

Emergency Preparedness for People with **DISABILITIES**



Office of Disability Employment Policy
United States Department of Labor

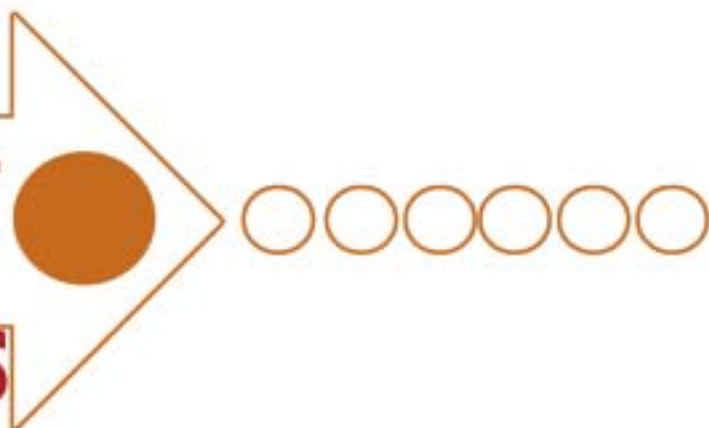


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**Emergency
Preparedness for
People with
DISABILITIES**



**An Interagency Seminar of Exchange
for Federal Managers**

Summary Report

April 2004



Hosted by United States Department of Labor
Office of Disability Employment Policy
December 2-3, 2003



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ABOUT THIS REPORT

On December 2-3, 2003, the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) hosted *Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities: An Interagency Seminar of Exchange for Federal Managers* at the Washington, DC headquarters. This report summarizes the proceedings from the day and a half event and is meant to serve as a source of practical information on developing, implementing, and maintaining emergency preparedness plans for people with disabilities.

The document has been compiled using session transcripts, presenter presentations, and rapporteurs' notes. It is intended to provide an overview of the themes, ideas, questions, and practices exchanged during the Seminar rather than a word-for-word or minute-by-minute account of the event. More importantly, the information and opinions related to strategies, products, and issues presented **should not be regarded as endorsements or policy statements ODEP or the Department of Labor (DOL).**

While the report structure closely reflects the official Seminar agenda, some sections have been added or modified to enhance both the readability and usability of the document. Space has been devoted to each Seminar session rather than integrating the information based on themes or topics. This was done for two reasons: 1) to assist readers in putting the information in perspective; and 2) to preserve—as much as possible—both the context in which the information was shared and the flow of the Seminar.

Finally, it is hoped that this report provides readers a better understanding of the common themes that emerged over the day and a half, as well as practical resources and information related to emergency preparedness for people with disabilities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) would like to thank all of the participants of the Seminar of Exchange, whose open sharing and expertise contributed to the event's overall success. Many federal experts provided critical contributions to shaping the program, including Margaret (Peg) Blechman of the U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, and Alan Clive of the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency. Invaluable guidance and involvement in the event was provided by distinguished national experts in the field, including Elizabeth Davis of the National Organization on Disability, Edwina Juliet of the National Taskforce on Fire/Life Safety for People with Disabilities, and June Isaacson Kailes with the Center for Disability Issues and the Health Professions at Western University of Health Sciences.

Finally, special thanks is warranted for the contributions of the following entities, for without their input and involvement, this Seminar of Exchange would not have been possible:

- Office of the Secretary (Department of Labor)
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Department of Labor)
- Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management (Department of Labor)
- Department of Labor Emergency Command Center
- Office of Personnel Management
- Department of Homeland Security
- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
- Disability Preparedness Center
- Department of Transportation
- Department of Defense, Defense Intelligence Agency
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Department of Agriculture
- Job Accommodations Network
- U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board
- Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons

INTRODUCTION



SCOPE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE ISSUE

Americans enjoy relative security in their everyday lives. Yet, the threat of emergency situations caused by natural disasters, technological accidents, or acts of terrorism always looms on the fringes. For Federal Government employees, the threat has been made reality in recent years. Examples include the shutting down of federal offices due to Hurricane Isabel on September 18-19, 2003; the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon on September 11, 2001; and the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal regional building on April 19, 1995.

Emergency situations impacting Federal Government employees rarely announce their

ple with disabilities have been of keen interest, stimulated by accounts of people in wheelchairs being trapped and left to die in the smoke-filled stairwells of the World Trade Center in New York.

The ability to evacuate and/or find shelter during an emergency situation for an employee with a disability can be a daunting task not only for the person with the disability, but also for his or her employer. Consequently, emergency preparedness plans that do not address the unique needs of people with disabilities can limit the employment, promotion, and retention possibilities of an applicant or existing employee with a disability. Specifically, employers may be hesitant to recruit people with disabilities as a result of liability concerns surrounding the ability to secure

“Research and experience in the last decade demonstrate that the needs of federal and private sector employees with disabilities are often omitted during the emergency preparedness planning process.”

imminence. Therefore, it is important for Government agencies to assume a position of preparedness for a disaster or threat to human life, through specific and established plans of action. This condition of preparedness can only be achieved through thoughtful planning, collaboration, and steadfast commitment by federal managers, who have been vested with the responsibility of the safety of their employees.

Research and experience in the last decade demonstrate that the needs of federal and private sector employees with disabilities are often omitted during the emergency preparedness planning process. However, since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the specific needs of peo-

ple with disabilities during an emergency situation. Similarly, people with disabilities may be reluctant to seek employment in certain locations due to a fear of being trapped or not being accommodated in a dangerous situation.

As federal agency emergency plans continue to evolve, it is important to evaluate all scenarios to ensure they include the requirements for people with disabilities. By anticipating such needs during the emergency preparedness planning process, fear and panic can be mitigated and lives can be saved.

Like other federal agencies, the Department of Labor has been actively preparing its office

spaces and buildings for emergency situations for all employees, including employees with disabilities. While much has been done, there remains much to do, in the Department of Labor and throughout the Federal Government, in the Washington, DC area and, particularly, in the regions. The Seminar of Exchange and this Summary Report are a significant step forward.

BACKGROUND ON THE SEMINAR

On December 2-3, 2003 the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy hosted *Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities: An Interagency Seminar of Exchange for Federal Managers* at the Department of Labor headquarters in Washington, DC. The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) was created to enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities through the development of sound policy regarding youth and adults with disabilities, public and private sector employers, employment supports, and employer-focused research.

ODEP's goal in hosting the Seminar of Exchange was to highlight the importance of developing emergency preparedness plans in the federal workplace that include the needs of employees with disabilities. The agenda for the day and a half Seminar of Exchange was designed to allow more than 200 participants—consisting of federal managers and other personnel involved in emergency preparedness—to obtain and share information about specific issues in the development, implementation, and maintenance of emergency preparedness plans for people with disabilities.

The agenda was divided into five general (plenary) sessions and seven breakout sessions, which repeated over the course of a day and a half. Nationally and locally recognized experts provided information and facilitated an exchange of experiences between federal managers aimed at promoting consistent and effective emergency preparedness practices that afford equal protection for people with disabilities. As such, the following were specific objectives of the Seminar:

- To facilitate an exchange of information and dialogue between federal agencies regarding emergency preparedness for people with disabilities;
- To provide a forum where federal agencies could discuss the topic with their regional offices;
- To provide an opportunity for interagency exchange of effective practices related to emergency preparedness in general, and specifically to people with disabilities; and
- To enhance existing employer emergency preparedness plans to include the needs of people with disabilities through the sharing, preparation, and dissemination of resources.



