White Paper
The World According to Oregon's
Vulnerable Populations Emergency Preparedness Coalition

The Ideal World

In a world where disasters happen but the damage and problems suffered by people with special needs are minimal, both the individuals and the community are prepared. Individuals have at least a three-day accessible supply of usable water, food, medications and the other material goods that are critical to their daily activities. They have a support system where caring people are reachable and can get there in time to lend a hand if necessary. In this ideal world individuals understand their own strengths and vulnerabilities in the face of the types of disasters they are likely to encounter. They know how they will respond because they have made plans and practiced. In the ideal world, individuals who need more help receive the support of family, neighbors, volunteers or staff members who are able to guide and assist the individuals to understand what is happening and what to do. In this world, people with special needs can adapt to rapidly changing disaster conditions because they know how to receive and respond to the messages that the emergency responders are sending out and those messages are provided in simple language, in formats accessible by people with disabilities, and in appropriate languages for those who don't speak English. Since the people who have special needs know what to expect from the local emergency response system they can incorporate those expectations into their plans. They understand how to get extra help when faced with unexpected challenges for their health and safety. This extra help may not materialize in the earliest hours of the disaster, however, and people with special needs may find themselves afraid and helpless, just as are many of their able-bodied neighbors. In the ideal world all neighbors have something to offer each other. When the disaster has passed, individuals with special needs know where to go for information and assistance to get their lives back to normal as soon as possible. This is the prepared community—the one we're all working towards.

How Do We Get From Here to There?

The Vulnerable Populations Emergency Preparedness coalition sees its role to support local communities in working towards that ideal world. The Coalition's Statement of Purpose is: *All disasters are local; all vulnerable people are local residents. The purpose of this group is to support local communities to keep their vulnerable people safe.* Its principles are:
1. Keep it local
    o Resources for VP emergency planning should be directed to the local level.
    o Support local planning efforts. Do local trainings.
2. Bring local people to Salem when standards are being developed so they can give input so the standards will be appropriate for a range of local situations.

Local efforts to keep vulnerable people safe include, but are not limited to the following considerations:

<u>Individual Preparedness</u>
The first priority should to make sure that individuals with special needs are empowered to help themselves. Public sector, governmental and community-based organizations must provide

education and preparedness training to individuals with special needs, to their caregivers, to community advocates and to peer helpers. Lessons will include helping them to assess the types of disasters they might expect where they live and to decide what they need to do in order to stay as safe and healthy as possible under a variety of situations, given their own personal limitations. The training should cover basic family and individual preparedness topics. It should include a discussion of the roles of emergency responders and reasonable expectations for what they can do for individuals while the emergency is in progress. Education will include clear and understandable direction on what types quantities of supplies to have on hand in case they need to shelter-in-place. Ideally, there will also be financial assistance available for those in real need to be able to buy those supplies. Mentoring will be available for individuals who need extra assistance in putting together their plans and kits. Private businesses will be approached to provide some of the materials and supplies needed by individuals with special needs.

Appropriate Communications
Disaster communication must be delivered in as many languages as are spoken in each community and the most-used media for each language population should be identified ahead of time. Messages must be broadcast in, at minimum, the following formats for people with differing disabilities that impact communication: 1) All directions that are scrolled on television must also be spoken for people with vision impairment. 2) All spoken information, such as weather conditions, evacuation instructions and other important details must be captioned on television for people who are deaf or hearing-impaired. Also, 3) text message networks for the deaf and hearing impaired should be identified beforehand and utilized during a disaster. In all local areas, someone within the Public Information Office must be designated to make sure all messages that are sent out are also accessible to non-English speakers and people with a variety of disabilities. 2-1-1 coverage is needed in every Oregon community for disaster response information and for recovery referral information.

Community Planning
Vulnerable populations emergency preparedness coalitions comprised of representatives and stakeholders from all populations with special needs should be active in every Oregon county or multi-county region. These coalitions can coordinate a system of resources and that is responsive to the full range of the community's citizens. The coalitions should be an integral part of city and county emergency management, providing a forum where special needs community can work with the emergency management community to develop and maintain complementary resources. Governmental and community based service providers can gather data and resource lists and plan together out to utilize staff, and hard resources (like building space, bed space, vehicles, equipment, supplies) during a variety of events. All emergency planning should be considered a public-private partnership, integrating the comparative advantages of both aspects. Emergency management should provide training and exercise opportunities for special needs individuals and the agencies that serve them so they can become part of the response network at the local level. This integration process could include having human services representatives serving as Liaisons in emergency response command structures. Some individuals and agencies may chose to participate at the state level, as well.

How to Locate People with Special Needs

Every community should be able to locate each person with a special need in an emergency through a disaster registry of some kind. If no community-wide registry exists, agencies who serve those populations should hold internal discussions about how to contact their clients before and during an event to do a safety check. In some communities it may be appropriate to do an education campaign instructing people with disabilities to contact their local fire departments on order to inform them of their location and need for special assistance.

Emergency Sheltering for People with Special Needs
Mass care shelters and special needs shelters should be accessible to vulnerable populations, in terms of wheel chair access and communications within the shelter. Special needs shelter plans should include sheltering for people with medical needs, as well as sheltering for people with personal care needs, and should outline definitions of the stages at which each type will be activated. Plans should include physical locations and logistics, to be coordinated with Red Cross, as well as special staffing, incontinence and other critical supplies, pharmaceutical and durable medical equipment needs to be coordinated among community agencies. Plans should include staffing for triage, supervision, personal care, discharge planning and other important functions. Tracking systems will ensure that every shelter resident is accounted for, receives appropriate care while in the shelter, and has access to planning resources for returning home or to another appropriate temporary or permanent housing situation.

Emergency Transportation for People with Special Needs
Each community must have a plan of how to transport people with special needs from their homes to local emergency shelters or to evacuate them from the impacted area to another community. Emergency transportation plans should include public and private providers and should address communications and reimbursement plans.

Role of State Government in Strengthening Local Efforts
State government organizations should support the work of local communities, local coalitions and local programs by:
- providing information that helps local response planning;
- providing training where appropriate;
- facilitating networking and information sharing opportunities across counties and regions, such as sponsoring annual conferences;
- coordinating resource sharing between federal, state and local entities;
- encouraging consistency across programs and communities where appropriate or mandated, such as promulgation of emergency plan standards and administrative rules for provider programs;
- partnering with local communities by playing their part in the response network.

Role of the Vulnerable Populations Emergency Preparedness Coalition
This coalition of public and private agencies works to address all aspects of local planning for the well-being of people with a wide variety of special needs during a disaster. Its role includes:
- networking and sharing of best practices regarding community planning, individual preparedness education and outreach, accessible communications for notification, special needs sheltering, emergency transportation, disaster registries, and exercising of plans;
- updating on policies and trends at the state and federal levels;

- training on various aspects of preparedness for vulnerable populations;
- supporting of Oregon's Department of Human Services as it develops its own policies and procedures and rules to govern service providers;
- working with Oregon Emergency Management as it develops its policies and procedures regarding vulnerable populations.