

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

UNITED STATES SENATE

“Emergency Preparedness, Aging and Special Needs”

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Introduction

Chairman Kohl, Ranking Member Martinez and other distinguished members of the Committee, I am Timothy Manning and I serve as Deputy Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). It is a privilege to appear before you today on behalf of FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security. We appreciate your interest in and continued support for emergency management, and in particular for the unique disaster planning challenges posed by those with special needs.

Throughout the history of emergency management planning, considerations for special needs populations have been inadequate. From the 1930s, when disaster response was ad hoc and largely focused on the repair of damaged infrastructure, through the present day, special needs populations were often given insufficient consideration. This fact was evident in 2003 during the California wildfires, and when Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast in 2005. During these events, a substantial number of individuals with special needs did not receive appropriate warning, were unable to access shelters, went without medical intervention or, at worst, perished. During the 2006 Nationwide Plan Review, a sample of emergency management plans from various regions in the United States were reviewed by subject-matter experts on disability and aging. The review confirmed that many of the 2006 emergency plans overlooked these populations. The review concluded that “substantial improvement is necessary to integrate people with disabilities in emergency planning and readiness.”

Numerous “lessons learned” reports that followed Hurricane Katrina also identified a large segment of the U.S. population that may not be able to successfully plan for and respond to an emergency with resources typically accessible to the general population. The current general population is one that is diverse, aging, and focused on maintaining independence as long as possible. The popularity of living situations that provide an “as needed” level of care in the least restrictive manner is fast becoming the norm. Consideration must therefore be given to people who may be able to function independently under normal situations, but who may need assistance in an emergency situation.

For example, in the event of a disaster, it is estimated that about 13 million individuals age 50 or older in the United States would need evacuation assistance, and about half of these individuals will require such assistance from someone outside of their household. There are well over one million people in the United States receiving home health care according to 2000 data cited by the National Center for Health Care Statistics. Populations such as these must be considered when emergency plans are developed to accurately assess the resources needed to adequately respond when a disaster strikes. The 2000 Census reported that 18 percent of those surveyed speak a language other than English at home. This statistic highlights the need to ensure the effectiveness of emergency communications. All of these examples serve to demonstrate that community emergency planning must go beyond traditional considerations.

FEMA is working hard to ensure that its own basic planning addresses special needs populations and that we are supporting and assisting states, Tribes and localities in this regard. We are also reinforcing the critical and enduring need for personal preparedness, to encourage individuals to

adequately prepare themselves for disaster events, recognizing that better individual preparedness translates into better community preparedness and resilience.

FEMA is directly engaged in activities that will address special needs populations, including the elderly. In coordination with FEMA's Office of Equal Rights, DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, and the National Advisory Council, as well as state, tribal, and local disability and special need agencies, the FEMA Disability Coordinator has built a viable network to ensure that the needs of the elderly and persons with disabilities are addressed during and following disasters. For example, FEMA:

- Developed a FEMA Handbook called "Accommodating People with Disabilities and Special Needs in a Disaster," to assist FEMA, state emergency managers, FEMA partners, and other stakeholders in accommodating people with disabilities and special needs in a disaster.
- Developed Go-Kits to be distributed to all the Regions to assist states with the evacuation and sheltering needs of special needs and disability populations in a catastrophic event. These Go-Kits are designed for people who experience hearing impairment, visual disabilities, cognitive disabilities, or mobility disabilities, as well as for children, and people with service animals.
- Developed with Mass Care a Functional Need Support Plan to share with the states to ensure that people with disabilities and other special needs are provided the accommodations in a shelter to ensure inclusion and independence.
- Developed plans for working with the Disaster Recovery Centers to ensure that the centers are accessible to everyone and are adequately staffed with interpreters.
- Collaborates with local disability and other special needs agencies in the field before and during all disasters, ensuring that the agencies are communicating with first responders, shelter managers, and impacted special needs populations to identify and address any gaps.
- Provides training and resources for emergency managers on how to develop and include plans to accommodate evacuation and sheltering concerns for people with disabilities and other special needs.
- Collaborates with federal and state exercise planners to ensure that the exercises include evacuation and sheltering methods for people with different types of disabilities and other special needs and engage persons with disabilities and other special needs as participants in the development and execution of exercises.
- Works through FEMA Public Affairs to ensure that all materials are in alternative formats, that materials are 508 compliant, and that interpreters are available.
- Developing disability and special needs subject matter teams to work with States during a disaster in order to ensure accommodation for people with disabilities and other special needs.

Community Engagement

Citizen Corps is FEMA's grassroots initiative to actively involve all citizens in the security of their communities through planning, personal preparedness, training, and volunteer service. The Citizen Corps mission is based on the principle that full citizen engagement – including active

participation by citizens with disabilities, children and the elderly – is of critical importance at all levels and in all areas of all-hazard emergency preparedness, planning, mitigation, response and recovery. As part of FEMA’s Community Preparedness Division, Citizen Corps will work closely with FEMA’s National Disability Coordinator.

