



# Assistive Technology Reuse and Emergency Preparedness

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## 1) Background

Each year thousands of individuals in the United States are affected by disasters and emergencies. These occurrences may include blizzards, fires, floods, tornadoes and hurricanes as well as man-made disasters like chemical spills. People with disabilities are disproportionately affected during and after these events.

As a trusted voice in the community, professionals such as educators, vocational rehabilitation counselors, occupational and physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, and other health care providers can play a key leadership role in preparing for or responding to an emergency or disaster. When professionals have the appropriate resources, they in turn are able to help people with access and functional needs navigate systems to obtain access to assistive technology (AT).

## 2) Problem

Recent natural disasters such as Tropical Storm Lee and Hurricane Irene (2011) and Superstorm Sandy (2012) demonstrated to us how AT reutilization and preparedness can play a key role in emergency response. Users of AT for hearing, vision, speaking, mobility, cognitive or related functions may be especially affected if they lose access to their AT as a result of emergency or disaster. AT may be left behind, lost or damaged at any time during an emergency or disaster and can result in loss of independence and safety for many users of AT.

We advocate for the provision of reused AT as a stop-gap measure during an emergency or disaster, until the individual can get the new AT they need.



## 3) What Providers Can Do...

### PLAN, GATHER, ASK, INFORM, STORE, LIST, PREPARE...

Pennsylvania's Initiative on Assistive Technology (PIAT), the Commonwealth's AT Act program and a program of the Institute on Disabilities, encourages all individuals, including those with access and functional needs, to plan for the possible need to evacuate the home, school or work environment in the event of an emergency or natural disaster. Make plans and be prepared to evacuate with all AT devices and components necessary for independent daily living in the face of an emergency or other disaster.

Individuals should plan ahead and consider self-preparedness in the event they must seek immediate shelter where they are, otherwise know as "shelter-in-place".

Providers working with individuals with access and functional needs have several opportunities to discuss individual preparedness – and they may be the only ones who will have the conversation.

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The following situations provide opportunities for the discussion:

- **DEVELOPING THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN (IEP)**
  - Address the consideration of AT and the obligation of the school district to provide replacement AT (including IDEA Parts B and C, as well as Section 504).
- **TRANSITION PLANNING**
  - Address personal emergency preparedness and individual responsibilities within transition activities (i.e. from rehabilitation center to home).
- **DEVELOPING THE INDIVIDUALIZED PLAN FOR EMPLOYMENT (IPE) OR EMPLOYEE ACCOMMODATION PLAN**
  - Address the consideration of AT and the obligation of the vocational rehabilitation system and/or employer to provide replacement AT.
- **DELIVERING AT SERVICES**
  - Address personal emergency preparedness during an AT assessment.

PIAT offers the following suggestions for users of AT in the event of evacuation or the need to shelter-in-place:

