

*Male:*

In the last two decades, there has been a greater focus on the various groups that require special attention from emergency planners in events involving evacuations. These include people living in assisted care facilities or nursing homes, school children, day care centers, or high-rise building occupants. Within the emergency management field, special needs is defined in a variety of ways, often focusing on groups such as the elderly and children, or people with disabilities. Important groups often overlooked are people with disabilities that are not as evident, such as those with mental illnesses or impairments, people with visual, hearing, or mobility limitations, or those who may have difficulty going outside the home.

It's important to consider those with special needs, because some evacuees may need assistance in physically moving up or down stairs or boarding buses for transport. Those dependent on respiratory devices, wheelchairs, or walkers will need to have vehicles that can accommodate their equipment. The mentally impaired may need to be assigned a caretaker, because they may not understand the warning to evacuate or how to orient themselves at a shelter. Security may have to be provided to ensure such evacuees are not harassed or exploited at shelters.

People with special needs may be congregated in a facility or dispersed throughout the community. Health care facilities may need help, both in planning for evacuations and in physically helping clients evacuate during an emergency. Those facilities should have realistic and customized plans, not boilerplate, that include prior arrangements for transportation and care commensurate with client needs. Evacuation plans should be exercised regularly to acquaint staff and residents with evacuation procedures.

Remember that shelters chosen for special needs adults should not have stairs or child-sized furniture. Planners can help facility managers by examining all evacuation plans to ensure they do not rely on the same resources when evacuating. Managers of health care facilities might plan to use a special needs shelter or medical needs shelter instead of a general population shelter for their clients. Such a shelter can provide a higher level of care and more support services than the minimal first-aid care provided in general shelters.

Most schools have plans to evacuate children in a community emergency. Two planning strategies most frequently used by schools include early dismissal, with children who will not have a

caretaker at home sheltered at the school, or busing, where the entire school population is relocated to a pre-designated shelter. Relocation may be the only option in fast-moving events, but may create problems in reuniting children with families or caretakers later on if the information on where children were taken is not well-publicized.

In emergencies, where the time to impact is fairly long, some parents will likely attempt to pick up students at school. This rarely interferes with the evacuation process. In rapid-moving events, children are evacuated before parents have the opportunity to pick up children. Exercises suggest that schools can evacuate in 10 to 20 minutes following the decision to move students out of harm's way.

Understanding how vulnerability affects people's ability to evacuate is also important in planning. Vulnerability refers to the characteristics of a person's or group's situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist, and recover from the impact of a hazardous event. Frequently, a disadvantaged socioeconomic situation can place a person in an unsafe living or work situation, and can impact their ability to take a protective action. Terms like fragile, unsafe, and hazardous refer to livelihoods, buildings, settlement locations, or infrastructure, not people.

Betty Horn Morrow.

*Female:*

I think that women tend to be at some disadvantage throughout the process, but certainly some women are much more vulnerable than others. You know, poor women, minority women, recent immigrant women, elderly women, women with disabilities. These kinds of risk factors, vulnerability factors, often are compounded so that you have people who are very vulnerable at the bottom of the scale.

*Male:*

Institutionalized populations and special needs facilities are frequently considered homogenous, when in reality they exhibit many characteristics that differ by physical or geographical constraints. For example, prison populations vary widely by age, physical ability, and education, while residing in a secured environment. As individuals, they cannot respond directly to evacuation warnings, even though they may not have any physical constraints.

Tourists populations and temporary visitors such as day workers or travelers in vehicles through an area at risk should not be overlooked. They may not be familiar with community hazards and ignore or misunderstand warning messages. Foreign-speaking individuals may not understand what evacuation means, while those raised in other cultures may not respond as officials recommend. It is recommended that emergency officials and planners provide information materials in foreign language when a segment of the population exceeds one percent of the total population.

The Red Cross translated many of their brochures on protective actions into several languages that are available from local Red Cross chapters or on the Internet. Understanding the types of foreign languages spoken in a community ensures those groups will be adequately informed in an emergency. Individuals with special needs who are dispersed among the general population may be unknown to emergency planners or social agencies unless they self-identify. Developing a database of such individuals is difficult because the information must constantly be updated. Privacy concerns forbids such information being routinely collected by agencies, so much of the information is on a self-report basis.

Another problem is the single elderly resident who may shun interaction with others and remain isolated, even with the best of agency efforts. Planners should make every effort to reach these individuals with appropriate information that meets their specific need. Some people will always lag behind or refuse to evacuate, from a sense of powerlessness, a feeling of social isolation, or from a perception the event doesn't warrant the effort. This can place later rescue workers at risk, if the impacts are severe. Planners can minimize this type of behavior with good emergency information that is timely and detailed.

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