Promoting active participation by organizations and individuals representing persons with disabilities is an important part of the mission for the 2,100 councils at the State, local, and Tribal levels who implement Citizen Corps. Working with local Citizen Corps Councils, representatives from the disability community are helping to strengthen community preparedness by developing emergency operations plans that address accessibility and inclusion in all aspects of planning, ranging from alert and warning systems to evacuation and shelter plans. Collaborative community efforts support campaigns for outreach, disaster preparedness education, and 72 hour kits for citizens who need assistance. Partner Programs like Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) provide all-ability training for community volunteers.

At the national level, Citizen Corps promotes inclusion and a focus on the disability and special needs community by integrating these priorities into Homeland Security policies. Citizen Corps actively seeks and publicizes, through newsletters and other forums, examples of how state and local Councils and programs collaborate with organizations to strengthen community preparedness related to these needs.

Planning Assistance

Emergency management takes into consideration planning for the safety of every person in the community during and following a disaster. Taking into consideration populations historically considered “vulnerable,” “at risk,” or “special needs” ultimately improves the overall community’s post-disaster sustainability. In addition to active program support, FEMA assists states and localities with planning guidance for state and local preparedness efforts.

FEMA will shortly issue guidelines on special needs populations through its Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 301: *Emergency Management Planning Guide for Special Needs Populations*. This guide, developed in collaboration with DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, is currently available to all of our nation’s communities as an interim document on the FEMA website. It addresses many of the issues that will confront us in providing care to elderly and other special needs populations in the face of disaster, as well as the importance of personal preparedness.

Training

Training development and delivery for special needs populations and citizen preparedness have been and will continue to be FEMA priorities. The Department has supported the development of a variety of course curricula, including:

- Emergency Responders and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community: Taking the First Steps to Disaster Preparedness

This course addresses fundamentals associated with emergency preparedness and response as it relates to deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and deaf-blind individuals and fosters a greater understanding between this community and the emergency responders that serve them.

- Responding to the Unique Evacuation and Shelter-in-Place Needs of Medically Dependent People during a Disaster Situation

FEMA is partnering with and supporting the Yale New Haven Health System in the development of a training program that will equip local and regional emergency planners and responders with homeland security related responsibilities to address the unique evacuation and shelter-in-place requirements of medically dependent persons residing in high occupancy facilities, including hospitals, nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Course content will focus on pre-event preparation, tactical operations for evacuation and sheltering-in-place during a disaster and strategies for returning individuals to their place of residence at the conclusion of the disaster. Approximately 2,000 will be trained via the instructor-led course and 33,000 in the online course. We expect this course curriculum to be available in early 2010.

Additionally, our Emergency Management Institute provides a variety of training opportunities, including:

- **Emergency Planning and Special Needs Populations field course (G197)** - This 2-1/2 day course is intended to provide those with responsibilities for providing emergency planning or care for seniors, people with disabilities, and/or special needs groups with the skills and knowledge they will need to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergency situations. The target audience includes emergency managers, senior first response personnel, special needs coordinators, human services organization personnel, facility planners, community-based organizational personnel, advocacy group personnel, elected officials, public health personnel, and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) personnel.
- **Special Needs Planning Considerations for Emergency Management independent study course (IS-197.EM)** – This course is designed for emergency management and first responder personnel to enable them to better understand the special needs population and teach how to partner with persons with special needs as well as their support providers and organizations.
- **Special Needs Planning Considerations for Service and Support Providers independent study course (IS-197.SP)** – This course is designed for people who work with the elderly and people with disabilities, and will teach how to partner with local emergency management to better prepare for all phases of an emergency.

These are just a few examples of the kinds of specialized training that FEMA and the Department are making available nationally.

Exercises

Congress included, within the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, a requirement that our National Exercise Program “shall be designed to provide systematic evaluation of readiness; and designed to address the unique requirements of populations with special needs.”

To address this requirement, National Exercise Program Tier I and Tier II exercises, including the TOPOFF 4 Full Scale Exercise, have included special needs-focused objectives. Specifically, one of the objectives for TOPOFF 4 was to examine the handling of mental health and special needs issues arising during and after a Radiological Dispersal Device event that was at the center of the exercise scenario. This “special needs population” element was identified as a strength in the overall exercise design and has been incorporated in future National Level Exercises planning.

Conclusion

Secretary Napolitano, FEMA Administrator Fugate and I are committed to advancing our nation’s preparedness. Our efforts must begin with personal preparedness – a process of individual thinking and consideration of basic steps that each of us must take to help prevent and prepare for the next disaster. All Americans must take responsibility for preparing themselves, their families and their communities for the next disaster. In times of crisis, government plays a critical role in coordinating response and recovery efforts, especially in protecting and providing for our most vulnerable populations. Improved personal preparedness will increase the government’s capacity to ensure the safety and well-being of the American public. Communicating the importance of preparedness is a cornerstone of our strategy moving forward, and with the continued support of Congress, we believe that considerable progress is within reach.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, for allowing me to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.