



Device Reuse and Emergencies

Device reutilization programs can be an important source of assistance to people with disabilities who need assistive technology, whether that need existed before the emergency or disaster or is related to a new injury or condition resulting from the event.

Definitions

Device reassignment and refurbishment activities are those in which devices are accepted (usually by donation) into an inventory; are sanitized and/or refurbished as needed; and then offered for sale, loan, rental, or given away to consumers as redistributed products. The consumer becomes the permanent owner of the device.

Repair activities are those in which device(s) are repaired for an individual (without the ownership of the device changing hands) thus avoiding the owner's need to purchase a new device. Devices may have been damaged as a result of the disaster (e.g. by falling debris) or in the course of evacuation to a shelter. In emergency or disaster recovery situations, cleaning/sanitizing (for example, wheelchairs that have stood in contaminated floodwaters) may also be an important step to avoiding the owner's need to purchase a new device.

Devices in a reuse inventory can be reassigned on a permanent basis to a new "owner" or provided as an open-ended loan to a borrower. Open-ended device loans are generally distinguishable from short-term device loans by the length of the loan period. Open-ended loans are generally long term (at least several months) with the device provided to the consumer for as long as s/he needs it; ownership usually does not transfer to the consumer. Open-ended loans are recommended as a part of reuse in emergency situations.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is it recommended that gently used DME that is distributed to hurricane survivors be considered “open-ended loans”? In “non-emergency” situations in our reuse program, we have always transferred ownership (in part to reduce potential liability).

Providing gently used DME is a “stop-gap” measure and the equipment, while safe and serviceable, may not be the most appropriate fit. When survivors apply for individual assistance from FEMA, they are asked if they “have” the DME they need. If they own the reused equipment they have received, they would no longer have a need and would not qualify for FEMA assistance in replacing the item with the most appropriate device.

What steps should I take to make it clear to the recipient (and others) that the device is a loaner?

Label the item with a sturdy tag that clearly states this device belongs to your program and is a “loaner”, along with a contact number to arrange for return of the device. You may want to make it clear, however, that there is no “due date” and the consumer may use the device for as long as s/he needs it.