

Older persons and persons with disabilities tend to face different risks in disasters from those faced by persons in the general adult population. While there is a large volume of literature on disasters, relatively little of it focuses on older persons at any disaster stage—preparedness, response, and recovery. Health and functional status are key factors in the ability of persons of any age to respond to disasters. Older persons are likely to be disproportionately vulnerable because they are more likely to have chronic illnesses; functional limitations; and sensory, physical, and cognitive disabilities than younger persons.

- In 2010, Mississippi had 541,163 citizens 60 years or older
- Copiah County had a population of 29,449 with 13.7% (4,029) 65 years or older.
- Adults who reached age 60 in 2010 could expect to live an average of 22 more years
- Since 1970, the 60+ population in the state has increased 43%
- 52% (236,640) of older Mississippians live in rural areas
- Over 80% of elderly Mississippians live in their own family dwellings

Getting ready for disaster starts at home with the individual. All individuals need to assess their situations and create a personal emergency preparedness plan. Also, caregivers, be it family or professional, must consider potential disasters and think through how they would be able to provide basic necessities.

Senior Citizens need to create a personal support network made up of several individuals who will check in on them in an emergency to ensure their wellness and to give assistance if needed. This network can consist of friends, roommates, family members, relatives, personal

attendants, co-workers and neighbors. It is suggested that a minimum of three people are identified at each location where one regularly spends a significant part of their week, for example; at work, home, school or volunteer site.

There are seven important items to discuss, give to and practice with a personal support network:

- Make arrangements, prior to an emergency, for your support network to immediately check on you after a disaster and, if needed, offer assistance.
- Exchange important keys.
- Show where you keep emergency supplies.
- Share copies of your relevant emergency documents, evacuation plans and emergency health information card.
- Agree and practice a communications system regarding how to contact each other in an emergency. Do not count on the telephones working.
- You and your personal support network should always notify each other when you are going out of town and when you will return.
- The relationship should be mutual. Learn about each other's needs and how to help each other in an emergency. You could be responsible for food supplies and preparation, organizing neighborhood watch meetings and interpreting, among other things.

Emergencies and disasters can strike quickly and without warning and can force you to

evacuate your neighborhood or be confined to your home. What would you do if your basic services—water, gas, electricity or communications—were cut off?

Learn how to protect yourself and cope with disaster by planning ahead. Even if you have physical limitations, you can still protect and prepare yourself. Local officials and relief workers may not be able to reach everyone right away. You can deal with disaster better by preparing in advance and by working with those in your support network: your family, neighbors and friends as a team.

Knowing what to do is your responsibility.

The Three Steps to Preparedness

1. Get a Kit
2. Make a Plan
3. Be Informed