**PART I:
OPENING AND
KEYNOTE
REMARKS**



The following are highlights of the Seminar Opening and Keynote Remarks. Please see the Appendices for the full text of the prepared remarks.

OPENING REMARKS BY W. ROY GRIZZARD, JR., Ed.D., ASSISTANT SECRETARY, OFFICE OF DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT POLICY, U.S. DEPART- MENT OF LABOR

Office of Disability Employment Policy Assistant Secretary, Dr. W. Roy Grizzard, Jr., Ed.D., opened the Seminar with remarks welcoming the more than 200 participants to the Department of Labor. He stressed that emergency preparedness planning for people with disabilities is important to employment opportunities for this group in the Federal Government, as well as in the private sector. “If people with disabilities are going to be in the workplace, then, it



W. Roy Grizzard, Jr., Ed.D., ODEP Assistant Secretary, encouraged federal managers to help ensure the workplace is safe for all employees, including people with disabilities.

becomes paramount that they feel comfortable.... If we are going to encourage employers across the country—private, non-profit and Government entities—to hire people with disabilities, that workplace should be one that is comfortable, healthy and safe and that feeling should be conveyed to those ...[employees].” In support of promot-

ing employment of people with disabilities in all sectors, Dr. Grizzard remarked that the Federal Government “should be a shining example for all employers for how to prepare the workplace for people with disabilities in case [an] emergency does come [about].”

KEYNOTE REMARKS BY SECRETARY ELAINE L. CHAO, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Labor Secretary Elaine L. Chao delivered the keynote remarks on the first day of the Seminar. She congratulated the sponsoring agencies, presenters, and participants for convening this first of its kind seminar on emergency preparedness for federal employ-



Secretary of Labor, Elaine L. Chao, stressed the Department’s commitment to the safety of all federal employees.

ees with disabilities. Secretary Chao characterized emergency preparedness planning that includes employees with disabilities as a priority for the Department of Labor (DOL). She added that “making the federal workplace a model workplace by assuring a safe and secure environment for employees with disabilities” is a critical element in meeting President George W. Bush’s challenge to remove the barriers that impede Americans with disabilities from leading full and independent lives. Secretary Chao pointed out that “every single

day, more than 120,000 employees with disabilities go to work in national headquarters buildings, regional offices or field offices that are owned by or leased by the Federal Government.” She continued, “Their safety, the safety of all federal employees, is our number one priority.” Secretary Chao charged participants to remain committed to including employees with disabilities in their agencies’ emergency preparedness efforts, because their preparation and creative planning will make a difference in the lives of their colleagues. ■



“[E]very single day, more than 120,000 employees with disabilities go to work in national headquarters buildings, regional offices or field offices that are owned by or leased by the Federal Government.... Their safety, and the safety of all federal employees, is our number one priority.”



**PART II:
PLENARY
SESSIONS**

SETTING THE STAGE: THE IMPORTANCE OF EMERGENCY PREPARED- NESS IN A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY

The plenary sessions began with remarks from Daniel Sutherland, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. The purpose of Mr. Sutherland’s remarks was to “set the stage” regarding the importance of developing, implementing, and maintaining emergency preparedness plans for employees and customers with disabilities.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) focuses on mitigating the threat of terror in advance of emergencies by promoting the concept of disaster-resistant communities. DHS has set an aggressive pace in developing and managing national training and evaluation systems to design curriculums, set standards, evaluate, and reward performance in local, state, and federal training efforts. Federal agencies have responded favorably to these and other initiatives by establishing and improving their respective emergency preparedness plans. Additionally, through keen observation and awareness, federal agencies and their employees are doing their parts in combating terrorism. However, even the best security measures can be overcome, so federal agencies and their employees must adequately prepare to address any emergency situation.

In his presentation, Mr. Sutherland remarked generally about the “terror” element that is ever-

present since the events of September 11, 2001. However, he urged people to stand against fear, saying the best way to do this is to be prepared. “If we are [fearful], they are winning, giving them victory. [You] need to be doing what you’re doing, planning and thinking ahead and be ready for what is coming. The job of preparedness is not only the job of professionals. It is not just their job, but all our responsibility to be prepared. And why is that? They can’t do everything, be everywhere.”

“The job of preparedness is not only the job of professionals... but all our responsibility...”

Mr. Sutherland also commented on DHS’s goal of being a model employer for people with disabilities, through the full implementation of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. This is being accomplished by improving internal and external communications, actively recruiting people with disabilities, challenging DHS managers to provide “reasonable accommodations,” and developing effective emergency preparedness plans. As to the latter, he applauded ODEP’s efforts.

Nevertheless, Mr. Sutherland acknowledged that emergency preparedness for people with disabilities deserves more attention for several reasons. First, “if we in the federal workforce



Dan Sutherland, DHS Officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, addressed the importance of emergency preparedness.

have an effective emergency preparedness plan, it is going to make federal managers much more comfortable hiring people with disabilities.” He explained that having effective emergency plans reduces the barriers that people with disabilities encounter in pursuing employment opportunities. Finally, Mr. Sutherland stated that the challenges identified, and eventually eradicated, in emergency preparedness planning for people with disabilities will have an immeasurable positive impact on emergency planning overall. “The problems that people with disabilities face in the context of emergency preparedness can shed so much light on so many related problems. And, the solutions that we develop to solve those problems can shed so much light on other situations.”

LESSONS LEARNED: PERSPECTIVES FROM FEDERAL MANAGERS AND EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES

Seminar participants next heard from Lawrence Roffee, Executive Director, U.S. Architectural and Transportation Compliance Board (Access Board), and Mary Ann Wilson, Director, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in Richmond, VA. These federal managers shared their unique perspectives with Seminar participants—representing the experiences of an agency with a workforce that is 50% disabled (Access Board) and an agency office that has actually endured an emergency situation resulting from terrorism (HUD).



Larry Roffee, U.S. Access Board, and Mary Ann Wilson, U.S. HUD Office in Richmond, VA, shared lessons learned regarding emergency preparedness for people with disabilities.

The goal of this particular session was to develop a clearer understanding of the level of detail required from federal managers to promote safety for their employees with disabilities. The strength of an emergency preparedness plan can never be fully measured until it has been tested in an actual emergency situation. However, it is possible to create new plans and fortify existing emergency plans to ensure they are as comprehensive as possible in securing the safety of employees and customers with disabilities. Some of the most valuable resources in developing such plans are the experiences of federal managers who have addressed the emergency preparedness needs of a significant number of employees with disabilities or who have been involved in an emergency situation.

The central theme of Mr. Roffee’s remarks consisted of the eight rules of emergency preparedness planning for people with disabilities. During his presentation, Roffee admitted that

“...[C]hallenges identified, and eventually eradicated, in emergency preparedness planning for people with disabilities will have an immeasurable positive impact on emergency planning overall.”

prior to September 11, 2001, his agency did not have an adequate emergency preparedness plan, despite the fact that more than half his staff had at least one targeted disability.¹ Following an emergency situation in the privately owned building where the Access Board is located, he became acutely aware of the agency's deficiencies in this area. He set about to rectify the situation. From this process, Roffee identified eight rules to developing effective emergency preparedness plans. He explained that although these rules were gleaned from the experiences of the Access Board, they could be applied to other agencies, where appropriate.

