



## **ORANGE COUNTY PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS PROGRAM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **What is the Orange County Special Needs Program?**

The People with Special Needs Program (PSN) is a program designed for Orange County residents or visitors. During times of disaster or weather-related evacuation, the program provides a shelter environment to individuals who have a health/medical condition that requires medical assistance by their caregiver/home health in a shelter environment. Additionally, the program is designed for medically fragile individuals who require transportation assistance to evacuate their home. The Special Needs Program also maintains a registry that allows for early notification of disaster or weather-related events and provides this information to local emergency responders, informing them you are in the community.

### **What is the purpose of having a Special Needs Registry?**

The Florida Department of Emergency Management requires that each county in Florida maintain a Special Needs Registry to provide first responders with valuable information to prepare for disasters and other emergencies. The Special Needs Registry allows for early notification of areas that may be affected during times of disaster, related emergencies and evacuations, if needed.

### **What other services does the PSN Program provide?**

The PSN program provides emergency preparedness information to special-needs citizens throughout the year by participating in community events and presentations. In addition, persons registered with the PSN Program receive emergency preparedness information annually.

The PSN Program is also responsible for the management of Special Needs Shelters during times of disaster by deploying the necessary equipment and staff to operate a Special Needs Shelter. The PSN Program partners with local emergency responder agencies to ensure the residences of persons housed in a Special Needs shelter are safe for them to return home. In addition, the PSN Program provides information on disaster-related services that may be needed.

### **What are the advantages of being registered with the PSN Program?**

Clients registered with the PSN Program receive early notification of information during a hurricane or event. Their information will also be shared with their local fire departments so they are aware you are in the community. In addition, you will receive annual hurricane preparedness information.

### **Who is eligible and how does someone register?**

Any Orange County resident who meets the established eligibility criteria may register. Registrants need to update their information annually or as the registrant's needs change. Registrants who do not update their information annually will be placed in an inactive status.

Registration can be done by:

- Visiting the Orange County Government website at [www.ocfl.net/ems](http://www.ocfl.net/ems) and downloading the registration form.
- Contacting and requesting a form for the Orange County People with Special Needs Program by contacting Orange County Citizens Line at 3-1-1 on your phone or visit [www.ocfl.net/311](http://www.ocfl.net/311).
- Asking your Home Health Care Agency to register you.
- Asking your Hospice Agency to register you.
- Asking your Medical Equipment Supplier to register you.
- Asking your Senior Social Service Agency to register you.

Information collected during the registration process is confidential by law and can only be given to emergency responders who may provide for the registrant's needs during an emergency.

### **Do I need to register if I am a resident of a nursing home, convalescent and retirement home, or adult congregate living facility?**

No, residents of nursing homes, convalescent and retirement homes, or adult congregate living facilities are responsible for the evacuation of their own patients and must have emergency plans in place to handle these types of situations.

### **Why can I no longer register on the State of Florida website or online?**

Effective December 1, 2018 the State of Florida no longer maintains a statewide database. Each county in Florida is required to maintain its own Special Needs Registry. Orange County is currently in the process of updating and restructuring its Special Needs Program. You can currently register by telephone. Contact the Orange County Citizens Line by dialing 3-1-1. Registrants may also download a paper form from the Orange County website at [www.ocfl.net/ems](http://www.ocfl.net/ems). The form will need to be returned to the address printed on the back or via fax at 407-836-2838.

In the near future, Orange County will be developing an online registration form.

**Why does the Registration Form ask for so much information?**

The information you provide will allow emergency management officials to plan accordingly for disasters and weather-related emergencies. This information will assist us in determining the type of shelter that would best accommodate your needs should you need to seek refuge.

**How will I know if I am eligible for the Special Needs Program?**

Upon receipt of your registration form, it will be reviewed. If deemed eligible, your data will be entered into the Special Needs Registry. You will receive a letter within 30 days informing you of your eligibility status. Citizens not eligible for the Special Needs Program can still seek refuge at American Red Cross Shelters.

