

SAFE TOGETHER

A Resident Handbook for Preparation, Response, and Recovery

DRAFT FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

Prepared for the PVRA Safety Advisory Committee (SAC)

July 2026

Purpose of this draft

This document gives SAC and staff a substantive starting point for review. It is not an adopted policy, emergency plan, or substitute for official community instructions. Yellow callouts identify places where local facts, policies, or staff verification are still needed.

Prepared from prior resident-safety work, a structured interview, and publicly available guidance from the American Red Cross, FEMA/Ready.gov, and CDC.

Cover Note to SAC and Staff Reviewers

Why circulate a draft now? A focused draft gives committee members and staff something concrete to test, correct, and improve. It should make a future meeting more productive than an open-ended discussion of emergency preparedness in general.

Please review this draft with three questions in mind:

1. Are the basic principles accurate, useful, and understandable to an independent-living resident?
2. Where does the draft imply a community capability or responsibility that staff cannot promise?
3. Which local facts are essential in the resident booklet, and which belong instead in a building-specific insert, orientation, drill, or administrative procedure?

Suggested division of work. Resident members can concentrate on clarity, practicality, and the real decisions residents face. Staff reviewers can verify regulatory, operational, communications, and building-specific statements. The committee can then decide what belongs in the general booklet and what should be handled locally.

LOCAL INPUT NEEDED: Insert the preferred SAC review deadline, meeting date, and method for returning comments.

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1. About This Handbook

Emergencies can be confusing. A resident may hear an alarm, see smoke, lose electrical power, receive a weather warning, or be told to shelter or relocate. In the first moments, the resident may need to act before staff or public safety personnel can arrive.

This handbook uses three simple stages:

PREPARATION What you do before an emergency.	RESPONSE What you do while the danger is present.	RECOVERY What you do after the immediate danger has passed.
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Plain-language goal

This is a resident guide, not an emergency-management manual. It explains practical principles and personal responsibilities. Official alarms, announcements, staff directions, and instructions from public responders always take priority over this booklet.

2. Safety Is a Shared Responsibility

Residents in independent living retain primary responsibility for their personal preparedness and for the immediate decisions they make. The community has a supporting role and is responsible for maintaining the physical plant and required safety systems, complying with applicable codes and ordinances, communicating official instructions, and coordinating the larger response within its capabilities.

Core principle

Do not wait for someone to come to your apartment and tell you what to do. Know the basic actions you may need to take, act promptly for life safety, and follow official instructions as they become available.

Shared responsibility does not mean that every resident has the same abilities. A resident's plan should reflect mobility, hearing, vision, stamina, health, medication, cognition, communication, and the needs of anyone who depends on that resident.

Resident responsibility	Community responsibility	Shared action
Know personal needs and limits.	Maintain required safety systems and the physical environment.	Discuss needs before an emergency.
Learn alarms, exits, safe areas, and official communications.	Explain systems, conduct education and drills, and issue official instructions.	Participate in drills and ask questions afterward.

Maintain personal contacts, information, medications, and supplies.	Coordinate campus operations and assistance according to need and available resources.	Understand what help may be available and what cannot be guaranteed.
Act promptly for personal safety.	Coordinate staff and public responders.	Follow authoritative instructions as the response develops.

3. Preparation: Know Yourself and Your Surroundings

Preparation begins with situational awareness: understanding your own circumstances, your immediate surroundings, the emergencies that are reasonably predictable, and how the response is likely to unfold.

3.1 Know your own needs

- Consider whether you can walk quickly, use stairs, open heavy doors, hear announcements, see exit signs, tolerate heat or cold, or remain without electricity.
- Plan for medications, oxygen, refrigerated supplies, mobility devices, hearing aids, eyeglasses, chargers, and other essential equipment.
- Consider any person who depends on you and what you can safely do for that person.
- Keep essential health and contact information where it can be reached quickly.

LOCAL INPUT NEEDED: Decide whether the community will provide a confidential process for residents to identify assistance needs, and describe its limits.

3.2 Know the places around you

Residents should know the safe choices available near their apartment and common destinations. The exact answer may differ by building.

- Know more than one way out when possible.
- Know where you may be directed to shelter for severe weather or another hazard.
- Know whether the building is divided into fire- or smoke-resisting areas and what moving to another area means locally.
- Know the location and purpose of enclosed stairways or other protected spaces identified by the community.
- Know where to assemble or report after leaving the building, if the local plan uses an assembly point.