■ **Rule #1: Make sure people with disabilities are an integral part of the planning process.** Roffee explained that a person with a disability knows best what he or she may require in the event of an emergency. Indeed,

“...‘[N]ever make assumptions about what a person with a disability [cannot] do’ and do not hesitate to ask an employee with a disability about the kinds of assistance he or she may need in the event of an emergency.”

the contributions of an employee with a disability can be advantageous to the overall emergency preparedness planning effort. As Roffee quipped, “I’m guessing that [a blind] person [is in a better position to lead someone] out in a dark smoky stairwell much easier than a sighted person.” Moreover, Roffee urged people to “never make assumptions about what a person with a disability [cannot] do” and do not hesitate to ask an employee with a disability about the kinds of assistance he or she may need in the event of an emergency.

■ **Rule #2: Inform the local fire department about any particular issues that you have identified with respect to the employees with disabilities.**

More importantly, be sure to let the fire department know where



employees with disabilities are located in the facility. According to Roffee, “Fire officials really do not want a bunch of people carrying a bunch of other people with disabilities out of the building.” Doing so may cause more chaos and actually impede fire officials from stabilizing the situation. It is important to “work with the local fire department” to develop plans that are not cumbersome.

■ **Rule #3: Communicate with building managers and engineers about the various communication, alarm and sprinkler systems in the building, as well as the designated location of “areas of rescue assistance.”** The importance of being familiar with these systems cannot be over emphasized, as they will have a vast impact on the design of an emergency preparedness plan.

■ **Rule #4: Do not rely on a “buddy system.”** A buddy system typically consists of assigning an able-bodied employee to assist an

employee with a disability in the event of an emergency. Roffee emphatically maintained that the “buddy system simply does not work” for several reasons. It can lead to “not-my-job syndrome.” Or, at the very least, the buddy assigned to the employee with a disability may not be in the office the very day, hour, or moment an alarm sounds. A better more effective alternative, suggested Roffee, is to have the volunteers and the employees with disabilities convene in a pre-determined area and wait for further instruction.

■ **Rule #5: Purchase evacuation chairs, and plan to evacuate any mobility devices (e.g., wheelchairs) that evacuation chair users may require once they have been removed from the emergency situation.** According to Roffee, many fire departments have ladders that cannot reach the entire height of a multiple story building. By having evacuation chairs available, people with disabilities can, at the very least, be moved to an area or floor where emergency response personnel can assist them further. Additionally, having a plan in place that provides for the evacuation of mobility devices makes for a smoother transition for the employees who use these devices. Otherwise, employees will be “basically helpless” once they have left the emergency situation.

■ **Rule #6: Plan for communications.** This includes not only developing a system of communication that is accessible to and useable by everyone, but also knowing how to utilize the system.

■ **Rule #7: Designate an emergency situation room.** This room should have windows that face the street, along with a “HELP HERE” sign. This room should also be equipped with telephones and other equipment pertinent to your communication plan.

■ **Rule #8: Practice, practice, practice!**

Roffee regarded practicing as an essential component of emergency preparedness. It is impossible to adequately prepare for an emergency situation without having practiced. Roffee also stated that apathy about practicing weakens a good emergency preparedness plan. Therefore, it is very important to practice regularly, and to ensure that each practice session is taken as seriously as an actual emergency.

Mary Ann Wilson’s remarks were based upon her experiences on September 11, 2001, while assigned to the HUD office at the World Trade Center in New York. She depicted a scene of unwavering uncertainty that was augmented by the lack of a comprehensive plan. The deficiencies were numerous. Wilson told participants that she was unaware of the following issues at the time: the evacuation policy; the members of her staff who were in the office; who had a disability and the nature of those disabilities; an accessible door designed to accommodate a person with a disability did not work; the communication system was inaudible; and the service elevator, used by people unable to take the stairs, was experiencing problems.

Like Roffee of the Access Board, Wilson provided participants with a checklist of important items she considered critical to emergency preparedness. In many respects, they were similar to the eight rules presented by Roffee. For example:

- Wilson implored participants to practice. However, she added that employees should be debriefed after every drill to find out how the emergency plan succeeds, and, more importantly, how it fails.

- She suggested that agencies have a regularly updated continuity of operations plan that not only considers the needs of people with disabilities, but that also makes them a part of the planning process.
- Her next suggestion was to make sure the evacuation plan is posted and accessible—and strongly encourage all employees to be familiar with it.
- Another suggestion proffered was to establish a policy where employees should take necessary items (e.g., a purse and car keys) when attending meetings or conducting other business away from their desk, even if it is in the same building.
- Wilson also urged participants to remain flexible at all costs. “Don’t count on any thing. Be prepared, because so many things are not going to work. And, you are just going to have to be flexible and prepared to go at it another way.”

FEDERAL AGENCY SHOWCASE: EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLANS THAT INVOLVE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

When it comes to developing, implementing and maintaining an emergency preparedness plan that includes people with disabilities, there is no standard formula. Federal agencies vary in size, location, structure design, and budget. Moreover, within any given federal agency, whether in the District of Columbia metropolitan area or in the regions, the number of employees with disabilities varies substantially. So then, how can an agency develop a plan that adequate-

ly addresses its unique circumstances? A universal first-step is to engage in dialogue with other federal agencies to assess some of the processes instituted, barriers encountered, and noteworthy resources available. In this session, participants heard from three federal agencies about the rudimentary elements of their emergency preparedness plans, which adequately include people with disabilities: U.S. Department of Labor (DOL); U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT); U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Intelligence Agency (DOD/DIA).

Each of these agencies was chosen because of their specific processes and unique circumstances. For example, DOL is a medium-sized agency with field offices across the United States. DOT is a somewhat larger agency, with a significantly more intricate institutional structure. DOD/DIA is a large office within the largest federal agency that employs a significant number of people with disabilities.

In many ways, each of these federal agencies’ plans was similar. In just as many ways, their plans were different. Of greater importance for this session was the discussion related to how they developed, implemented, and maintain these plans in order to ensure the safety of their employees with disabilities. The objective was to provide a comprehensive summary of the various approaches to developing an emergency preparedness plan that includes people with disabilities.

Department of Labor

Al Stewart, the Director of Business Operations, presented the DOL’s plan to participants. Stewart explained that the creation and designation of an emergency

response team (ERT) was the first element of establishing DOL's current emergency preparedness plan. The ERT is "comprised of a broad array of officials from within the Department" to ensure that all essential issues are addressed.



Al Stewart, DOL Director of Business Operations, talked about the agency's plan.

Additionally, the DOL Office of the Inspector General conducted assessments of the DOL national and regional facilities. This activity resulted in the conclusion that a "cookie-cutter" approach was not appropriate. Instead, DOL officials determined that it was a better and more efficient practice "to tailor and address the needs, based on what the situation was for the specific population of people," to include people with disabilities. A key element of the updated DOL plan is the shift in focus from the security manager force to the building occupants. As part of this shift, DOL revised its evacuation handbook to include blueprints of the DOL facilities and an illustration of collection points for people evacuating the building.

