

Evacuation of Special Needs Populations - Best Practices

Engaging & Implementing Resources of Special Needs Groups - Because the population of individuals encompassed by the term special needs is so vast and has such diverse needs, identifying these individuals and planning for the provision of appropriate evacuation assistance is impossible without involving individuals from these communities as well as representatives from organizations and agencies serving these groups.

Best Practice #1 - New York City Office of Emergency Management

The New York City Office of Emergency Management has convened a Special Needs Advisory Group comprised of about 30 umbrella agencies, NGOs and individuals that serve various special needs populations within the city. This diverse network of agencies meets every two months to provide assistance in the development of NYC evacuation plans and share information from their own organizations. Twelve of the largest organizations are participants in NYC's Advanced Warning System.

The group stays abreast of emergency plans and issues and continuously carries evacuation planning messages through their existing networks, in some instances face-to-face. NYC does not employ a special needs registry. Rather, when an event occurs the combined resources of the Advisory Group are leveraged. Conference calls are held with all members of the group, messages are relayed through their networks and in some cases agency resources are utilized to assist in evacuation.

The city is also developing a web-based system to augment the work of the Advisory Group in the aftermath of a disaster. The system will allow all representatives to communicate through the web to share information, arrange conference calls, and convey messages and should prove particularly useful in a no-notice event. The system can also be utilized to administer surveys to more 2000 umbrella or direct vendors involved in evacuation of special needs populations to assist in determining their resource needs and capabilities. Results of these surveys will be posted on the database and accessible only to membership.

More information can be obtained on NYC OEM's web-site at www.nyc.gov/html/oem/html/get_prepared/ready.shtml or by calling 718-422-4800: POC Dina Maniotis, Director of Human Services in the Planning and Preparedness Division

Best Practice #2 - State of Florida, Florida Vulnerable Populations Working Group

In 2008 the Florida Department Health and Department of Business & Professional Regulation spearheaded the Florida Vulnerable Populations Working Group. The primary purpose of the group is to develop assessment tools that can be used by local emergency managers to identify their special needs populations as well as their

evacuation requirements. Included in these tools are fact sheets for each agency represented on the working group which will list the the diverse needs of the populations served by each agency as well as what resources they can bring to bear. The group plans to have the tools posted to the web by June 1, 2009 (web address not yet available).

Once the tools are completed the workgroup will continue to meet to gather feedback from local planning efforts, assist with coordination and whenever possible fill identified gaps in evacuation planning.

POC for more information: Michael Whitehead, Emergency Management Coordinator Department of Business & Professional Regulation, 850-410-2496

Other Resources

- *Why and How to Include People with Disabilities in Your Planning Process? Nobody Left Behind:*
http://www.nobodyleftbehind2.org/findings/why_and_how_to_include_all.shtml
- Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable People in Times of Disaster: A Guide for Emergency Managers:
[www.oes.ca.gov/WebPage/oeswebsite.nsf/ClientOESFileLibrary/Plans%20and%20Publications/\\$file/VulnerablePopulations.pdf](http://www.oes.ca.gov/WebPage/oeswebsite.nsf/ClientOESFileLibrary/Plans%20and%20Publications/$file/VulnerablePopulations.pdf)

Categorizing Special Needs Populations & Matching with Appropriate Transport

Because the transportation needs of different special needs groups can vary significantly, successfully matching the type of transportation required with the need of the evacuee is crucial to the success of an emergency evacuation.

Best Practice 3 - New York City OEM, planning without a Registry

As discussed earlier New York City does not utilize a special needs registry, but employs the resources of several public and private organizations to facilitate evacuation messaging and in limited cases, transport. Any individual still requiring transportation assistance for evacuation is asked to self identify with the city via 311 or 911 calls.

Under NYC's plan, emergency operators fielding these calls use a simple script that includes questions regarding the mobility of the evacuee. For instance: Can the evacuee sit up in bed, can they walk to the door, can they walk to the curb? Based on the responses, operators direct the appropriate type of city resource (or contracted carrier) to pick up the individual/s and transport them to a City Evacuation Center where they will be assessed for further needs, and assigned to an appropriate shelter.

More information can be obtained on NYC OEM's web-site at www.nyc.gov/html/oem/html/get_prepared/ready.shtml or by calling 718-422-4800:

POC Dina Maniotis, Director of Human Services in the Planning and Preparedness Division

Coordination of Transportation Providers/Vendors - While most State and local authorities have passed legislation requiring licensed health care facilities to develop an evacuation plan, not all include requirements that the facilities provide transportation for evacuation. Even when they do, statutes are not always enforced, and often the same vendors are used for multiple facilities, severely limiting the actual ability of these facilities to conduct their own evacuations.

Best Practice 4 - NYC OEM

NYC statutes require that all health care facilities, public or private (eg hospitals, nursing homes, senior living facilities) must develop their own evacuation plans which includes transportation. To support these endeavors, the City Health and Medical Unit, part of OEM's Planning and Preparedness Division, is setting up a vendor coordination sector to review/cross reference the evacuation plans of licensed health care facilities and ensure there is not overlap in transportation vendors that would create gaps.

More information can be obtained on NYC OEM's web-site at www.nyc.gov/html/oem/html/get_prepared/ready.shtml or by calling 718-422-4800: POC Dina Maniotis, Director of Human Services in the Planning and Preparedness Division

Tracking Evacuees - Typically it is expected that if a governmental organization provides transportation for evacuees (as is the case with the evacuation of many Special Needs groups), they should be able to account for the location of those evacuees, yet rostering and tracking evacuees has proven incredibly difficult. New technologies are aiding in the ability of emergency management officials to track evacuees they have transported.

