

Learn HOW SHELTERS WORK:

- Government and nonprofits set up emergency shelters for people who must evacuate in an emergency. The American Red Cross is the largest nonprofit for disaster shelters.
- Shelters are put together in different ways depending on the disaster:
 - Shelters may be set up before a disaster when there is notice. For example, this could happen if there is an oncoming hurricane.
 - Shelters may be set up after a sudden disaster. For example, this could happen after an earthquake or tornado.
 - Officials may create “cooling centers” during heat waves.
- What type of shelters are there?
 - “Congregate shelters” are the most-used type of shelter. These are large buildings, such as high school gyms.
 - “Non-congregate shelters” can be set up in hotels or buildings with separate rooms. (Officials prioritized non-congregate shelters during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.)
 - “Cooling centers” are often set up during heat waves. Cooling centers allow locals to get a break from the heat during the day, especially if they are homeless or do not have air conditioning. These are often in libraries or other air-conditioned public buildings.
 - People with acute medical needs may go to a hospital or medical shelter if it is necessary.
 - Animal evacuation shelters are available for pets and livestock.

Understand YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Your rights include:
 - Disaster shelter managers may not discriminate based on disability; however, someone with acute medical needs may go to a medical shelter or hospital.
 - Shelters must be as accessible as possible for disabled residents. Managers may need to modify the shelter – such as rearranging pathways.
 - Your service animal can stay at the shelter. It must be well behaved.
 - You can request an elevated bed or cot for sleeping, located in an accessible area
 - Other “reasonable accommodations” as needed
 - Assistance with traveling back home or to a new home
- Shelters are not required to provide:
 - Personal Care Attendant or acute medical services
 - Separate rooms when in a congregate shelter
- Your responsibilities include:
 - Know your own needs! This will help you work on accessibility and reasonable accommodations with the shelter staff.
 - Arrange and/or manage personal care. Staff may be able to help you connect with caregivers.
 - Safeguard your personal items, including medical supplies. Staff may have secure lockers or other storage areas.

Find YOUR LOCAL SHELTER IN AN EMERGENCY:

- Enroll in your local emergency notification system (phone, email or text). This can be found at your city or county emergency services website or office.
 - Emergency services may tell you where a shelter is, or they may give contact info where you can find nearby shelters.
 - Many emergency managers are active on social media. Twitter accounts are especially helpful in emergencies.
 - In a sudden emergency, it may take time to learn where a shelter is.
- Your city may have a list of designated cooling shelters well before any heat wave. Contact your local emergency manager to learn more and find a nearby cooling shelter.
- If you can, arrange transportation in advance.

Specialized DISABILITY PROGRAMS:

- Shelters may have staff members focused on helping residents with disabilities.
- These programs are different depending on state. For example:
 - The Red Cross in Massachusetts has the “Disability Integration Team.”
 - California has the “Functional Assessment Service Team” program
 - Areas without these programs may work with other states’ teams.
- Disability teams arrange reasonable accommodations, transportation and more.
- Disability teams do not provide personal care attendant services. If you need personal care services and your care attendant is not with you, staff may be able to find a local agency or independent living center who can help.