The plan also includes two shelter-in-place policies. The first shelter-in-place policy (Posture I Advisory) requires employees to go back to their designated areas and wait for more instructions. The second policy for shelter-in-place (Posture II Advisory), used in instances that are deemed highly critical, requires employees remain in the building in a pre-designated secure area. DOL

also utilizes "designated Floor Wardens and Zone Monitors" equipped with radios on every floor to ensure "that all the offices in evacuation are cleared and that individuals who may need assistance... have that assistance in reaching their destination."

In developing, implementing and maintaining the emergency preparedness plan at DOL, Stewart underscored three critical points:

- First, emergency preparedness requires continuous training and review, because there are always upgrades that can be made.
- Second, the importance of two-way communication cannot be over emphasized. Collecting and analyzing feedback from people within the agency who have participated in drills makes the emergency preparedness plan much stronger.
- Third, Stewart asserted, "Practice is key to having a successful emergency plan for a federal agency." Practice should occur on a regular basis, so it becomes second nature to all employees.

Department of Transportation

The development and implementation strategy of the DOT Emergency Preparedness Plan was presented by John Benison, Disability Policy Advisor, DOT Office of Civil Rights. According to Benison, the development and implementation of an emergency preparedness plan that addresses people with disabilities is necessary to be in compliance with Sections 501 and 504 of the Rehabilitation



John Benison,
DOT Disability Policy Advisor,
highlighted key aspects of the
agency's planning process.

Act of 1973, as amended. At DOT, emergency preparedness is seen as an accommodation for employees, and therefore, “essential.” Furthermore, the basic philosophy of the Department is that “individuals with disabilities, DOT employees, and other employees should not feel any more vulnerable than anyone else in an emergency situation.”

Benison outlined six specific procedures and practices that went into the development and implementation of the DOT emergency preparedness plan:

- **Obtaining support from the highest level:** At DOT, this critical step was accomplished through a Secretarial memorandum to top leaders. The memorandum, by its very existence, demonstrated both the significance of this issue to all the Departmental employees and the Secretary's commitment to individuals with disabilities. For example, the memorandum designated specific roles and responsibilities in developing the emergency preparedness plan. It also required that people with disabilities be involved in the plan development, and mandated that the DOT Secretary be provided a summary of steps that had been or would be taken (to fulfill the responsibilities and roles delineated). Accordingly, implementation and maintenance of the plan met with little resistance.

- **Ensuring that everyone at DOT has a responsibility in emergency preparedness:** The senior management has oversight responsibility. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring the safety of their employees, and employees with disabilities are responsible for their own safety, which includes providing needed information to personnel responsible for assisting them in the event of an emergency. Finally, the facility, emergency, and security personnel have the responsibility of planning for emergency situations in general, as well as considering the unique needs of people with disabilities.

- **Managing emergency information:** According to Benison, DOT's plan provides specific details on the kind of information that can be requested from a DOT employee with a disability and how that information can be used. However, the plan also stresses assumptions should not be made about whether an individual needs assistance. In addition, the information should be given voluntarily, and any information obtained about an individual's disability should be kept confidential. Benison regarded the most important aspects of this portion of the DOT emergency plan as information collected about the kind of assistance needed, the individual's work schedule, and his/her contact information. The plan also requires this information be compiled for emergency management personnel (e.g., supervisors and security personnel).

- **Communicating with and training employees:** Benison emphasized that at DOT it is a requirement that a specific communication plan related to emergency

preparedness be issued to all employees, in an accessible format. The plan itself provides information on required procedures in emergency situations—such as allowing individuals with disabilities to report to work before, during, and after regular business hours. Benison advised Seminar participants that DOT is developing a training program on the existing emergency

the Access Board, the National Organization on Disability (NOD), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

- **Making sure the emergency preparedness plan remains as current as possible:** One of the ways this is accomplished is by reviewing the lessons

“...[E]veryone—from agency employees to experts and external stakeholders—needed to be involved in the emergency preparedness planning process.”

preparedness guidelines. It will be available to all DOT employees through e-learning technology and other means. Under this program, the DOT operating administration will be required to provide training to new DOT employees. Additionally, anytime the plan is updated training will be mandatory for all employees.

- **Developing the emergency preparedness guidelines:** Benison identified this as an effective practice in and of itself. The development of the DOT guidelines began with the creation of a workgroup, consisting of representatives for the DOT operating administrations, employee groups, and specific employees with disabilities. The workgroup served as a vehicle for obtaining input and feedback on procedures under development. By establishing a workgroup and utilizing the information generated through their research and discussion, the guidelines are comprehensive and thorough. Some of the resources that have been explored include information from Federal Government and non-Federal Government entities, such as the Job Accommodations Network (JAN),

learned from drills, practices, and other issues that present themselves. Additionally, Benison noted that the DOT emergency preparedness plan is continually updated; employees are regularly educated on the substance of the plan; and the equipment is as current as possible.

Department of Defense, Defense Intelligence Agency

The last presentation of this plenary session came from Pamela Butler, Deaf and Disabled Persons Program Manager in the Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity Office at the Department of Defense, Defense Intelligence Agency (DOD/DIA). While DIA's plan proved to be similar in many ways to the other plans presented, there were some distinct nuances.

According to Butler, the development of DIA's emergency plan required the consideration of many factors. First, DIA is a 24-hour worldwide operation, which requires that the emergency plan be “conducive to daytime, nighttime, any-

time, weekends, [and the] regular work week.” Second, DIA has an older workforce and a significant number of employees with temporary and permanent disabilities. Third, DIA is undergoing construction and is surrounded by a berm² for security reasons. Each of these situations presents unique challenges related to emergency preparedness planning for people with disabilities.

Given these challenges, it was quickly decided that everyone—from agency employees to experts and external stakeholders—needed to be involved in the emergency preparedness planning process. Some of the actions DIA took included:

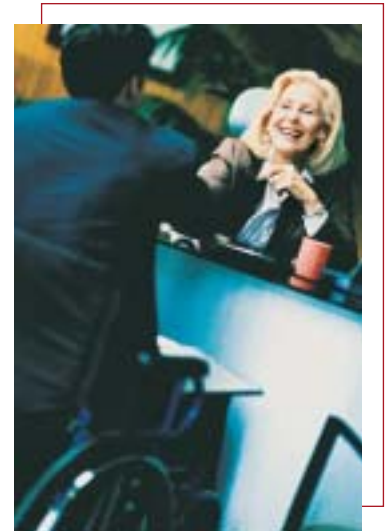
- Soliciting advice and counsel from the entire Department of Defense (DOD) network;
- Obtaining information from the local fire department; and
- Working closely with DIA senior leadership and others that have access to the DIA facility or are otherwise involved.

As a result of this open planning process, the DIA emergency plan requires that SES personnel and their deputies be designated as Area Assembly Commanders and Deputy Area Assembly



Pam Butler, DIA Deaf and Disabled Persons Program Manager, described steps taken by the agency.