Best Practice 5 - Lowcountry Regional Transportation Authority (commonly known as Palmetto Breeze), Beaufort, SC

Palmetto Breeze provides bus transportation within Beaufort County, SC. It is a standalone agency not affiliated with government, however, they are very involved in emergency planning in Beaufort County, and have become an integral part of the county's evacuation plan. During a mandatory evacuation within the county, Palmetto Breeze is responsible for providing transportation of county residents to public shelters. (They have also provided this service during voluntary evacuations.) When needed, their fleet is augmented by school buses and human service agency vehicles.

Working in conjunction with the county emergency management office, six different color coded evacuation routes have been established that buses will travel during an

emergency evacuation. Residents needing transportation to a shelter during an evacuation can be picked up at any bus stop along these routes, or at several designated “pick up locations” on the routes which provide an option at which people can congregate (park and ride option). Before boarding the bus, each evacuee is asked to sign a manifest and provide some basic information. They are then provided a colored wrist band, matching the color of their evacuation route. A number on each wrist band corresponds with the number of the evacuee on the manifest list. The wrist bands are made from heavy duty, water resistant paper that can withstand wear for several days.

Evacuees are then taken to shelters as designated by the city. (Shelter designation is fluid depending on the type and magnitude of the event.) Evacuees with like colored wrist bands are grouped together in the shelters to aid in keeping neighborhoods together. It also aids in the distribution of information regarding specific geographical areas. The bus drivers remain with evacuees at the shelter until return transportation is approved. They maintain the manifests collected on their own bus, and transport the same evacuees they brought to the shelters back to their homes or pick-up locations.

POC: Rochelle Ferguson, Executive Director, Palmetto Breeze, (843) 757-5782

Best Practice 6 - State of Texas

Any evacuee transported by the State is tracked by the state. To do this, the state employs its Special Needs Tracking System (SNET) which is contracted through AT&T and Radiant. The system uses evacuee bracelets which are barcoded. Evacuees are tagged at State identified embarkation points, then the wristbands are used to record the location of the evacuee as they enter shelters at the debarkation.

The system was tested during Hurricanes Ike and Gustov, and did present some problems because the two events were so close together in time. For instance, there were not enough trained operators to run the system several days in succession. There was also not enough time to recharge the batteries for the handheld bar-code readers by the time the second storm approached. While there are some bugs to be worked out, overall, Texas Emergency Management Officials are pleased with the system and anticipate fully successful implementation.

POC: Rex Ogle, Preparedness Section Administrator, Texas Department of Public Safety, Division of Emergency Management, 512-424-7051

Best Practice 7 - NYC OEM

NYC OEM has purchased software designed specifically to track persons displaced in a disaster and has contracted with a vendor to configure it specifically to New York. The software, Sahana, is a web-based system that is open source.

As individuals come into shelter they are given a registration card to fill out and self identify. The process is entirely voluntary. There are approximately 20 data points on the card for each family and pets. Typically the most crucial data point is a cell phone number for evacuees. The information is entered into the Sahana system by shelter workers. Friends or family members of evacuees may place a query in the system. If a match is made, a message is passed to the evacuee to call the individual making the query.

More information can be obtained on NYC OEM's web-site at www.nyc.gov/html/oem/html/get_prepared/ready.shtml or by calling 718-422-4800: POC Dina Maniotis, Director of Human Services in the Planning and Preparedness Division

Lack of Adequate Medical Transportation - In a large scale evacuation, the need for specialized transportation particularly for medical evacuees, often outweighs the resources available to provide them. Contracting for these services can prove exorbitant, so mutual aid agreements and MOUs are encouraged.

Best Practice 8 - The States of FEMA Region VI

In addition to resources available to them through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), all states in FEMA Region VI (AR, LA, NM, OK and TX) have engaged in a Response initiative that commits each state's medical transportation resources to support any other state in the Region during a catastrophic event requiring mass evacuation. The draft MOU for this agreement should be complete this month (March) and the final plan is expected to be put in place by May of this year.

POC: Rex Ogle, Preparedness Section Administrator, Texas Department of Public Safety, Division of Emergency Management, 512-424-7051

Ensuring Availability of Adequate Workers to Assist with Evacuations of Licensed Care Facilities and Special Needs Populations. - As we saw following Hurricane Katrina, many licensed care facility workers abandoned their jobs to take care of their own families leaving a critical gap in evacuation needs.

Best Practice 9 -State of Texas

State law requires that specialized care facilities such as hospitals, nursing homes, and group homes have the legal responsibility to evacuate individuals in their care to equivalent care facilities and must bring their own specialized equipment, staffing, and caregivers. The State of Texas's Hurricane Evacuation and Mass Care Plan goes a step further and states that caregivers' can bring their families with them during evacuation.

You can view the Texas Hurricane Evacuation and Mass Care Plan at:
ftp://ftp.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/plan_state/hurr_evac_shelter_state_plan.pdf

Best Practice 10 - City of Sacramento Department of Utilities

The Sacramento City Department of Utilities supports emergency transportation operations during an evacuation using staff in the Solid Waste Division. They have about 150 trained drivers, all of whom have been trained on the refuse and disposal and recycling trucks. These drivers are certified for operating vehicles with air brakes and have class B driver's licenses. They may be tasked with operating any kind of commuter bus (school or Regional Transit) in the event transit providers are lacking personnel resources.

Other Resources to Review:

Emergency Preparedness for Vulnerable Populations: Best Practices Compilation, July 2008 - Information Compiled by the Vulnerable Populations Workgroup Emergency Preparedness Oversight Council and available through the Arizona Division of Emergency Management's web-site: www.dem.azdema.gov