



No one can predict the outcome of a disaster, whether natural or man-made, but with proper planning the aftermath does not have to be catastrophic.



Preparing Makes Sense
Get Ready Now

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U.S. General Services
Administration

Office of Civil Rights
**EMERGENCY
PREPAREDNESS**
*for People with
Disabilities*



**Getting
Ready
Now**



The Interagency Coordinating Council on Emergency Preparedness and Individuals with Disabilities was established under Executive Order 13347, on July 22, 2004. The Executive Order calls for agencies to support safety and security for individuals with disabilities in all emergency situations through a coordinated effort among federal agencies.

As the General Services Administration's (GSA) emergency plans continue to evolve, it is important to evaluate all scenarios to ensure they include the requirements for people with disabilities.

An effective emergency preparedness plan requires support and commitment from senior-level management within GSA. A preparedness plan will only be as good as the financial and personnel resources supporting it.

Priorities for Emergency Planning

- Develop an Occupant Emergency Plan
- Obtain support from the highest level
- Think about all phases of emergency
- Manage emergency information
- Communicate with and train employees
- Make sure the emergency preparedness plan remains current.

Developing an Effective Emergency Preparedness Plan

Make sure people with disabilities are an integral part of the planning process. A person with a disability knows best what he or she may require in the event of an emergency. The contributions of an employee with a disability can be advantageous to the overall emergency preparedness planning effort. Announce that you are making emergency plans and request feedback from persons with disabilities.

Inform the local fire department and emergency services about any particular issues that you have identified with respect to employees with disabilities. More importantly, be sure to let the fire department know where employees with disabilities are located in the facility. It is important to work with the local fire department and emergency services to develop plans that are not cumbersome.

Communicate with building managers and engineers about the various communication, alarm and sprinkler systems in the building, as well as the designated location of "areas of rescue assistance." The importance of being familiar with these systems cannot be over emphasized, as they will have an impact on the design of an emergency preparedness plan.

Do not rely solely on a "buddy system." A "buddy system" typically consists of assigning an employee to assist an employee with a disability in the event of an emergency. The "***buddy system***" may not work for several reasons. It can lead to "***not-my-job syndrome***" or, at the very least, the buddy assigned to the employee with a disability may not be in the office the moment an alarm sounds. A more effective alternative is to have the volunteers and the employees with disabilities convene in a pre-determined area and wait for further instructions.

Purchase evacuation chairs, and plan to evacuate any mobility devices (e.g., wheelchairs) that evacuation chair users may require once they have been removed from the emergency situation. Many fire departments have ladders that cannot reach the top stories of buildings. By having evacuation chairs available, people with disabilities can be moved to an area or floor where emergency response personnel can assist them. Additionally, having a plan in place that provides for the evacuation of mobility devices makes for a smoother transition for the employees who use these devices. Otherwise, employees will be basically helpless once they leave the emergency situation.

Plan for communications. This includes developing a system of communication that is familiar, accessible to, and useable by everyone.

Practice, practice, practice! Practicing is an essential component of emergency preparedness. It is impossible to prepare for an emergency situation without having practiced. Therefore, it is important to practice regularly, and to ensure that each practice session is taken as seriously as an actual emergency.