Safe and Equal in EMErgencies (SEE ME)

What to do in the event of floods, earthquakes and wildfires and declared protective measures

# PREPARE FOR EMERGENCIES

Natural disasters can happen anywhere, at any time. Some happen without warning, whereas others can be predicted.

It is important that blind and partially sighted people and their family members and personal assistants are also prepared for emergencies. Find out what you can do in an emergency and where you will need help, especially if you are alone.

Before an emergency:

* Identify whether you live in an area at risk from floods, earthquakes or wildfires;
* Get guidance on how to prepare for, deal with and recover from emergencies. The instructions are available at the following internet site of the [Administration of the Republic of Slovenia for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief](https://www.gov.si/podrocja/obramba-varnost-in-javni-red/varstvo-pred-naravnimi-in-drugimi-nesrecami/napotki-prebivalcem-ob-nesrecam/)
* Carry out preventive measures as far as you are able;
* Be aware that protective measures may be declared in the event of certain emergencies, for example evacuation, reception and care for populations at risk, nuclear, biological and chemical protection, etc.;
* Find out possible ways to contact 112;
* You can assess the seismic resistance of a building (using the [POTROG app](http://potrog2.vokas.si/))

If people with disabilities cannot get informed by themselves, they should be helped by relatives, parents, children, caretakers, personal assistants, etc., in an appropriate way and with appropriate means of communication. This should not cause panic. People with disabilities can get in touch with their umbrella organizations or associations.

**PREPARE THE THINGS YOU WILL NEED DURING AN EMERGENCY**

In the event of a major emergency, it may happen that:

* The assistance of emergency services is not immediately available;
* Electricity and natural gas supplies are disrupted;
* The water supply is disrupted or the water is not safe to drink;
* The sewerage system is damaged and therefore unusable;
* The heating system you normally use does not work or is not safe to use;
* Landlines, mobile phones and the internet do not work;
* Access to shops, pharmacies, doctor’s surgeries, etc. is blocked.

It is important to prepare things that you will need. Consider your needs and the needs of your family members.

Prepare:

* Food and water supplies; take into account the dietary habits of you and your family members (diets, allergies, baby food, etc.). You should also stock up on food and water for a guide dog for the blind and for your pets;
* Toiletries;
* First aid kit;
* Medicines you need to take regularly;
* Warm clothing and sturdy footwear;
* Copies of your documents;
* The devices you use (glasses, white cane, etc.);
* Battery-powered radio, battery-powered torch and extra batteries;
* Anything else you think you might need.

Make a list of important phone numbers (relatives, people who help you, doctor, etc.).

When you are asleep, always keep your glasses and white cane in the same place (for example, next to your bed) so that you can reach them immediately in the event of an emergency.

# PROTECTING YOUR HOME

Take preventive measures at home to protect your home from earthquakes, floods or wildfires. If you cannot do it yourself, ask relatives, friends or neighbours to help.

For protection against earthquakes:

* Fix furniture to a wall or other support;
* Place large or heavy items on lower shelves;
* Do not hang pictures, mirrors or sharp or breakable objects above beds and seating areas, etc.

For protection against floods:

* In rooms subject to flooding, lift furniture and other equipment off the floor;
* Consider relocating the electrical wiring;
* Floors and walls should be made of materials which are not easily damaged by water and can be cleaned and dried quickly;
* Install non-return valves on drains and pipes;
* Ensure that rainwater drains smoothly around the house, etc.

For protection against wildfires:

* Keep the surroundings of buildings tidy;
* Keep combustible materials at a safe distance;
* Remove tree branches and dry grass, etc.

# PROBLEMS IN THE EVENT OF EMERGENCIES

Think about what problems you might face in the event of an earthquake, flood or wildfire and declared protective measures.

Blind and partially sighted people, especially if they live alone, can (generally) have the following problems in the event of disasters:

* They cannot prepare the things they need in the event of an emergency;
* They cannot take preventive measures to protect their home from an emergency;
* The route they know and use every day may be impassable in the event of an emergency, with obstacles in the way;
* They cannot see whether it is safe to move around a room; they do not see where there are hazards and that, for example in an earthquake, furniture and equipment have been overturned and there is debris on the ground;
* They may have difficulties with evacuation (obstacles on the evacuation route due to the emergency, large numbers of people, orientation, etc.);
* They may have slower movement;
* They may have orientation problems;
* Communication may be difficult;
* Accommodation in an accommodation centre (a new environment) may cause problems;
* Power failure will result in braille readers/computers not working;
* They cannot read written warnings and notices;
* Strong, flashing light signs can be a barrier for the partially sighted;
* Too many sounds can distract them;
* A guide dog may be injured;
* After an emergency, they cannot remove damaged equipment, clean up etc. by themselves.