**How often do I need to update my registration?**

To have the most accurate information, we require that you update your information annually or as changes occur in your medical condition. You will be notified by mail at least 30 days prior to the annual verification asking you to update or submit your information via a phone call to Orange County 3-1-1 or by paper form. Registrations not updated annually will be placed in an inactive status.

**What happens to the demographic and medical information I have provided on my registration form to Orange County? Who is it shared with?**

Your information is kept for a period of 30 days while we enter your information in the Special Needs Registry and process your registration. After completion, the paper copies of your information are destroyed/shredded according to accepted national standards. Information on data stored on the registry is kept in an Orange County-owned database and is protected under Federal, State and Local guidelines.

**How will I be notified if there is a disaster or hurricane?**

Persons registered with the Special Needs Program will receive an automated message providing information on sheltering and transportation via telephone to the home and cell phone numbers provided on their registration. If you are not available to answer the phone, a message will be left on your voicemail. Please note you may receive several informative messages regarding the disaster or hurricane.

**Where will I go if I must evacuate my home?**

Orange County has designated Special Needs shelter sites throughout the County. Decisions on which of these shelter sites are opened are determined by County officials. All shelter sites may not be utilized for every emergency situation; PSN shelters are not generally publicized to the general public. You will be asked to call the Orange County Citizens Line at 3-1-1 should you

require special needs sheltering or transportation. You will not automatically be picked up if you are registered with the PSN Program, and you will need to contact us to make arrangements for transportation. If possible, you should try to make arrangements with family or friends for transportation.

If there are any legal restrictions that prevent you from access to a public school or public shelter, contact the Orange County Citizens Line at 3-1-1 for guidance and direction.

### **Why can't I go to a hospital instead of a Special Needs Shelter?**

Local hospitals must maintain the capability to provide for the needs of the very sick or those with life-threatening injuries. Unless you have a life-threatening health/medical condition requiring continuous medical attention, you should go to a designated American Red Cross or Special Needs Shelter.

### **What type of transportation is available to Special Needs Shelters?**

The Orange County Special Needs Program partners with community agencies to coordinate and provide pick up and drop off at "open" Special Needs shelter locations.

The Special Needs Program utilizes a variety of vehicles equipped for individuals with various needs and disabilities. Transportation to shelters will be arranged through the Special Needs Program.

### **What should I bring if I decide to go to a shelter?**

If you have no other alternatives and need to seek refuge at a shelter, you must bring with you a minimal number of supplies for your stay there.

These include:

- Identification card
- Medical information card
- Daily prescriptions (2-week supply)
- Non-prescription medicines you utilize on a daily basis (2-week supply)
- Non-perishable food and water (3-day supply)
- Blanket and pillow
- Change of clothing and personal toiletries
- Mobile phone charger, if needed
- Other special items such as eyeglasses, hearing aids, prosthetic devices, walkers, special dietary foods, etc.
- Medical supplies you utilize on a daily basis, which may include any portable oxygen, cannula, diabetes testing kit, nebulizer, etc.
- A book, magazine or something to occupy your time while you wait for the storm to pass.

The Special Needs Program provides three meals a day for persons at shelters. You are encouraged to bring some food, snacks and water with you.

In addition, please bring the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of family and friends should you need to contact them or provide information regarding your whereabouts. Please leave your porch light on when you leave; this will assist the authorities that drive around your neighborhood after the storm to indicate you have electricity.

Firearms and weapons of any kind are not permitted at any American Red Cross or Special Needs shelters.

**What should I expect when I arrive at a Special Needs shelter?**

Special Needs shelters are usually located in large gymnasiums. They can typically house several hundred people. Special Needs shelters are equipped with a cache of cots, medical supplies and oxygen. They are staffed with medical and administrative support staff to assist clients, as needed. All shelter locations are handicap accessible.

**Can I bring my family to the Special Needs shelter? Can they stay with me?**

Family residing in the same home as the registrant will be allowed in the Special Needs shelter. Please ensure family members bring bedding and supplies for themselves. Cots are only issued to Special Needs clients.

**Will food be provided?**

A standard diet will be provided. Clients with special dietary needs must bring acceptable food with them to the shelter. All clients are encouraged to bring water and non-perishable snacks.