Commanders, respectively. They are held responsible and accountable for their office, their directorates, and for all employees in that area. Another component of the plan is an alert messaging system that overrides the DIA computer networks to advise individuals of an emergency situation. Additional components of the DIA emergency plan are the routine, but mandatory, “quick mass training” sessions and the one-on-one training sessions for every DIA employee, including those with disabilities.



Also coming out of the DIA plan is an innovative system of evaluating the drills conducted throughout the year. According to Butler, the purpose of the drill evaluation system is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of DIA’s emergency preparedness plan. DIA uses a *red*, *yellow*, and *green* grading system. A grade of *yellow* indicates that modifications in specific areas are needed, while a grade of *red* requires all personnel involved in an area to be retrained regarding the DIA emergency preparedness plan. Additionally, DIA has developed a communication and information dissemination plan that includes conducting regular information sessions and publishing information in a variety of formats. Yet another process born out of the plan is identifying training programs geared toward DIA emergency personnel (e.g., Floor Wardens) and requiring them in turn to train other DIA employees.

Making employees feel comfortable about their responsibilities and the established plan is an integral part of DIA emergency preparedness. For example, DIA conducts drills where instead of employees physically evacuating from an area or floor, firemen go to where the employees are located. The firemen talk to employees, either as a group or individually, about perceived next steps and give advice in accordance with the employees' specific limitations. DIA's plan also calls for the provision of counseling by trained personnel for individuals who may have a debilitating emotional or psychiatric reaction to the stress of an emergency.

Through the process of developing and implementing the DIA emergency preparedness plan, many lessons have been learned, said Butler. Foremost of these lessons is that communication

facilitated by Dr. Beth Loy and Linda Batiste, was designed to promote creative solutions to unique situations related to the development, implementation, and maintenance of an emergency preparedness plan that involves people with disabilities. In this unconventional session, Loy and Batiste, Human Factor Consultants with the Job Accommodations Network (JAN), presented participants with various workplace scenarios, involving people with an array of disabilities. They were then asked to brainstorm about the appropriate solution to implement in an emergency preparedness plan. Additionally, the participants were afforded an opportunity to learn about the ODEP-sponsored JAN and the services it offers, which include resources for building and maintaining disability-friendly plans.

“...[C]ommunication and accountability are essential to the success of an emergency preparedness plan...”

and accountability are essential to the success of an emergency preparedness plan. It is vital that every person be accounted for, with mandatory cooperation. Added Butler, teamwork is fundamental to a plan's success: everyone must work together.

SITUATIONS AND SOLUTIONS: EXCHANGING INNOVATIVE IDEAS

Creativity and access to appropriate resources are integral aspects of developing a successful emergency preparedness plan. The next general session, *Situations and Solutions: Exchanging Innovative Ideas*,

Loy and Batiste presented an array of situations and solutions and facilitated a general discussion of possible solutions proffered by Seminar participants. Some examples of the issues discussed are below. Please note that while the various examples may not necessarily apply to specific federal jobs, the concepts may be applied where appropriate.

Situation 1:

An individual has post-traumatic stress resulting from a burn injury sustained at work. This individual works on the third floor of a multi-story building. However, since sustaining the injury, he has had difficulty returning to the building due to anxiety.

Solutions:

- Place the individual near an exit, so they will have comfort in knowing they will not have to go too far to evacuate the building.
- Relocate the individual to the first floor.
- During drills, this individual does not have to participate. (*Regarding this issue Loy and Batiste noted that this solution is very controversial. An alternative would be to conduct individual drills for the person, breaking each element of the drill into small steps.*)
- Encourage the individual to work with an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)³
- Talk with the individual, asking what would help increase his comfort level.
- Utilize a “buddy system.” Connect the individual with someone whom he will feel comfortable with and who will personally escort the individual during an emergency situation.
- Allow the individual to work from home as much as possible, depending on the required job duties.

Situation 2:

A guidance counselor who has a speech impairment must communicate her needs to people during an emergency situation.

Solutions:

- Provide the individual with pre-written notes regarding things she may need to say.
- Provide the individual with a laminated card (in case it gets wet) that has pictographs, so that she can point to various things.

- Utilize sign language. (*Loy and Batiste pointed out that this is useful only if the individual knows sign language.*)
- Install closed-captioned television in designated areas of the building. (*Loy and Batiste pointed out that this may be of no use if the person with the speech impairment will need to do the communicating.*)
- Provide the individual with a flashlight for an established Morse code-type communication system or to see pre-written notes (in the dark).
- Provide the individual with battery-operated text services.
- Provide a bullhorn or other speech amplification/enhancer device.

Situation 3:

A secretary, who works on the 21st floor of an office building, is blind and uses a service animal. The building design is a complex maze of hallways and cubicles.

Solutions:

- Locate the individual’s desk reasonably close to the exit and practice evacuation techniques. (*Loy commented that assigning a person with a disability, to a specific location based on the fact that the individual has a disability might be seen as discriminatory segregation, despite the fact that it is done solely to ensure the person’s safety. However, this potential problem can usually be overcome by involving the employee with the disability in the decision-making process. If the employee prefers to be moved to a location closer to an exit, then this accommodation is likely appropriate.*)

Another consideration advanced by a Seminar participant on this issue was that placing the individual next to the exit and making this her main means to evacuate may cause more problems. Specifically, the exit door may be impacted by the emergency, and the individual may not have any other recourse.)

- Provide the individual with tactile maps and clues, so that she becomes familiar with the alternate exits and can locate them on her own.
- Provide the individual and service animal with plenty of one-on-one training, to include mobility training, so that she becomes familiar with the tactile signals.
- Provide the service animal with equipment or devices that will allow it to assist the employee. For example, provide a service dog with booties for his feet. This may help the dog negotiate hot surfaces or broken glass.
- Install an alarm system that signals where an exit is located.
- Tape record simulations. *(Loy and Batiste built on this concept, explaining to Seminar participants tape-recorded simulations could be provided to the employee. The recording would advise the individual of alternative exit routes throughout a building.)*

Situation 4:

A warehouse employee, who is deaf, works in an environment where heavy pieces of machinery move at high speeds. Because of the fast-paced environment, the worker has difficulty recognizing emergency signals.



Seminar participants listened as common situations were presented, and then provided possible solutions.

Solutions:

- Install strobe lights strategically throughout the warehouse.
- Install mirrors on all intersections within the warehouse.
- Install a device in a strategic location that vibrates or provide the individual with a vibrating pager to alert them of an emergency.
- Inform other employees of the situation, so that they can be watchful and careful as well.
- Provide the individual with a brightly colored vest or hat. *(Loy and Batiste commented that this is a controversial solution, as the individual may not want to be pointed out. The best thing to do is talk with the employee about the available options and determine the option that works best for all involved.)*

Situation 5:

A clerical assistant with mental retardation has difficulty quickly evacuating her workplace.

Solutions:

- Implement the buddy system, consisting of a team of colleagues to assist the individual.

- Utilize a series of pictograms to help the individual understand that there is an emergency situation or a drill and describe what steps must be taken to get to safety.
- Make emergency preparedness a part of the individual's job coaching experience.
- Color code fire doors.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: STRENGTHENING YOUR AGENCY'S EMERGENCY PLAN

Throughout the Seminar of Exchange, participants were provided an opportunity to explore a number of specific issues related to emergency preparedness planning for people with disabilities, ranging from communicating with employees to individualizing emergency preparedness plans. Each of these topics is important in and of itself. However, an effective emergency preparedness plan requires that these elements be thoroughly and appropriately integrated to ensure the safety of all employees.

