

RELATED TERMS

- Power Outage
- Interagency Coordination
- Food and Water Delivery



**Lessons Learned
Information Sharing**
www.LLIS.gov

PRIMARY DISCIPLINES

- Emergency Management
- Emergency Communications
- Mass Care and Human Services

LESSON LEARNED

Special Needs: Establishing Emergency Communications Plans with State Aging Services Agencies to Accommodate Elderly Residents in an Emergency

SUMMARY

Local agencies responsible for assisting elderly residents in an emergency should consider collaborating with state and local aging services agencies to create emergency communications plans as an annex to existing emergency operations plans. State and local aging services agencies have access to critical information about elderly residents that local emergency response agencies can use to identify, locate, and provide for elderly residents.

DESCRIPTION

On Thursday, August 14, 2003, most of southeast Michigan experienced widespread power outages that contaminated the water supply and rendered electric amenities, including refrigerators and stoves, inoperable. The three area agencies on aging (AAA) in southeast Michigan, AAA-1A (City of Detroit), AAA-1B (six metro-area counties), and AAA-1C (western Wayne County), responsible for coordinating supportive services for the elderly, wanted to check on their clients to make sure they were safe and had sufficient food and water. However, the power outage rendered the AAA's computerized client databases inaccessible. Consequently, elderly residents who lived alone and relied on the AAA's Home Delivered Meals (HDM) program and other in-home services were placed in jeopardy.

Wayne County, Michigan, encompasses about 623 square miles of southeastern Michigan, including Detroit. It has 2.1 million residents, making it the most populous county in Michigan.

Prior to the blackout, the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging (OSA) worked with every AAA in the state to create a comprehensive emergency communications plan. OSA maintains a list of cell and home phone numbers for emergency coordinators at every AAA in the state. This allows OSA representatives to share information about an emergency situation and needed or available resources with state and county emergency coordinators and AAA network partners during an emergency.

Michigan OSA, based in Lansing, provides leadership, innovation, advocacy, and supportive services to Michigan's elderly residents and caregivers.

During the 2003 power outage, OSA implemented its emergency communications plan with the three AAAs in the affected areas to provide for elderly residents. On Thursday evening, the Michigan State Police Emergency Management Division called the OSA emergency management coordinator to notify him of the power outage. The OSA emergency management coordinator immediately contacted the emergency coordinators for AAA-1A, AAA-1B, and AAA-1C. He asked the emergency coordinators to establish contact with one another and with their County Emergency Operations Centers. On Friday, the OSA

emergency management coordinator re-established contact with the three AAA coordinators to determine what assistance the AAAs needed from OSA.

At Governor Jennifer Granholm's request, OSA and the AAAs took steps to assess the needs of the elderly in the areas affected by the power outage. None of the AAAs had sufficient staff to check on residents directly. For example, each AAA identified resources within its respective region, including local police officers, Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) coordinators, and congregate senior housing unit managers, to assist the AAAs in checking on elderly residents in high-rise buildings. OSA provided a list of high-rise buildings in the Wayne County area to AAA-1C. AAA-1A and AAA-1C staff then contacted high-rise building managers to identify their power outage status and to request door-to-door checks on their residents. In addition, OSA and the AAAs verified the safety of senior citizens living in senior housing centers by using the emergency communications plan as a resource for information and contacts. AAA-1B contacted senior housing unit managers using hard copy lists from all six metro-area counties to check on residents. AAA-1C staff contacted police agencies to request door-to-door checks of senior housing units. OSA and AAA staff also identified cooling shelters in 16 communities where senior citizens could find relief from the dangerous heat. At OSA's request, Elder Law of Michigan's Legal Hotline for Michigan Seniors set up a 1-800 disaster response information and assistance hotline coordinated through the State Emergency Operation Center.

OSA and the AAAs also used the communications plan to coordinate the provision of food and water for senior citizens who had no power. AAA-1A delivered a total of 4,000 extra meals to elderly Detroit residents over the weekend. Working with the City, AAA-1A staff also set up special congregate meal sites where anyone in the community could receive a cafeteria-style hot meal. AAA-1B's HDM clients had access to food through normal meal delivery or emergency shelf-staple meals. OSA faxed AAA-1C a list of their HDM clients from the state National Aging Program Information Systems (NAPIS) report. AAA-1C staff then called every client over the weekend to ensure they each had access to safe food or shelf-staple meals. All three AAAs provided bottled water for their HDM clients for several days following the power outage. Through the communications plan, OSA verified with the affected AAAs that plans were in place to ensure that elderly residents had food and water access. OSA also worked with the American Red Cross to provide bottled water to all three AAAs through the Wednesday following the power outage.

NAPIS

Michigan has developed a statewide Internet-based data collection program that generates statistical information on its elderly population for the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging, and for local AAAs.

State and local aging services agencies have access to critical information about elderly citizens who might require unique assistance in an emergency. Creating communications plans that supplement existing emergency operations plans with state agencies allows local senior service agencies to more effectively identify, locate, and accommodate frail and isolated elderly citizens who may need additional assistance in an emergency.

CITATIONS

Betterly, Steve. Emergency Management Coordinator, Michigan Office of Services to the Aging. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 20 Apr 2007.

Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging. "Michigan used NAPIS Data during Power Outage to Reach Older Adults." *AoA eNewsletter*. Vol. 1, issue 8, Oct

2003, p. 7.

<http://www.aoa.gov/press/enewsletter/archive/2003/Oct03/e-newsOct2003.doc>.

Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging. *Office of Services to the Aging (OSA) Emergency Response Report*. 02 Sep 2003.

http://www.aoa.gov/eldfam/Disaster_Assistance/emerg.asp.

DISCLAIMER

Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov) is the US Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency's national online network of lessons learned, best practices, and innovative ideas for the emergency response and homeland security communities. The Web site and its contents are provided for informational purposes only, without warranty or guarantee of any kind, and do not represent the official positions of the US Department of Homeland Security. For more information on *LLIS.gov*, please email Feedback@llis.dhs.gov or visit www.llis.gov.