

OVERVIEW

People with mobility restrictions are more vulnerable to disasters than the general population. This is because many rely on aids such as wheelchairs and walkers, which can significantly slow evacuation when ordinary objects such as furniture, stairs, curbs, and doorways become barriers.

Mobility challenged individuals may include the elderly, those born with developmental disabilities, and those who have been injured or affected by illness. According to the U.S. Census, over 1.6 million Americans were wheelchair bound and four million people required mobility aids such as canes and walkers. These numbers should rise as the baby boomer generation ages.

REDUCING VULNERABILITY TO DISASTERS

Ideally, those who are mobility challenged or their advocates should be directly involved in the disaster planning process including preparation, notification, response, sheltering, and recovery. Several pragmatic steps should be taken to build emergency preparedness and response capacity and awareness, as follows:

- α Inform those who are mobility impaired about proper disaster preparedness and evacuation. Preparation should include making a standard [disaster supply kit](#) in a backpack or duffle bag that can be easily carried by someone with impaired mobility. The disaster supply kit should include a first aid kit, non-perishable food and water, and items specific to those who are mobility challenged. For wheelchair users it is recommended that the disaster supply kit include a pair of heavy gloves to use while wheeling over glass and other debris or a backup battery for a motorized wheelchair.



New Orleans, Louisiana, September, 2005 -- An evacuee is assisted at the New Orleans Airport.

Source: Liz Roll for FEMA

- α A successful plan for those who are mobility impaired should include a medical alert system. The plan should also involve contact with local emergency management concerning the availability of special services, particularly transportation, during an evacuation.
- α In order to accommodate individuals with mobility challenges, emergency shelters should be assessed and upgraded for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.¹ Emergency shelter staff and volunteers should be trained on how to work with this population effectively.²
- α Establish a confidential special needs registry of people who may need additional assistance during a disaster event or an evacuation.³ If a registry is already established, publicize it. The registry should be

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available to anyone with a disability and should include physical assistance evacuating a residence or place of work, transportation accommodations for wheelchair users, and assistance to people who are sheltering-in-place.

- α Conduct an inventory of transportation options available at the local and regional level in order to assess the capacity to serve those who are mobility impaired. Coordinate with these organizations to establish a network of transportation options in the event of a disaster. The registry should be used to help determine the need of this service.

RESPONSE

In the event of a disaster in which an evacuation is required, swift emergency response and safe, adequate shelter are critical to protecting individuals with mobility challenges.

Communities should have shelters that can easily accommodate the mobility impaired. Shelters must be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), provide space and accommodations for service animals or caregivers, and provide accommodations for mobility devices.⁴



Corpus Christi, Texas, September, 2008 -- A Corpus Christi firefighter assists a resident with special needs into a bus.

Source: Patsy Lynch for FEMA

RECOVERY

After a disaster, individuals with mobility challenges may need further assistance transitioning back to their homes. Downed trees, debris, or damaged homes or entrance ramps may further restrict mobility and make daily activities more difficult.

Local governments and volunteer organizations should help individuals with disabilities, unable to clean up their properties, by providing those services as well as options for long-term sheltering as an alternative to a permanently damaged residence.



PROFILE: ADA COMPATIBILITY

Program:	Americans with Disabilities Assessment Tool of Emergency Management
Organization:	ADA
Keywords:	ADA compatibility, emergency preparedness plans, assessment and checklist
Source:	ADA Best Practices Tool Kit for State and Local Governments www.ada.gov/pctoolkit/chap7emergencymgmtadd1.htm
Brief Summary:	A checklist used to assess potential conflicts between emergency management plans, programs and procedures, and ADA standards and guidelines.

The ADA checklist is intended to guide local emergency management officials through a series of diagnostic questions covering several critical emergency management topics such as policies and procedures, notification and evacuation, first responder and personnel training, sheltering, medical and social services, post sheltering, and recovery.

The purpose of these questions is to assess the extent to which emergency management policies and practices incorporate ADA standards and guidelines. At the end of each diagnostic section there is an “actions” section that provides specific advice to emergency management on how to better address the needs of people with disabilities within the context of each diagnostic question.

Sample of Question from ADA Guide:

Do you seek input and participation from people with disabilities and organizations with expertise on disability issues when you stage emergency simulations and otherwise test your preparedness?