The objective of the final plenary session was to summarize the discussions held throughout the Seminar, as well as to help participants manage expectations and remain grounded in the reality of the planning process as they move forward. To this end, a three-person panel outlined specific points that participants should keep in mind. The panelists, national experts in the field of emergency preparedness planning for people with disabilities, were Elizabeth Davis, Director, Emergency Preparedness Initiative (EPI), National Organization on Disability (NOD); June Kailes, Associate Director, Center for Disability Issues and the



Elizabeth Davis, Director of NOD's Emergency Preparedness Initiative (EPI), listened as other panelists addressed plan implementation and maintenance.

Health Professions, Western University of Health Sciences; and Edwina Julliet, Co-Founder, National Taskforce on Fire/Life Safety for People with Disabilities.

Development

The first set of points concerned the development of emergency preparedness plans and was delivered by Davis, who stressed the importance of avoiding emergency preparedness planning in a vacuum. Davis stated that:

1. *Often those charged with developing an emergency preparedness plan are doing so on the basis of a directive to create a plan, but with little support, guidance, or commitment from within the agency.* As such, they are often unaware of other issues impacting plan development and/or implementation. This can lead to duplication of efforts, general chaos, and confusion.
2. *In order to develop the best plan for an agency, it is imperative that federal agencies share information about all aspects of their specific planning processes, including successes and failures.* Davis explained, "We want to make sure we replicate the successes and we don't replicate the failures. So, the sharing of information across agency

lines is critical.” Sharing also ensures that agencies are not relying on the same resources or setting protocol that will conflict with other plans. This is especially true in situations where agencies share office space or are housed in close proximity.

3. *“Planning is a constant, ongoing effort.”* As such, plans and other associated documents should be regarded as living documents or latest versions, but never as final or complete. Said Davis, “The minute [the plan] says it’s the final version, is the minute it gathers dust and cobwebs.”
4. *At all times, strive to exceed the minimum standards set by the plan.* For example, if a plan calls for having one drill a year on a regular schedule, respond proactively. Raise the bar to one regularly scheduled drill and one unannounced drill per year. In doing so, Davis said that weaknesses in the plan will be revealed.
5. *“Successful plans and efforts come about when we involve all levels of an organization, both in the planning as well as the actual implementation stage.”* According to Davis, you never know who will find themselves in a position where they need to respond.
6. *Seek out creative solutions, which incorporate tools, equipment, resources and new property in ways well beyond the original intended use.* Nevertheless, solutions do not have to be high-tech or expensive. Often low-tech interim protocols can have as much of an impact as the

final tool and policy under development. The point is something can often be better than nothing, as long as it is carefully considered and properly implemented.

Implementation

The second set of points targeted implementation of emergency preparedness plans for people with disabilities. Kailes stressed that the impetus for the successful implementation of an emergency preparedness plan is to ensure that all the targeted individuals of an inclusive plan are taken into consideration.

1. *Make it as comfortable as possible for people to self-identify that they may require assistance during an emergency situation.* Kailes insisted, “Many people who need assistance will never, ever identify as having a disability or having...a special need.” As such, according to Kailes, the effectiveness of emergency preparedness plans can be thwarted by an individual’s failure to self-identify that he or she has a disability. She surmised that this can be primarily attributed to the fact that “unfortunately, many people still attach a broad amount of stigma to disability and do whatever they can to stay away from that effort.”



June Issacson Kailes, Associate Director of the Center for Disability Issues and Health Professions at Western University of Health and Sciences.

2. *Ensure the plan is understandable and readable.* This will impact plans positively. Specifically, emergency preparedness plans should be formatted with bullets and pictures, as well as be available in Braille, large print, cassette tape or electronic text versions.
3. *Establish support networks.* Kailes specifically referenced the “buddy system” as a perfect illustration of support networks being beneficial. Recognizing that buddy systems are flawed in a number of ways, Kailes implored the participants to “rethink” the buddy system in broader terms. This means ensuring that everyone, including individuals with disabilities, is trained in various aspects of the emergency plan, despite any obvious limitations.

For example, while an individual in a wheelchair may not be able to take someone down the stairs in an evacuation chair, that individual could instruct someone else on doing so. In developing implementation processes such as this, people who require assistance during an emergency situation will “have a much broader network they can rely on.”

4. *Practice emergency plans through a variety of drills.* Kailes’ fourth point re-emphasized the importance of practicing emergency plans through planned and impromptu drills. Drills unveil weakness-

es in emergency planning, through a comprehensive analysis of employee feedback. To this end, it is imperative that all people participate and provide feedback regarding the successes and failures of a drill. While impromptu drills are an excellent way to solidify employees’ grasp of the plan, it is also helpful to “actually appoint key people that know when the next surprise drill happens, so as to be able to evaluate everything that happens, and...develop action steps accordingly.”

Maintenance and the Future

Juillet’s presentation focused on the maintenance of emergency preparedness plans in light of looking toward the future. The emphasis was on alarms, elevators, and evacuation devices. Her primary point was that engineering trends, Government codes, and industry standards will shape emergency preparedness plans by requiring increased egress safety for the building occupants with disabilities.

Alarms. With respect to alarms, Juillet explained that design and performance requirements are governed by “NFPA-72” (National Fire Protection Association). NFPA-72 permits voice annunciation override of alarms. Nevertheless, there should be the incorporation of more “intelligent” messaging, which would convey additional information—other than evacuation and sheltering in place—and consider the needs of persons with hearing impairments and cognitive impairments.

“Planning is a constant, ongoing effort.”

Elevators. On the issue of elevators, Juillet acknowledged the inconsistent messages regarding the use of elevators during an emergency. Historically, elevator use during an emergency has been regarded as dangerous, prohibited in virtually all instances.

Juillet expressed the paramount need for an active committee or council on these issues related to evacuation equipment, alarms, and, particularly, elevator use for emergency egress in order to assure these developments will be realized as quickly as possible. ■

“Historically, elevator use during an emergency has been regarded as dangerous, prohibited in virtually all instances. However, some elevators are indeed operable during an emergency situation.”

However, some elevators are indeed operable during an emergency situation. Specifically, Juillet stated that such elevators share several characteristics intended to ensure safety and reliability: they must be installed in a smoke-proof hoistway constructed to a two-hour fire resistance and pressurized against smoke infiltration, with enclosed lobbies having a two-hour resistance (one-hour in buildings fully equipped with sprinklers) and being pressurized.

Evacuation Devices. The final issue discussed by Juillet was evacuation devices. She defined evacuation devices as the “devices people can transfer (in)to, to get up or downstairs to be able to evacuate the building.” Juillet noted that currently there are no requirements for the manufacture, use, or operation of this class of devices. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) technical committee “Means of Egress” (chapter 5 of the Life Safety Code 101) has convened a task group, *Evacuation Devices in Stairwells*, to examine use, specifications for equipment and operations, etc.



Edwina Juillet, Co-Founder of the National Taskforce on Fire/Life Safety for People with Disabilities, explained the current state of alarms, elevators, and evacuation devices.