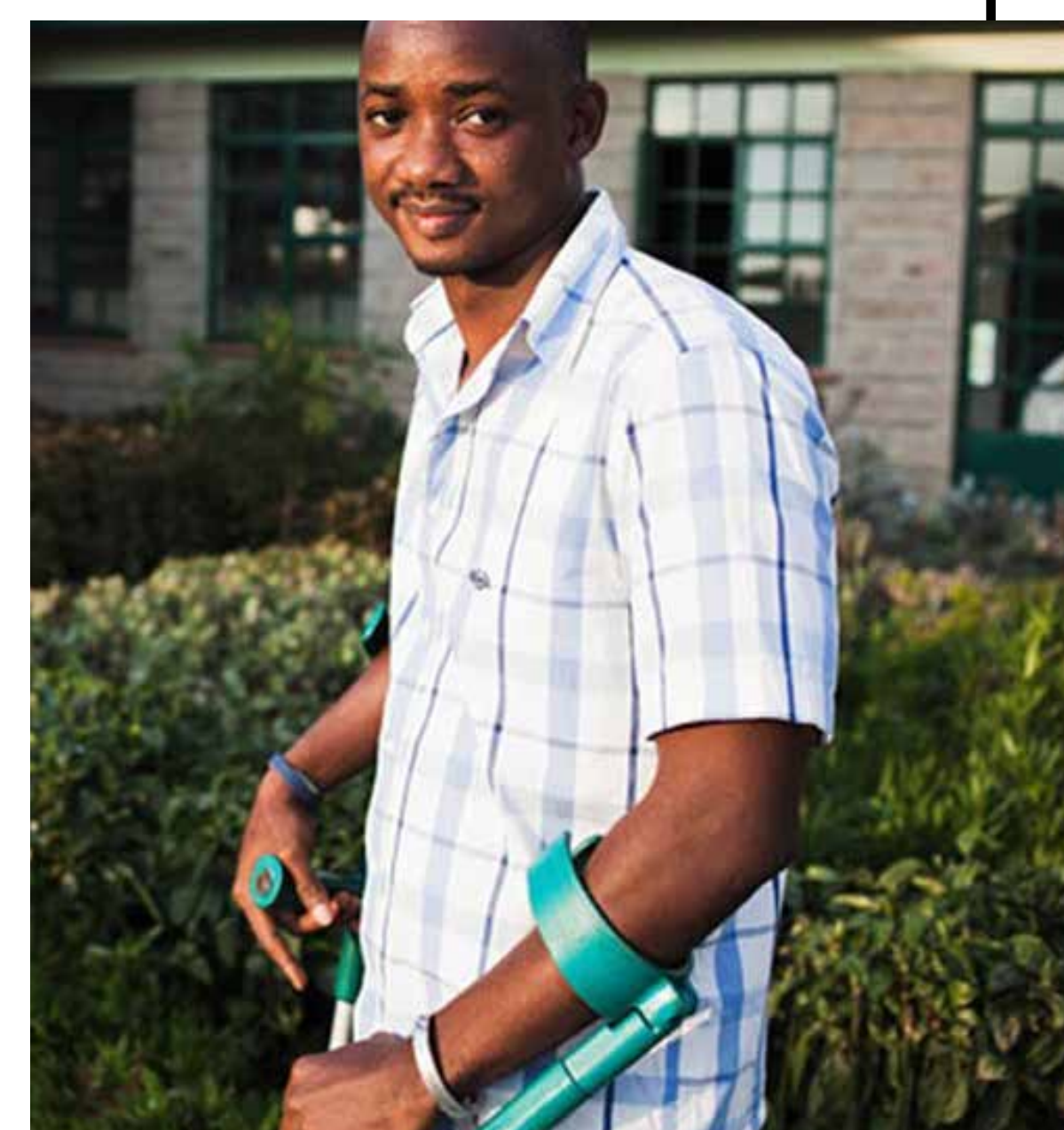
- Keep critical AT charged, including power wheelchairs, speech generating devices and cell phones.
- Store chargers, extra batteries, and adapters with devices.
- Take a plastic zipper bag and/or electronic file (e.g. flash drive) containing all AT info such as:
  - Device name and photograph of it.
  - Manufacturer's name and contact information.
  - Device model and serial numbers.
  - Vendor name and contact information.
  - Date of purchase and copy of receipt if available
  - Copies of physician's prescription and therapist's assessment with all contact information.
  - Funding source (i.e., Medicare, Medicaid, insurance co.) name, contact information, and policy numbers.
  - Label all AT devices and components with owner's name and contact information.
  - Post "how-to" instructions on big or complex devices for first responders and evacuation personnel.
  - Notify your local fire department and/or utility company and inform them of your special needs.

## 4) Stories

**In 2011, Hurricane Irene** brought lashing rain and wind gusts across Pennsylvania. A resident of Lancaster County was evacuated from his flooded home and had to leave his power wheelchair behind. PA's Reuse Partners joined together to locate a suitable power wheelchair for the resident to use while continuing to obtain a replacement.



**In 2011, Tropical Storm Lee** caused significant flooding in Pennsylvania, including the Susquehanna River which reached the third worst flood stage in its history. The storm brought 6 to 10 inches of rain in Pennsylvania; some areas received over 14 inches. Many counties sustained major flood damage and residents were evacuated from their homes. As a result of collaboration with national and regional response efforts, Pennsylvania's reuse network was able to help locate various reused devices for residents who lost their AT in this disaster. The most common needs included: canes, walkers, wheelchairs and scooters.



**In 2012, a Philadelphia resident** lost several aids for daily living (e.g. reacher, adapted shoe horn, swivel seat) in a fire. The individual was unable to afford the devices, which were not covered by insurance. The consumer was able to replace several low-tech aids at no cost, thanks to PIAT and the reuse program.



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