**Do I need to bring a caregiver to the PSN shelter with me?**

Yes. If you have a caregiver, they are expected to continue providing the same level of care they provide to you in a shelter as they do at home. If you receive home health care, they are required to continue providing care to you while you are in a shelter, too. Prior to seeking shelter, you should contact your home health agency of your plans to seek shelter and what shelter you will be at for continuity of care. Please bring your caregiver contact information with you to the shelter.

**What if I don't have a caregiver or home health? Will I still be able to come to a PSN shelter?**

If you do not receive regular care from a family member, caregiver or Home Health agency, you are considered to be "self-care." Medical staff will be on-site if assistance is required, but you should be able to provide for yourself just as if you were at home.

### **Can I bring my pets?**

Ordinary domestic household pets are welcome at PSN shelters. Domestic and common pets include:

- Dogs
- Cats
- Birds (common household varieties)
- Ferrets
- Pocket Pets, limited to the following
  - Gerbils
  - Guinea Pigs
  - Hamsters
  - Rabbits (small, under 10 pounds)

*Note: No reptiles will be allowed in shelters.*

It is important to bring shot records, food, leash and a crate. For the overall health and welfare of shelter residents, animals deemed contagious or dangerous may not be granted access or may be quarantined. This includes any animal suffering from a severe flea/tick infestation or any form of active parasitic/fungal infections such as ringworm or mange. Pets are not allowed in General Public Shelters unless they are service animals.

### **How long should I plan on staying? When will I be able to go home?**

You should plan on staying for the duration of the hurricane or event. Staff will notify you when it is safe to leave. You will be able to leave the shelter as soon as it is safe for you to return home. Prior to leaving the shelter, your home will be assessed for damage and power by the damage assessment team.

### **If I register do I need to go to a shelter or can I stay at home?**

Registering with the PSN Program does not obligate you to seek shelter unless there is a mandatory evacuation and you do not have a place to go. Registering allows us to share your information with your local fire departments/agencies. After a hurricane/event, these agencies will check on you to ensure you are safe.

### **Can I still seek refuge at a Special Needs shelter if I am not registered with the PSN Program?**

Yes, you will need to call the Orange County Citizens Line at 3-1-1 when shelter openings are announced on your television or radio. You will be triaged by phone, and your appropriateness for Special Needs sheltering will be determined.

### **What else can I do to prepare for a hurricane or other disaster?**

Create a personal disaster plan. Identify the specific hazards that threaten your community (e.g. hurricanes, tornados, flooding), and learn about your community response and evacuation plans.

Identify escape routes and safe places. In a fire or other emergency, you may need to evacuate on a moment's notice. Be sure everyone in your family knows the best escape routes out of your home as well as where the safe places are in your home for each type of disaster (i.e. if a tornado approaches go to an interior room or closet with no windows). Your plan should include contact information for family, friends and members of your support network. You should also include the phone number of an out-of-town contact.

Assemble a disaster kit for your home. The following should be included in your basic disaster supplies kit:

- 1-week supply of non-perishable food and manual can opener. Include special foods you require
- 1-week supply of water (one gallon of water per person, per day)
- Prescription and non-prescription medications (enough for 2-weeks). The name and phone number of the pharmacy where you have your medications filled.
- Portable, battery-powered radio or television and extra batteries
- First aid kit and manual
- Sanitation and hygiene items (hand sanitizer, toilet paper or any special items you require)
- Changes of clothing
- Pillow and blanket/sleeping bag
- Photocopies of identification, credit cards and important documents
- A list of your physicians and their telephone numbers
- A list of names, addresses and telephone numbers of family and friends should you need to contact for assistance in evacuating, sheltering or to provide information of your whereabouts
- Cash and coins (small denominations)
- Special needs items such as eyeglasses, hearing aid and batteries, etc.
- Extra wheelchair batteries, oxygen, medication, medical supplies or other equipment you might need. The name and phone number of your medical/oxygen equipment provider

Review the contents of your disaster supplies kit at least once per year or as your family's needs change. Check food and water supplies and medication for expiration dates and rotate or replace every six (6) months. Being prepared and knowing what to do is your best protection.