Important local caution

A protected stairway or another fire-resisting area may be part of a building's safety design, but residents should not assume that every stairwell is an approved waiting area. The community and fire authority must verify the exact local guidance before publication.

LOCAL INPUT NEEDED: Insert or cross-reference building-specific maps, refuge or relocation areas, fire/smoke zones, stairway guidance, and assembly locations. Consider a separate one-page insert for each residence building.

3.3 Know how help arrives over time

Every emergency has a timeline. The first action may belong to the resident. Staff may then arrive and organize assistance. Municipal fire, rescue, police, or emergency medical personnel may follow. In a large regional disaster, additional help may take longer and come from farther away.

- First moments: recognize the problem and take immediate protective action.
- Early community response: staff assess the situation, communicate, assist where possible, and coordinate operations.
- Public response: fire, rescue, police, emergency medical services, or other agencies take command of their responsibilities.
- Extended response: in a major event, outside resources may arrive gradually and local services may be strained.

What this means for residents

Your personal plan must work during the period before help reaches you. The larger the emergency, the more important personal and neighbor-to-neighbor resilience becomes - without taking unsafe risks.

3.4 Build a support network

A personal support network begins with people you can contact and people who know how to contact you. The network may include family, friends, neighbors, and community resources. It should not depend on a single person or a single telephone method.

- Keep a current list of telephone numbers and other contact methods.
- Identify at least one contact outside the immediate community or region.
- Discuss in advance who may check on you, transport you, care for a pet, or help replace essential items.
- Understand that community support will vary with the size and nature of the emergency.

LOCAL INPUT NEEDED: Describe any official resident check-in, buddy, telephone tree, emergency contact, or wellness-check system. Clarify whether participation is voluntary and what it does not guarantee.

3.5 Prepare supplies and information

This draft does not invent a new supply list. The American Red Cross and Ready.gov already provide practical checklists. Residents should use an established list and adapt it to apartment living, personal health needs, and the community's likely support capabilities.

- Keep a small, easy-to-carry set of essentials for relocation or evacuation.
- Keep enough supplies to remain safely in the apartment for a reasonable period when instructed to do so.

- Include medications, medical information, essential documents, communications equipment, and backup power appropriate to your needs.
- Review supplies periodically and replace expired items.

LOCAL INPUT NEEDED: Staff and SAC should decide whether to recommend a specific duration for resident supplies and whether the community has any storage, oxygen, battery, or fire-safety restrictions.

3.6 Include pets in your plan

Plan for food, water, carriers, leashes, medication, identification, and a person who could care for the pet if you cannot return promptly.

Life safety comes first

Take a pet with you only when you can do so without dangerous delay or added risk. Do not remain in or re-enter a hazardous area for a pet. Delayed evacuation can endanger the resident and can also create an additional rescue problem for firefighters or other responders.

LOCAL INPUT NEEDED: Insert local pet sheltering, evacuation, temporary care, and reunification procedures, if any.

4. Response: What to Do When Something Happens

The correct action depends on the emergency, but several principles apply across many situations.

4.1 Act without waiting for personal staff assistance

During the first moments of an emergency, residents should not expect a staff member to arrive at each apartment. Staff will be addressing the emergency, coordinating communications and responders, and prioritizing people who need the most help.

Resident action principle

In an emergency, act first for your own safety and for any person who depends on you. Take the safest, smallest effective action you can, and then follow official instructions as they become available.

4.2 Life safety comes first

- Move away from immediate danger.
- Call 911 or use the community emergency system when appropriate.
- Do not delay leaving to collect belongings.
- Do not re-enter a dangerous area unless public responders say it is safe.
- Do not take an action that is likely to make you another person who must be rescued.

4.3 Follow authoritative information

Use official alarms, public-address announcements, authorized messages from the community, and instructions from public safety responders. Information passed from resident to resident may be incomplete or wrong.

Simple rule

Follow official communications. Treat rumors as unverified until they are confirmed through an authoritative source.

LOCAL INPUT NEEDED: List the community’s authoritative communication channels and explain how residents can recognize them. Include backup methods for power, internet, or telephone outages.

4.4 Take alarms and drills seriously

Never assume an alarm is “probably nothing.” Treat an alarm as real unless an official source says otherwise. Participate in drills the way you should respond in an actual emergency.

