



Coffee Break Training - Community Risk Reduction

Planning for Individuals with Special Needs and Disabilities Before the Emergency

No. CR-2013-1 October 23, 2013

Learning Objective: To make emergency personnel more aware of the types of life safety messaging appropriate for community members with special needs and/or disabilities.

Have you considered a whole community approach to risk management, preparedness and response messaging for individuals with special needs and/or disabilities?

Have you given any thought to the number and scope of special needs and functional disabilities of the people in your response area? Are you prepared to communicate information about fire and life safety and the other major risks in the community? Have you coordinated with the organizations and agencies most likely to be already in contact with individuals with special needs or disabilities? Have you collaborated to engage as many groups and organizations as possible to send a consistent, clear and concise message about risk reduction, life safety, preparedness and response planning?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 54 million Americans, about one-fifth of the United States population, have a disability. Based on the recent Harris polls, over half of the disabled population has no plan, nor do they know whom to contact for assistance in preparing for disasters.

Who should be considered when identifying at-risk individuals with special needs and/or disabilities?

- Seniors.
- People with mobility impairments.
- People who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- People who are blind or visually impaired.
- People with seizure disorders.
- Pregnant women and newborns.
- People with autism spectrum disorders.
- People with cognitive disabilities.
- People with multiple chemical sensitivities.
- People with service animals.

Whom should you coordinate with? Communities organize themselves to deal with emergencies in much the same way as they organize to deal with daily challenges. Engaging with groups and organizations that are already working with special needs and disabled individuals in the other areas of their daily life will provide access and reinforce your message to a wider audience. Suggestions include:

- Local social services office.
- Local public health agencies.
- Local churches.
- Local service organizations.
- Local service animal groups.
- Local emergency management office.
- American Red Cross.
- U.S. Fire Administration and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
- National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

Here is a list of resources to assist you in developing risk messaging for special needs individuals in your community:

- <http://www.accessibleemergencyinfo.com/>. Link to 18 Emergency Preparedness Topics with information formatted to be friendly to deaf, blind and limited sight populations.
- <http://aaid.org/>. American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.
- http://www.nfpa.org/categoryList.asp?categoryID=824&cookie_test=1. NFPA fire safety educational materials.
- <http://www.redcross.org/prepare/location/home-family/disabilities>. American Red Cross, Plan and Prepare, People with Disabilities.
- <http://www.ready.gov/individuals-access-functional-needs>. FEMA, Individuals with Disabilities or Access and Functional Needs.
- http://www.disastersrus.org/MyDisasters/disability/disability_preparedness.htm. National Organization on Disability, EPI Guide for Emergency Managers, Planners and Responders highlights key disability concerns for officials and experts who are responsible for emergency planning in their communities.

Link to more information:

<http://www.ready.gov/document/preparing-makes-sense-people-disabilities-and-special-needs>.

For archived downloads, go to:

www.usfa.fema.gov/nfa/coffee-break/