**PART III:
BREAKOUT
SESSIONS**

The Seminar breakout sessions provided participants an opportunity to discuss specific emergency preparedness issues that impact employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The objective of these sessions was to facilitate an information sharing exchange about the impact of current policies, rather than the development of policy recommendations. A pre-selected facilitator led each session and discussions were documented and summarized at the close of each day by an assigned rapporteur.

A. Communicating with Employees

The ability to communicate effectively with all employees is vital to the development, implementation, and maintenance of any emergency preparedness plan. Communication or lack thereof can impact the establishment of emergency plans, maintenance of an effective plan, and response to drills and/or an actual emergency. In short, it directly impacts an individual's ability to remain safe in an emergency, and can mean the difference between life and death.

“Communication or lack thereof...directly impacts an individual's ability to remain safe in an emergency, and can mean the difference between life and death.”

The *Communicating with Employees* forum gave participants the opportunity to learn about communication strategies that can be used to ensure employees with disabilities are part of the emergency preparedness process. Topics that were addressed included specific considerations for communicating with employees who are deaf or hard of hearing, identifying employees requiring assistance, and obtaining necessary information from employees in a manner

consistent with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

According to Dr. Carl Cameron, founder of The Disability Preparedness Center, several factors can impact communication in the emergency preparedness process. First and foremost, people with disabilities are not included in the planning process. Little, if any, communication exists between planners and the disability community. This may be due in part to a lack of training or understanding regarding the needs of people with disabilities. Because of the varying communication, support, and health considerations among people with disabilities, emergency planning and response personnel may not know how or where to begin in considering this segment of the workforce. Cameron offered these suggestions to emergency management personnel and federal managers:

- **Involve people with disabilities in the planning process:** Take into account both the meeting space and materials. Make sure they are accessible to personnel with disabilities.
- **Include disability specific procedures:** This may entail reviewing the emergency plan, securing input from individuals with disabilities as to what accommodations are necessary, and developing procedures and practicing them.
- **Train response personnel:** It is important to include information for assisting individuals with disabilities in emergency preparedness training, but be prepared for

disagreement—particularly within the disability community. Involve individuals with disabilities as trainers.

- **Provide pro-active information:** Make sure information is readily accessible in a variety of formats (e.g., in a Word document, via the Web). Secure and share materials regarding emergency preparedness for people with disabilities with emergency management personnel and employees.

- **Create a special needs list**

Cheryl Heppner, Executive Director of The Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons, addressed some of the unique considerations for communicating with employees who are deaf or hard of hearing.

“Plans need to include ways to relay the same level of detailed information to all staff at all times.”

Plans need to include ways to relay the same level of detailed information to all staff at all times. This involves determining such considerations as how information will be conveyed to deaf or hard of hearing employees when they are



Sharon Rennert, EEOC Attorney, looked on while Cheryl Heppner, Executive Director for the Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, described communication strategies.

away from their desks or office. As Heppner noted, an emergency plan is useless unless an individual understands the type of emergency or shelter-in-place. She provided the following example:

A deaf individual had no knowledge of what had happened at the Twin Towers or the Pentagon. A co-worker hand-signed the word, “war” and told him to get out. When he was outside the building, he didn’t see any of his co-workers, so he went back into the office. One co-worker, who was still there, again spelled out in sign alphabet the word “war” and told him to go home. He had no detailed information on what was going on.

This experience was not unique. Reports from organizations “indicated that widespread difficul-

ties were experienced across the nation” (Heppner, 2003, p. 2).⁴ A national follow-up survey in Spring 2003 asked what plans or procedures had been implemented. “This second survey found that only a few isolated attempts had been made across the U.S. and that there was little or no sharing of information or coordination of efforts” (Heppner, 2003, p. 2).

Given these findings, she sees five key points when communicating with employees who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- Implement a variety of systems to communicate, not just one;
- Develop strategies for communicating with people who are away from their desk;
- Involve people who are deaf or hard of hearing in the planning process;

- Ensure that the emergency-planning manual has information specific to people who are deaf or hard of hearing; and
- Advocate for a variety of communication methods.

However, Cameron also pointed out that persons with disabilities must take responsibility for their own well-being and should play an active (not passive) role in the process. Clarifying roles and responsibilities of both the emergency management staff and building occupants, having a plan of action, and practicing the plan to make sure it is effective are essential elements to emergency planning. The worst-case scenario must be considered when making plans.

Additional elements include the psychological and human factors that impact plans. People with cognitive disabilities and/or some psychiatric issues may have difficulty understanding what is happening or dealing with the need to alter routines in an emergency situation. Others may require assistance, such as someone to help during an evacuation or a shelter-in-place. Talking directly to individual employees about their needs is imperative. Just as one emergency plan does not fit every agency, one employee with a disability does not represent all employees with disabilities in an agency.

Agencies can talk to employees about their needs and involve people with disabilities in the planning process consistent with the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act. Sharon Rennert, Senior Attorney Advisor with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), explained there are two main issues related to employee information and emergency planning: 1) obtaining information from employees and 2) sharing the information with others.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, does not bar agencies or federal contractors from gathering pertinent information (e.g., the type(s) of emergency assistance an individual needs and how it relates to the individual's disability), or disseminating it to necessary personnel; nevertheless, there are some guidelines as to how and when the information can be obtained, and the exact nature and with whom the data can be shared. Employers are permitted to get employee medical information for use in emergency planning. It is important to reassure employees of confidentiality: that the information will be shared only with those responsible for safety and emergency evacuation. Rennert stressed the value of having a dialogue with employees, and clearly sharing the reason for collecting information.

There are three key opportunities to obtain information that may be critical for emergency purposes:

1. After the job offer is made but before an individual begins work, the agency may ask the person to complete a questionnaire regarding emergency evacuation needs.
2. An agency may periodically survey the entire workforce.
3. If the manager knows that an individual has a disability, he or she can ask whether the individual might need assistance during an emergency. For example, consider a shelter-in-place: does an employee have dietary or medical needs? Also, keep in mind that there may not be an interpreter in the shelter. Determine what accommodations are needed to communicate with a person who is deaf.

With regard to sharing the information with others, here are several important points to keep in mind:

1. Designate an individual at your agency who knows and clearly understands these needs. Ensure that someone is responsible for providing the necessary assistance.
2. Share only necessary and appropriate information regarding emergency needs—not irrelevant disability-related information—with safety and emergency evacuation personnel.

Following the presentations, the discussion and questions centered around the need for employees to take an active role in preparedness efforts and the steps being taken to improve plans and technology access in the Federal Government.

Although plans may exist, there is often an element of the unknown during an emergency. More importantly, emergency personnel may be unable to meet every need immediately. Employees must also take active steps to prepare on a personal level. Consideration must be given to what will happen not only during, but also following an emergency. For example, how will employees get home if public transportation is not operating? What happens if an employee requires medication during a shelter-in-place? Effective practices may include keeping extra supplies and medication at the office. Several concerns included storing such items, and whether or not additional medication would be approved and covered by doctors and insurance companies.

With regard to efforts being made by the Federal Government to ensure plans are inclusive, it was noted that no federal agency is tasked with this responsibility. Evaluation standards for such plans would be difficult given the differences in

size, structure, and location among agencies. Nevertheless, agencies may be working individually to strengthen emergency preparedness plans. For example, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) has an initiative to improve access to technology.

