

Disaster Preparedness for the Vulnerable

Throughout the year, CNCS [Corporation for National and Community Service] engages more than 1.5 million Americans of all ages and backgrounds in service. Senior Corps, AmeriCorps State and National, and the AmeriCorps NCCC volunteers have been particularly active in responding to the recent disasters. These programs play an essential role assisting communities responding to a disaster. CNCS volunteer programs provide a great deal of value both to the communities in which they serve and the volunteers themselves.

—Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA)

Each year in America, natural and manmade disasters cause billions of dollars in damages, displace residents, halt productivity, and are to blame for the loss of many innocent lives. According to FEMA, individuals can mitigate the effects of such events by recognizing potential and impending hazards, knowing what to do to protect themselves and their family, and preparing *before* disaster strike.

Disturbingly, a 2009 Citizen Corps report revealed that adults age 55 and older are less prepared to cope with disaster than younger people. Older adults perceive many barriers to being prepared, including higher reliance than younger groups on emergency responders. In fact, 43% of survey respondents age 55 and older had not taken disaster preparedness steps due to expected reliance on first responders such as fire, police, or emergency personnel. Also, 24% of those over age 55 (versus 8 to 10% of younger respondents) indicated that doubts regarding their abilities to take action were a primary reason for not taking any preparedness steps. (*Personal Preparedness in America: Findings from the 2009 Citizen Corps National Survey*)

Triads, emergency response agencies, and national disaster preparedness organizations should collaborate to ensure that vulnerable older adults receive all necessary assistance before, during, and after an event occurs. Furthermore, these organizations can work with agencies such as Citizen Corps to educate and create volunteer opportunities that empower capable older adults to plan for and recover from disasters.

Disaster Facts

In 2011, FEMA made 99 major disaster declarations, 29 emergency declarations, and 114 fire management assistance declarations. Events included a 5.8 earthquake centered in Virginia; severe storms, tornadoes, and flooding in the Midwest; wildfires in Texas; and Hurricane Irene, which battered the East Coast.

The August 2009 (revised December 2009) report *Personal Preparedness in America: Findings from the 2009 Citizen Corps National Survey* revealed the following:

- ✦ Just 57% of participants (all ages) reported having supplies set aside in their home to be used only in case of a disaster, while only 34% of individuals said they had supplies set aside in their car.

- ★ Individuals between the ages of 18 and 34 (38%) and ages 35 to 54 (35%) were significantly more likely to have disaster supplies set aside in their cars than individuals age 55 and older (29%).
- ★ More individuals age 55 and older significantly felt that the impact of a natural disaster would not be severe at all (9%) as compared to other age groups.
- ★ Across all disasters except for a severe disease outbreak, individuals ages 35 to 54 (33 to 47%) were significantly more likely than those over the age of 55 (29 to 39%) to think that preparing for a disaster would help them very much.
- ★ Older adults are more likely to be aware of their community's shelter locations and evacuation routes.

Linking Triad to Emergency Management

Often, disaster preparedness plans fail to serve, or under-serve, those most vulnerable—older adults and people with disabilities. Triads can work with emergency management (EM) organizations to locate, map, and plan assistance programs for these individuals.

Triad is a direct link to communities and the vulnerable people they serve. Incorporating Triad into a disaster preparedness system builds capacity and effectiveness of response to the human service issues that result from disasters. Triad can be linked to the emergency operations center through the same EM branch as the American Red Cross, Salvation Army, and other organizations. Also, Triad works with FEMA to ensure that recovery services reach older people and that efforts are not duplicated.

When engaged in disaster planning, Triads and emergency management agencies can also involve social services, public and mental health, area agencies on aging, Meals on Wheels, the United Way, volunteer centers, Catholic Charities, food banks, health clinics, homeless service providers, Jewish Family and Children's Services, the Salvation Army, Neighborhood Watch, and interfaith providers.

The Older Volunteer

Despite age and ability, thousands of older adults volunteer in communities throughout America. Opportunities for service abound and include older adult-focused organizations such as Triad and Senior Corps. For example, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is a Senior Corps project that connects volunteers age 55 and over with service opportunities that match their skills and availability. A database of state RSVP offices is available at www.seniorcorps.gov/about/programs/rsvp.asp. For older volunteers interested in disaster preparedness, the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) database currently includes more than 1,100 community programs nationwide. For an online directory, visit www.citizenorps.gov/cc/listCouncil.do?submitByState&state.