A useful reminder

It is not a drill if you do not participate. Habits practiced during drills are the habits most likely to appear when seconds matter.

After a drill, use the debriefing or question period to clarify confusing instructions, report barriers, and learn what the community expects.

LOCAL INPUT NEEDED: Describe the local drill schedule, debriefing process, and method for reporting accessibility or safety concerns discovered during a drill.

4.5 Help neighbors without becoming another victim

Residents naturally want to check on neighbors. That concern is a strength, but an untrained or unsupported rescue attempt can enlarge the emergency.

Neighbor principle

Be a good neighbor, but do not become another victim. Help within your capability, from a safe place, and without ignoring alarms or official instructions. Summon trained help when the task is unsafe.

- Call or alert a neighbor when it is safe to do so.
- Report a neighbor’s likely location or needs to staff or responders.
- Assist with a simple task only when conditions are safe and the action does not delay your own protective action.

- Do not enter smoke, fire, a contaminated area, or another clearly hazardous location.
- Do not use an elevator or other equipment contrary to official instructions.

4.6 Common protective actions

Official instructions may require one of several basic actions:

Protective action	Plain-language meaning
Leave the apartment	Move away from danger in the unit and close doors if safe to do so.
Leave the building	Use the approved route and go to the designated location.
Relocate within the building	Move to another fire/smoke area, floor, or protected location as the local plan directs.
Shelter in place	Remain indoors or move to a specified interior location and follow instructions for the hazard.
Remain where you are	Do not move into a more dangerous area; communicate your location and await instructions when that is the approved action.

LOCAL INPUT NEEDED: For each predictable hazard - fire, tornado/severe weather, power failure, medical emergency, water problem, hazardous material, security threat, and others selected locally - add a short card stating the official protective action and communication method. Avoid technical detail that belongs in the emergency operations plan.

5. Recovery: Regaining Safety and Stability

Recovery begins when the immediate threat has been controlled, but normal life may not return at once. Staff must set priorities, restore systems, communicate, and assist those with the greatest needs. Residents who can remain reasonably self-sufficient help the whole community recover.

Recovery principle

Being as independent as possible during recovery is a contribution. It allows limited staff and public resources to be directed first to residents with greater needs.

- Confirm your location and condition through the community's established process.
- Follow instructions about re-entry, elevators, food, water, electrical equipment, and damaged areas.
- Use your personal supplies and support network when it is safe and appropriate.
- Report unmet medical, mobility, communication, or essential living needs clearly.
- Document damage and contact family, insurers, or other support as needed.
- Be alert for scams, rumors, and unauthorized requests for money or personal information.
- Replenish supplies and update your plan after the event.
- Participate in an after-action discussion when offered; report what worked and what did not.

LOCAL INPUT NEEDED: Describe resident accountability, temporary relocation, meals, medication access, transportation, family communication, re-entry, and service restoration at a level suitable for residents.

6. The Community-Resident Partnership

The partnership can be summarized in four paired expectations:

The community	The resident
Provides and maintains required alarms, fire protection features, emergency systems, and safe physical conditions.	Learns what the systems mean and how to respond.
Communicates official instructions and coordinates with public responders.	Pays attention, treats alarms seriously, and follows authoritative directions.
Conducts drills, education, and debriefings.	Participates, practices, asks questions, and reports barriers.
Prioritizes assistance according to urgency, need, and available resources.	Prepares for the period before help arrives and remains as self-sufficient as reasonably possible.

7. Community-Specific Information to Add

The general booklet should remain basic. Some information is too detailed or building-specific for the main text, but residents still need a reliable way to obtain it. A short local insert, building map, orientation sheet, or drill handout may be better than placing every detail in this handbook.

- ☐ Official alarm sounds, lights, announcements, and meanings.
- ☐ Authoritative communication channels and backups.
- ☐ Building-specific exits, fire/smoke zones, protected locations, stairway guidance, shelter areas, and assembly points.
- ☐ When elevators may or may not be used.
- ☐ How residents request assistance and what assistance cannot be guaranteed.
- ☐ Procedures for power loss, electrically powered medical devices, oxygen, heat, and cooling.
- ☐ Procedures for resident accountability, family communication, transportation, relocation, pets, and re-entry.
- ☐ Drill schedules, debriefing, and reporting of barriers.
- ☐ Who approves changes and how residents receive updates.