# GUIDE DOG FOR THE BLIND

Some blind people use a guide dog. Although a guide dog is taught to remain calm in the event of an emergency, it can become panicky and agitated. In this case, calm it down with words and slowly approach it with your arms open (do not wave your arms). If a guide dog for the blind is injured in an emergency, call the veterinary service.

In the event of an evacuation, the person evacuating should be accompanied by a guide dog, and if possible, the dog should be led by the person themselves, as this ensures the person's safety.

If a blind person is injured in an emergency and is taken to hospital, the person's relatives should be called, and if there is time, the Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia, who will tell the trainer to come and get the dog. If there is no time, the dog should be taken to a shelter.

# SAY YOU NEED HELP

We suggest you create a social network of people who can help you. In addition to relatives and friends, this can include neighbours, classmates and teachers at school or colleagues at work. Make them aware of your needs in an emergency and where you keep your essentials. Agree on how they will help you in the event of an emergency and afterwards (how they will inform you of the emergency and of the warning given, how they will help with recovery, evacuation, etc.). Be aware that they may not always be available or able to reach you.

People with disabilities living in a multi-apartment building can inform the building manager or the person responsible for implementing fire safety measures that they will need help in the event of an emergency, and also what help they need.

We suggest you contact your umbrella organization.

**WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF DECLARED PROTECTIVE MEASURES**

Protective measures such as evacuation, reception and care in accommodation facilities, or nuclear, biological and chemical protection and so on may be ordered to ensure the safety of the population. Measures may be declared before an emergency occurs or after the emergency has already happened.

If you must leave your home (in the event of an evacuation):

* Follow the instructions of the relevant services;
* Say you need help;
* Take the essentials you have prepared in case of an emergency; consider your needs and those of your family members;
* Take your guide dog with you.

If necessary, decontamination will be carried out. Follow the instructions of the relevant services and tell them you need help.

When you arrive at the place of accommodation, registration is carried out and basic care is provided. Tell the staff what help you need and explain your limitations. Let your relatives know where you are.

# WHAT TO DO DURING AN EMERGENCY

## Earthquakes

If you feel the ground shaking and swaying, and hear furniture and objects moving and falling, it is likely that it is an earthquake.

Stay calm!

Together with your guide dog for the blind, look for shelter under solid tables and benches, in doorframes in load-bearing walls, or along interior load-bearing walls. Squat down, bend your head to your knees, protect your head with your elbows and cover the nape of your neck with the palms of your hands.

Do not run out of the building during an earthquake! Do not use the lift or stairs and do not jump out of the window!

If you are outside, go to an open space, away from buildings, watercourse banks, trees, billboards and power lines.

In densely built-up areas where you cannot move away from buildings, look for protection from falling objects in nearby doorways.

If you are a passer-by and see a blind person, go up to them and tell them what is happening and help them if they want help.

If you are trapped in rubble after an earthquake, stay calm. If it gets dusty, cover your mouth and nose with any protective covering to hand (a handkerchief, part of your clothes). Strike an object against a metal installation or a wall at regular intervals. Call for help from time to time.

If you have a mobile phone, use it, although phone networks may not necessarily work after an earthquake. Turn it off periodically and try to conserve battery power as long as possible.

## Floods

If you hear water entering the building or feel it under your feet, move to a higher floor.

When out in the open, move to an area that cannot be reached by the rising water.

Do not cross a watercourse, even if it only reaches up to your knees.

If you are a passer-by and see a blind person, go up to them and tell them what is happening and help them if they want help.

## Wildfire

If there is smoke in the air, close the doors and windows. Turn off ventilation and air-conditioning systems.

Ask for help and remove objects from the building's surroundings that could catch fire. Water the surroundings of the house with a hose.

Stay indoors.

# WHAT TO DO AFTER AN EMERGENCY

## Earthquakes

After an earthquake, a building can be damaged, and furniture, equipment and objects in the home can be displaced or knocked over. There may be debris on the floor. This can pose an additional risk to blind and partially sighted people.