Have you established a voluntary, confidential registry for persons with disabilities to request individualized notification, evacuation assistance, and transportation?

Have you conducted an accessibility survey of all of your emergency shelter facilities, whether owned by government or a private entity to determine if they comply with ADA requirements?

Have you adopted “mass care” shelter procedures to ensure that shelter staff and volunteers do not turn away people with disabilities who may need assistance with activities of daily living even though their personal care aides may not be with them?



PROFILE: SPECIAL NEEDS REGISTRIES

Program:	Monroe County, Florida Special Needs Registry
Organization:	Monroe County Emergency Management
Keywords:	special needs, emergency preparedness and response, registry
Source:	www.monroecounty-fl.gov/Pages/MonroeCoFL_Social/specialneeds
Brief Summary:	Local special needs registry coupled with targeted emergency services for those registered.

Under Florida law, every local emergency management agency within the state must establish and maintain a voluntary special needs registry for those who are mentally or physically disabled, and allocate the appropriate resources to those on this registry in the event of a disaster.

Monroe County, Florida has a registry is available to any individual within the county who is 60 years of age or older, or mentally or physically disabled. Those in need can register by filling out an application and mailing it to the local emergency management office or agency or by completing the application online.

The online application can be accessed at http://www.monroecounty-fl.gov/Pages/MonroeCoFL_Social/form1-2007SNSregistryFillable.pdf.

The registry collects information about individuals such as contact information, medical conditions or disabilities, and emergency management services needed prior to and during a disaster. Depending on the level of disability and self-disclosed needs, individuals will be contacted and assisted with evacuation.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Other Examples of Special Medical Needs Registries

- 1) Orange County, Florida Special Needs Registry
http://www.co.orange.nc.us/socsvcs/special_needs_registry.asp
- 2) Miami-Dade, Florida Special Needs Registry
http://www.miamidade.gov/oem/special_needs.asp
- 3) Duval County, Florida Special Needs Registry
<http://www.coj.net/Departments/Fire+and+Rescue/Emergency+Preparedness/Get+Ready/Special+Needs+Registration.htm>
- 4) Fairfax County, Virginia Special Needs Registry
<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/specialneeds/medicalneedsregistry.htm>
- 5) Pitt County, NC Special Medical Needs Registry (only for severe immobility)
http://www.co.pitt.nc.us/formslib/emergserv/disaster_plan_special_needs.pdf
pg. 63-104 of plan
- 6) Polk County, Wisconsin Special Medical Needs Registry (only for severe immobility)
http://www.co.polk.wi.us/emergency-mgmt/special_needs.asp

Special Needs Evacuation Tracking System

www.motorola.com/governmentandenterprise/contentdir/en_US/Files/CaseStudies/SNETSCaseStudy.pdf

Other Resources

- 1) Nobody Left Behind – A compilation of research, resources, and best practices about disaster preparedness and response for the mobility impaired.
Website: <http://www.nobodyleftbehind2.org/>
- 2) Nobody Left Behind - Do's and Don'ts for Community Preparedness for Mobility Impaired
Website: http://www.nobodyleftbehind2.org/resources/pdf/b_community_preparedness.pdf
- 3) “FEMA EMS Planning Guide for Special Needs Populations”
Website: http://www.nobodyleftbehind2.org/resources/pdf/FEMA_CPG301.pdf
- 4) Red Cross Disaster Preparedness Guide for People with Disabilities
Website: <http://www.scd.state.hi.us/documents/A5091.pdf>
- 5) “Preparing for Disasters – A checklist for People with Mobility Problems”
<http://www.adacourse.org/>

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- 6) ADA Training Resource Center – a resource for education and training about ADA compliance
<http://www.adacourse.org/>

REFERENCES

¹ ADA checklist for Emergency shelters at: <http://www.ada.gov/pcatoolkit/chap7shelterchk.pdf>.

² FEMA orientation manual for first responders on the evacuation of people with disabilities at:
<http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/FA-235-508.pdf>

³ Information and guide on preparing registries for special needs populations at:
http://www.az211.gov/images/stories/basic_services/emergency_vp_toolkit/emergency_vp_toolkit_special_needs_registries_overview_and_planning_considerations.pdf

⁴ Space requirement considerations for sheltering people with disabilities can be found at:
http://www.ct.gov/demhs/lib/demhs/space_layout_considerations.pdf