment loan programs/closets.** Keep a list of local organizations that have equipment you can temporarily borrow if you are not able to get a replacement in a timely manner.



22. **Insure devices.** Make sure you have included all of your devices on your homeowners or renter insurance policies. This will help expedite any repairs or replacement necessary after an emergency or disaster.
23. **Share information with Support Network.** Instruct members of your Support Network on your power outage plans. They should also know how to manually operate and safely move all your equipment.

## AFTER AN INCIDENT

1. **Get a police report.** Always get a police report or report from response personnel (with pictures) to document the damage or total loss of a piece of equipment. Medicaid, Medicare or private insurance will not process a claim without it.
2. **Get a vendor assessment.** After an incident, contact the vendor or supplier for their written assessment of the amount of damage to the device and the ability to repair or need to replace the device. Third party payers will also require this documentation.
3. **Contact insurance company or third party payer.** They will require information documenting the incident and damage to the device before authorizing repair or replacement.
4. **Contact prescribing physician.** The doctor who wrote the original prescription will need to provide an updated prescription to document the device is still needed.
5. **Contact physical or occupational therapist.** You may need some adjustments to the original piece of equipment and a reevaluation would determine any changes or upgrades necessary. The therapist will need to provide updated equipment recommendations and a letter of medical necessity before the vendor can place the order for the new equipment.

When involved in an emergency or disaster, an individual's state of mind doesn't always allow you to remember what you need to consider around your assistive equipment. Having a plan ahead of time allows you to develop a reasonable response to a power outage, the need to evacuate



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and transport your equipment to a safer location. It will also greatly assist in your recovery and the process of repair and/or replacement.

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Made possible by NIDRR Grant #H224A40014 and

The Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council



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