Disaster Planning

The following checklist is designed to help community organizations and individual volunteers prepare for potential disasters. For more detailed planning information, consult the Disaster Preparedness Programs guide in the Programs section of this manual.

- ★ Include people living both independently and in dependent care facilities.
- ★ Identify community needs and the support necessary to meet them.
- ★ Arrange personal care assistance if in-home care support is unavailable.
- ★ Get food, water, and other supplies distributed to older people and individuals with disabilities living alone or in isolated areas.
- ★ Provide food for those who depend on home-delivered meals if services are interrupted.
- ★ Help older people and individuals with disabilities fill prescriptions for medications and replace vital personal equipment (e.g., hearing aids, wheelchairs) damaged or lost in the disaster.
- ★ Ensure that dependent care facilities have disaster plans that include measures to support the population they serve.
- ★ Contact isolated and homebound individuals to check on their status and to help them get needed services.
- ★ Check on and, if needed, evacuate people who cannot be self-sufficient for 5 to 7 days following a major disaster.
- ★ Relocate people dependent on electricity to maintain life support during power outages. Support mobility needs with accessible transportation resources. Triad can help transport people to disaster service areas during evacuations.
- ★ Supplement the response to medical needs through volunteer and/or staff trained in first aid and emergency response, and/or by providing medical supplies.
- ★ Support people with special dietary needs and help with distribution of food and water to at-risk, homebound, and disabled persons. Ideas include volunteer kitchens, meal programs, and food pantries to support mass feeding and food distribution efforts.
- ★ Provide information on community resources that connect people who need help to available services.
- ★ Create emergency supply kits for older people.

Resources

American Red Cross

2025 E Street NW
 Washington, DC 20006
 (800) 733-2767 (REDCROSS)
www.redcross.org

Center for Disease Control and Prevention Emergency Preparedness and Response

1600 Clifton Road
 Atlanta, GA 30333
 (800) 232-436 (CDC-INFO)
 TTY: (888) 232-6348
cdcinfo@cdc.gov
www.bt.cdc.gov

Citizen Corps

citizencorps@dhs.gov
www.citizencorps.gov

Community Emergency Response Teams (C.E.R.T.)

cert@dhs.gov
www.citizencorps.gov

Federal Emergency Management Agency

500 C Street, SW
 Washington, DC 20472
 (800) 621-3362 (FEMA)
 TDD: (800) 462-7585
www.fema.gov

Fire Corps

7852 Walker Drive, Suite 450
Greenbelt, MD 20770
(888) 324-6361 (FC-INFO1)
www.firecorps.org/

Independent Living Centers

www.ilusa.com/links/ilcenters.htm

Medical Reserve Corps**Office of the Surgeon General****U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

5600 Fishers Lane, Room 18C-14
Rockville, MD 20857
(301) 443-4951
www.medicalreservercorps.gov

National Neighborhood Watch Program**National Sheriffs' Association**

1450 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-3490
(703) 836-7827
nw@sheriffs.org
www.usaonwatch.org

Ready Campaign**U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Federal Emergency Management Agency**

500 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20472
(202) 282-8000
ready@dhs.gov
www.ready.gov

Senior Corps

1201 New York Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20525
(202) 606-5000
www.seniorcorps.gov

U.S. Department of Agriculture**Food Safety Inspection Service****Homeland Security Council**

TTY: (800) 877-8339
<http://1.usa.gov/kuF9s>

U.S. Department of Agriculture**Food and Nutrition Service****Food Distribution Division**

3101 Park Center Drive, Room 504
Alexandria, VA 22302-1500
(703) 305-2680
fdd-psb@fns.usda.gov
www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/fd-disasters

U.S. Department of Health and**Human Services****Office of Emergency Preparedness**

200 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 638G
Washington, DC 20201
www.phe.gov

Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS)**International Association of Chiefs of Police**

515 N Washington Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
info@policevolunteers.org
www.policevolunteers.org