
support efforts to facilitate access to indoor and outdoor fitness and recreation areas so that those with vision loss can have the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from recreational activity, just as the rest of the population does.

Organizations working to increase physical activity among the general population should be encouraged to focus on and feature resources that provide services for people with vision loss. One positive example is the National Center on Physical Activity and Disability (<www.ncpad.org>; 800-900-8086), a federally funded information center that provides information on many useful physical activities for people with vision loss and other types of disabilities.

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James H. Rimmer, Ph.D., director, Center on Health Promotion Research for Persons with Disabilities, director, National Center on Physical

Activity and Disability, Department of Disability and Human Development, University of Illinois at Chicago, 1640 West Roosevelt Road, Chicago, IL 60608; e-mail: <jrimmer@uic.edu>.

Emergency Preparedness

Matthew Sapolin

When disasters strike, people with disabilities are not left out of the destruction and turmoil that follow. In recent years, people with disabilities have become increasingly active in the dialogue surrounding emergency preparedness and have called on the government to confront the issue of disaster planning for people with disabilities. As a result, government and disaster response organizations have taken several steps that can help to improve options for people with disabilities during emergencies, and to increase preparedness activities and overall communication. Although states and localities have established offices of emergency management, this article will briefly touch on some of the federal initiatives and programs that have emerged to address special needs populations. These programs are fairly new and were introduced by the top-ranking federal leadership.

Under an executive order signed by President George W. Bush on July 22, 2004, the Department of Homeland Security was charged with aggressively exploring the matter of addressing the emergency response needs of disabled populations, and established an interagency council for that purpose. This action expanded on the president's "New Freedom Initiative," a series of policies designed to advance the interests of people with disabilities by directing the federal government to address the safety and security needs of this population.

At the first meeting of the Interagency Coordinating Council on Emergency Preparedness and Individuals with Disabilities, held at the Department of Homeland Security, senior federal government officials reported on significant new policy initiatives that aim

to better integrate people with disabilities in the emergency preparedness effort.

DETAILS OF THE INITIATIVES

R. Alexander Acosta, assistant attorney general of the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice, announced the release of a new technical assistance document, "Making Community Emergency Preparedness and Response Programs Accessible to People with Disabilities." It offers guidance to local officials in making emergency preparedness plans consistent with the requirements of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Acosta also reviewed the department's work promoting emergency preparedness for people with disabilities through "Project Civic Access," which has resulted in more than 100 agreements with towns and counties across the country ensuring access to their public facilities, programs, and services, including emergency preparedness efforts.

Troy Justesen, acting assistant secretary of the Office for Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, announced that the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research committed close to \$1 million for emergency preparedness research. The research will include a project to improve the egress during emergencies of individuals with disabilities from buildings and other settings. A lot was learned about egress for individuals who are blind or visually impaired during the evacuation of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. The National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research continued to expand its research in this area and hosted a two-day conference in October of 2002 on these issues. In addition, the Rehabilitation Services Administration awarded \$1 million to the National Organization on Disability's Emergency Preparedness Initiative (ODEP) to assist communities, governments, and federal agencies in developing plans that will ensure the safety and security of people with disabilities in emergencies.

W. Roy Grizzard, assistant secretary of disability employment policy at the U.S. Department of Labor, announced the release of a report on involving employees with disabilities in emergency-management planning. This comprehensive report resulted from the department's seminar: "Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities: An Interagency Seminar of Exchange for Federal Managers." ODEP has distributed the report of the findings of the seminar to state emergency coordinators, as well as public and private sector employers nationwide. In addition, ODEP continues to offer technical assistance on emergency planning for employees with disabilities and their employers through its Job Accommodations Network, and provides excellent guidance for individuals who are blind or visually impaired and for professionals who serve that population.

The Department of Homeland Security's citizen preparedness web site, <<http://ready.gov>>, includes new and updated information to help people with disabilities prepare for and respond to emergencies of all kinds. The council's work will lead to the inclusion of more comprehensive guidance for people with disabilities.

Citizen Corps has established a National Citizen Corps Council subcommittee on emergency preparedness for people with disabilities. This subcommittee is a key component of the federal government's efforts to reach out to communities across the country on these issues. The subcommittee comprises many leading advocates from the disability community, and, since October 2004, has successfully established local councils that include community leaders with disabilities.

OTHER EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS ORGANIZATIONS

Federal Emergency Management Agency

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is part of the Department of Homeland Security's Emergency Preparedness and Response initiative. Its mission is to take the lead in the effort to prepare the United States

for all hazards, and effectively manage federal response and recovery efforts following any national incident. FEMA also initiates proactive mitigation activities, trains “first responders,” and manages the National Flood Insurance Program and the U.S. Fire Administration. It works in partnership with other organizations that are part of the nation’s emergency management system.

Red Cross

The Red Cross is a disaster relief organization that works at the site of an event to help provide relief services and support to the local community and response structure. It has a tradition of working with blind and visually impaired individuals, and has published booklets on a variety of safety topics specifically for that population.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, people who are blind or visually impaired have a number of resources in terms of learning more about emergency preparedness. The Federal, state, and local governments have established offices to coordinate planning for and responses to disasters. Each of these offices has taken steps to engage the community of individuals with disabilities, and leadership from the community of people with vision loss has been involved in the dialogue.

Professionals working with this population, family members, and disabled individuals themselves all have a great responsibility with respect to emergency preparedness. Although this type of information can be helpful in the aftermath of a disaster, it is much more valuable if obtained and studied in advance. Many significant losses can be avoided with the acquisition of reliable information and the existence of a plan for evacuation.

Matthew Sapolin, M.P.H., commissioner, Office for People with Disabilities, The City of New York, Office of the Mayor, 100 Gold Street, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10038; e-mail: <msapolin@cityhall.nyc.gov>.

Diabetes Management and Visual Impairment

Susan V. Ponchillia

Diabetes is currently one of the major public health issues in North America. In the United States, 20.8 million children and adults have some form of diabetes (American Diabetes Association [ADA], 2006a) and multiple factors have led to an increasing number of people with diabetes being also affected by vision loss. The large number of babies born after World War II began to reach age 60 in 2006 (Adler, 2005), and they join a population of elders who are generally living longer due to improved treatment of chronic diseases. For the same reason, most “baby boomers” and their elders also enjoy a better quality of life. Unfortunately, a more sedentary and overfed lifestyle is associated with obesity and, in turn, with Type II diabetes. The number of new cases of this disease is growing exponentially, with 1.5 million added in 2005 (ADA, 2006b). Seven percent of the overall population of the United States and Canada now have some type of diabetes, and almost 21% of people age 60 or older have diabetes (ADA, 2006b; Centers for Disease Control, 2006). Diabetes negatively affects the quality of life of millions of people.

Diabetes education is critical in reducing the morbidity (and mortality) associated with diabetes and its complications, which include vision loss, neuropathy (both autonomic and peripheral), nephropathy (kidney disease), dental disease, and cardiovascular disease (leading to heart disease and stroke). The complications of diabetes affect the function of fine and gross motor activities; vision, hearing, and tactile senses; overall quality of life; and mobility (Rodriguez & Gabb, 2005). Diabetes is estimated to be the leading cause of blindness among adults aged 20–74, with 12,000 to 24,000 new cases of diabetes-related blindness each year (ADA, 2005; Sieving, 2002). If every state in the nation divided