If you live alone, find or call a person who can help you. Ask them to inspect the damage to the building and equipment and to help you with the elimination of the consequences of the disaster. Have the plumbing, sewerage, gas and electrical installations and flue devices professionally inspected.

In the event of disruption to the drinking water supply, follow the instructions on boiling water or use bottled water.

## Floods

Flooding can damage buildings, flood basements and lower floors, move furniture and equipment, and deposit mud and debris.

If you live alone, find or call a person who can help you. Ask them to inspect the damage to the building and equipment and to help you with the elimination of the consequences of the disaster.

Accept help from others to pump water out of flooded premises, remove debris, and clean, disinfect and dry rooms and equipment.

Clean objects that have been in contact with the floodwater. Discard items that cannot be cleaned.

Throw away food that came into contact with the floodwater.

Have the plumbing, sewerage, gas and electrical installations professionally inspected.

## Wildfire

If you have been evacuated, follow the instructions of the competent authorities on how to return to your home.

If there is still a strong smell of fire in the vicinity of the burnt area, stay out of the area or indoors.

Ventilate the building when there is no smoke or smell of smoke in the air.

Throw away food and drink that has been exposed to smoke and fire. Do not use the water/rainwater in tanks or water butts.

# GUIDELINES FOR PEOPLE WHO HELP

## Blindness and partial sight

Blindness or partial sight is a loss of vision that cannot be corrected by glasses, medical treatment or surgery. It can be inherited or acquired (as a result of disease, aging or accident), or it can occur at birth. Blindness does not necessarily mean a total loss of vision or darkness. Some blind people still have minimal residual vision, but not enough to carry out normal daily tasks. With partially sighted people, the residual vision is greater, but still not enough for normal reading, writing or driving a car. Blindness and partial sight are reflected in very different ways – for example, some people find it difficult to orient themselves in a room or on a road, but on the other hand they can read small signs, or vice versa. Some people use a white cane or a guide dog, while others do not.

## How to approach blind and partially sighted people

When communicating with people who are blind or partially sighted, consider ethical principles and the equal status of the other party. Be respectful.

Get the person's attention. Speak first and/or gently touch their hand. Always speak to a blind or partially sighted person, not to the person accompanying them.

Introduce yourself.

Describe the situation or hazard.

Ask them if they need help or an escort and how you can provide it. Do not help a person against their will.

Use short messages or a descriptive and unambiguous way of communicating. Always respond in words; avoid nodding and other non-verbal messages.

Describe what you are doing and check that the person has understood the information.

Do not do other things during the conversation, thinking that the blind or partially sighted person cannot see you. Look the person straight in the face when talking. Tell the person if you are going to move away or leave the room.

Provide the blind or partially sighted person with information in a format that is accessible to them (large black print, text in braille, e-form). Read written materials or provide an audio playback of information.

## Ways of accompanying and guiding a blind or partially sighted person

Approach a blind or partially sighted person, get their attention, and introduce yourself.

Describe the situation or hazard and tell what needs to be done.

Ask them if they need help or an escort and how you can provide it. Do not help a person against their will.

If the person has a guide dog for the blind, they should take it with them to guide them.

If the person uses a white cane, they should take it with them.

Guide the person by offering your elbow.

Adjust your speed of movement or walking to the person who is blind or partially sighted. Walk one step ahead of them.

Use short, clear messages when communicating. Replace non-specific words (here and there) with a description of the situation (straight ahead there is…, to your right there is…). Avoid nodding and other non-verbal messages. Check that the person has understood the information.

If there is not enough room for two people (e.g. in narrow passages), guide the blind or partially sighted person behind your body with a movement of your arm (move your arm to the back so that the person walks behind you).

Always be the first one to walk through the door, onto the stairs, in passages, in a lift, or on the bus.

If you find that there is no other option than to leave the blind or partially sighted person alone for a few minutes, make sure their back is secured and tell them where you are going and when you will be back. Describe the position of the chair, table, or seat.

# EMERGENCY CALL 112

In EU countries, 112 is always available free of charge. If you need emergency medical assistance or help from the fire brigade, other emergency services or the police, dial 112 to tell the operator:

– **Who** is calling,

– **What** happened,

– **Where** it happened,

– **When** it happened,

– **How many** are injured,

– **What** the injuries are,

– **What** the circumstances at the scene are,

– **What** help you need.

You can dial 112 anytime and free of charge from a landline or a mobile phone, even if your account is empty.

Data on calls to the 112 number are stored for 6 months. Misuse of the call to this number is a punishable offence.

 

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