Editorial test

Include a local fact in the main booklet only when most independent-living residents need it, it applies broadly enough to avoid confusion, and staff can keep it accurate. Otherwise, use a building-specific insert or another channel that is easier to update.

8. Personal Planning Worksheets

These pages are working prompts. They can be replaced or supplemented with Red Cross or Ready.gov worksheets.

8.1 My immediate needs

Mobility or stair limitations	
Hearing or vision needs	
Essential medications/equipment	
Power-dependent needs	
Person who depends on me	
Pet needs	
Other important limitation	

8.2 My support contacts

Name / role	Telephone or contact method	What this person can do

8.3 What I need to learn locally

- ☐ My nearest safe exits
- ☐ My severe-weather shelter location
- ☐ My building's fire/smoke relocation guidance
- ☐ My assembly or reporting location
- ☐ The official alert channels
- ☐ How to request help
- ☐ Pet procedures
- ☐ Where to ask questions after a drill

8.4 My first-action reminder

Write this in your own words

When I recognize an emergency, my first safe action will be:

The person or pet that depends on me is: _____

My out-of-area contact is: _____

9. Sources Consulted

These sources informed the structure and practical guidance in this discussion draft. SAC and staff reviewers may open the hyperlinks to compare the draft with the original materials.

American Red Cross - Disaster and Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults (booklet)

https://www.redcross.org/content/dam/redcross/get-help/how-to-prepare/Older_Adults_Disaster_Prep_Booklet_07272020.pdf

Practical older-adult guide covering individual needs, support networks, supplies, evacuation, sheltering, and recovery.

American Red Cross - Older Adults Preparedness Checklist

https://www.redcross.org/content/dam/redcross/get-help/how-to-prepare/Older_Adults_Disaster_Prep_1Pager_11012022.pdf

Concise checklist suitable as a model or handout.

American Red Cross - Survival Kit Supplies

<https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/survival-kit-supplies.html>

Established supply guidance that can be referenced rather than recreated.

American Red Cross - Make a Plan

<https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/make-a-plan.html>

General personal and household emergency planning steps.

Ready.gov - Plan Ahead for Disasters

<https://www.ready.gov/>

Federal public-preparedness portal with planning, alerts, and hazard guidance.

FEMA - Planning Considerations: Evacuation and Shelter-in-Place

<https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/planning-considerations-evacuation-and-shelter-in-place.pdf>

Background on the distinct protective actions of evacuation and sheltering in place.

FEMA - Shelter-in-Place Guidance

https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_shelter-in-place_guidance.pdf

Plain-language guidance on where to go and what to do when sheltering in place.

CDC - Emergency Preparedness and Disability Inclusion

<https://www.cdc.gov/disability-emergency-preparedness/about/index.html>

Guidance emphasizing safety before, during, and after emergencies and the inclusion of functional needs.

CDC - Identifying Vulnerable Older Adults and Legal Options for Increasing Their Protection During All-Hazards Emergencies

<https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/11763>

Background for community planning concerning older adults who may need additional support.

Appendix A. Review Questions for SAC and Staff

The draft is intended to focus discussion. Reviewers may use the questions below instead of beginning with a blank agenda.

- ☐ Is the shared-responsibility statement fair to residents and accurate for administration?
- ☐ Does the wording encourage prompt resident action without overstating resident capability?
- ☐ Are any statements about fire zones, stairways, alarms, evacuation, sheltering, or staff response technically unsafe or locally inaccurate?
- ☐ Which examples are useful enough to keep in the general booklet?

- ☐ Which details should move to a building-specific insert, map, drill handout, or orientation?
- ☐ What help can administration reasonably promise, and what limits must be stated?
- ☐ How should residents identify needs or request assistance before and during an emergency?
- ☐ Which official communications should residents trust, and what are the backup methods?
- ☐ What supply checklist should be adopted or linked?
- ☐ What additional recovery guidance is needed?
- ☐ What accessibility changes are needed for hearing, vision, mobility, language, or cognitive differences?
- ☐ Who will own, approve, update, and distribute the finished handbook and local inserts?

LOCAL INPUT NEEDED: Add names or roles responsible for resolving each open item after SAC and staff review.

END OF DISCUSSION DRAFT