

Emergency Preparedness for **Persons with Disabilities** (PWD) and/or **Mobility Impairments** (MI)

Disasters

Sudden, calamitous events that seriously disrupt the functioning of a community or society and cause human, material, and economic or environmental losses that exceed the community's or society's ability to cope using its own resources.



The Genesis of a Revelation

https://youtu.be/aPq0w_psbxs



The Importance of Emergency Preparedness

- University of Kansas "Nobody Left Behind" Study
 - Determined whether counties that experienced a disaster in the past 5 years had systems of emergency preparedness and response for PWD/MI.
 - Evaluated surveillance systems that can identify morbidity and mortality frequency and prevalence for PWD/MI exposed to a disaster.
 - Identified FEMA-declared disasters between 1989-2003. Selected a random sample of 30 counties across 10 federal regions. Interviewed county emergency managers and evaluated their disaster plans in place at the time of occurrence and more recently for actions targeting persons with mobility disabilities.
 - Only 27% of county emergency managers had taken FEMA Emergency Planning and Special Needs Course (G-197) pertaining to PWD.
 - PWD either were not represented or had minimal representation in the emergency planning process.
 - Surveillance efforts to identify PWDs and mobility impairments were weak.

The Hard Questions

- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has been in existence for more than 20 years...yet disaster-related or local services can still be deemed inaccessible, and disaster-related personnel uninformed of the needs of PWD and how to assist them. Why?
- Are there differences in disaster preparedness for persons who are disabled, seniors, or seriously ill?
- Are there differences within classes, races, and among states?
- When will local emergency management infrastructures be strengthened?
- Is your local government prepared?
- Have you prepared yourself?

Lessons Learned

- Emergency response and recovery measures did not accommodate PWD.
 - Inadequate warning systems.
 - People left behind when evacuating buildings.
 - Non-accessible shelters.
 - Lack of transportation to sites for relief services, and so on.
- There was a lack of relief workers and other service personnel, including mental health professionals experienced in working with PWD and the knowledge of benefits to help them.
- After the event, many vital services remained disrupted or disallowed, even when it became clear that doing so placed people with disabilities at risk.

Source: Lessons Learned from the World Trade Center Disaster: Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities in New York, September 9, 2004, The Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY

Lessons Learned



 34 people died when flood waters from Hurricane Katrina (2005) inundated
St. Rita's Nursing Home in Violet, LA.

"Survival Of The Fittest" Mentality



- Hurricane Rita (2005) forced an evacuation from Brighton Gardens nursing home in Bellaire, TX.
- 37 residents, 6 staff
- 23 elderly died
- The sheriff's deputy who arrived on the scene struggled to guide people out of the bus. "The sheriff's deputy trying to get people off the bus used his flashlight, telling passengers to 'follow the light' and some of them did but not all of them could," said John Wiley Price, a Dallas County Commissioner.

Lessons Learned

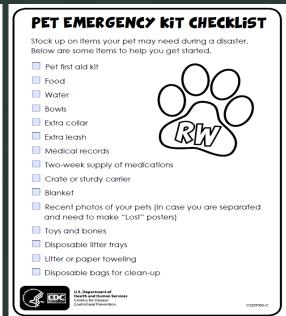


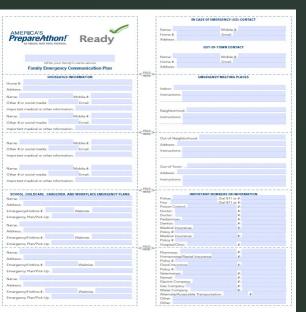
- 15 elderly were evacuated by helicopter from the La Vita Bella nursing home after Hurricane Harvey (2017).
- The picture was shared on Twitter by Timothy McIntosh, who said his motherin-law owns the nursing home.
- His wife, Kimberly McIntosh, said her mother sent the picture at 9 a.m.
 [Sunday] morning.
- "She said it was a disaster and they were hoping the National Guard would come," Kimberly McIntosh said.

Preparing for Emergencies and Disasters

- Pack an emergency supply kit
- Establish a Family Emergency Plan
- Establish a Family Communication Plan
- Register with local Emergency Managers
- Be familiar with Local Red Cross chapter or Emergency Management Agency Plan
- Tap into resources from Federal agencies and State Disability and Health Programs
- https://www.ready.gov/disability
- Alerting People with Disabilities and Access and Functional Needs | FEMA.gov
- Have your own medical and other supplies







Surviving Emergencies and Disasters

- Make yourself known..... IDENTIFY
- PREPARE, PREPARE, PREPARE
- Use common sense
- Register with your local Emergency Managers
- Be involved with the planning
- Plan in advance for accessible services
- Have your own medical and other supplies
- Have a POC to report your health/location
- Have alternate/extra sources of power
- Have adequate insurance



The Value of Emergency Preparedness

- Lessons learned from previous catastrophes (9/11, Katrina, Rita, Harvey)
- Previous mentality of "survival of the fittest"
- Having no plans or inadequate plans leads to "survival mode"
- "Failing to plan is planning to fail." Benjamin Franklin

Contact Information

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If you would like to have me present, train staff, or participate in any Diversity & Inclusion event, please email Shonda.Moore@usda.gov.

I am always available to answer any questions you may have!

References

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