B. Equipment Decisions

One of the most critical aspects of implementing and maintaining an effective plan is determining the type of equipment necessary to keep employees safe, whether it be during a shelter-in-place or an evacuation. *Equipment Decisions* provided an overview of emergency preparedness equipment and the various resources available to assist agencies during the selection and procurement decision-making process. Employee needs, architectural realities, budgetary constraints, and agency characteristics undoubtedly impact such decisions. The goal of this session, therefore, was not simply to supply attendees with an equipment checklist or identify the “best” products, but rather address the following issues:

- The various types of disability-specific equipment;
- The resources available to make equipment decisions; and
- Ways to promote appropriate equipment use in the event of an emergency.

Dr. Beth Loy and Linda Batiste, the presenters for this breakout session, work as Human Factor Consultants at the Job Accommodation Network (JAN). As they explained to Seminar participants, the mission of JAN is to provide information to employers and employees with disabilities regarding job accommodations, the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the employability of people with disabilities.



Beth Loy, JAN Human Factors Consultant, provided practical steps in making equipment decisions.

Although JAN staff responds to a variety of questions, Loy said the number of inquiries related to workplace safety and emergency preparedness issues have certainly increased since the events of September 11, 2001. The year prior to September 11th, JAN received approximately 35 calls regarding accommodations in the event of an emergency. The following year, the organization received nearly 2.5 times (94) the number of inquiries on the topic. That number has remained consistently high in successive years, with the majority of calls originating from the East Coast.

JAN developed the *Employer's Guide to Including Employees with Disabilities in Emergency Evacuation Plans* in response to the most commonly asked questions, and it served as the basis for the breakout session presentation and discussion. Topics addressed in the guide include the legal requirements for developing plans that include people with disabilities; guidelines for implementing and maintaining such plans; and accommodation considerations for individuals with different types of disabilities.

Legal Requirements

Two laws prohibit employers from discriminating against people with disabilities in regard to any

employment practices, conditions, and privileges: the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. Private employers with 15 or more employees are subject to the ADA, while federal agencies and their contractors must comply with the Rehabilitation Act. The ADA does not require an employer to develop an emergency preparedness plan, but if one is implemented, it must include people with disabilities. Employers who do not have emergency evacuation plans may still have to address emergency evacuation for employees with disabilities under Title 1 of the ADA, which requires employers provide "reasonable accommodations." Specific industry employers may also be obligated to develop emergency plans based on the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act), state, or local law.

Whether the development of such a plan is mandatory or voluntary, Loy and Batiste offered practical advice for involving employees with disabilities in the process. They said the key is communication, along with the following practices:

Identify the needs of employees and visitors. This can be done by directly requesting information from employees, in accordance with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidelines. It may also be helpful to conduct evacuation and hazard drills, as well as to develop a means of identifying visitors requiring accommodations in emergency situations.

Choose effective accommodations. Often employees with disabilities are a good resource for accommodation ideas. Remember to consider temporary impairments and hidden disabilities. Employers may also contact local first responders and community organizations (e.g., fire and police departments, Centers for Independent Living (CILs)). JAN also provides specific accommodation ideas on a case-by-case basis.

Distribute the plan to all employees, staff, and key personnel. This should include writing the plan, familiarizing staff with it through practice drills, and integrating the plan into the agency operating procedures.

Maintain the plan. Practice the plan regularly and update the accommodations from time to time. It is often beneficial to maintain a relationship with local fire, police, and other emergency response personnel. Equipment should be inspected periodically to make sure it is in proper working order.

Evaluating Equipment Options

Participants wondered how they could best evaluate equipment options. While the U.S. Army has done an evaluation of masks, there have been few studies of evacuation chairs and other types of equipment. One consideration with evacuation chairs, for example, is that they have weight limits. The LifesSlider®, on the other hand, does not have a weight limit, according to

when selecting accommodations. There is no “one-size-fits-all” when it comes to making equipment decisions, and as illustrated below, participants offered differing perspectives on some of the accommodations discussed.

Accommodation Suggestions:

General

- *Install emergency alarms and signs showing the emergency exit routes.* These alarms and signs should be accessible and in proper working order.
- *Implement a “buddy system” for all employees.* A buddy system involves employees working in teams, so they can locate and assist each other in emergencies. There was some discussion regarding the effectiveness of buddy systems. For example, a buddy may not be available at the time of an emergency. Having back-ups or cross training staff was offered as an alternative.

“Loy and Batiste encouraged talking with other federal agencies, and working with local emergency response personnel and community organizations to determine the most appropriate solutions.”

their sales representatives. Loy and Batiste encouraged talking with other federal agencies, and working with local emergency response personnel and community organizations to determine the most appropriate solutions. It is also imperative to communicate with these entities in order to educate new emergency response personnel and to keep abreast of new technology or procedures.

The following accommodations are simply suggestions; Loy and Batiste reiterated that talking directly to employees is of the utmost importance

- *Designate “areas of rescue assistance.”* Loy and Batiste admit this is also a somewhat controversial accommodation, but as participants themselves pointed out, not everyone may feel comfortable being assisted by co-workers. Whatever the decision, Loy said the important thing is that a plan is in place, and that all personnel are aware of the plan. This topic is specifically addressed in the Access Board’s ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG).

If these areas do not have escape routes, they should have the following:

- An operating phone, cell-phone, TTY (teletypewriter), and two-way radio so that emergency services can be contacted;
- A closing door;
- Supplies that enable individuals to block smoke from entering the room from under the door; and
- A window and something to write with (e.g., lipstick, marker) or a “help” sign to alert rescuers that people are in this location, and respirator masks.

Motor Impairments:

Evacuation devices help move people with motor impairments down the stairs or across rough terrain. If evacuation devices are used, both co-workers and response personnel should be trained to operate and maintain them. Manufacturer representatives may be willing to assist with training. Make sure to develop barrier-free paths out of buildings by removing any physical barriers (e.g., boxes, supplies, and furniture) from exit routes. Consider keeping heavy gloves, tire repair kits, and extra batteries on hand for those who use manual or battery-powered wheelchairs. Gloves may protect individuals’ hands from debris when pushing manual wheelchairs. Arrangements should also be made to have wheelchairs available after an evacuation.

Attendees discussed the issue of evacuating an employee and his or her power wheelchair. Most believed that evacuating the person should be the first priority, although plans should be made to get the chair out if at all possible. Concern centered on the cost and

weight of such a wheelchair, and an individual’s ability to maintain his or her balance in the evacuation chair.

One participant recommended that manufacturers put better straps on evacuation chairs. Using freight elevators to evacuate the building, rather than the standard passenger elevators, was offered as another solution. Wheelchair users often want to remain with their chair or obtain it as soon as possible after evacuating, since it is their main means of mobility. While power wheelchairs are often costly, Loy and Batiste reminded participants that they can be replaced; getting out of the building safely is more important. Leaving manual wheelchairs stationed in various stairwells and in the main lobby ensures that individuals have at least a temporary means of getting around in the event of an evacuation in which they cannot take their own wheelchairs.

Sensory Impairments:

- Lighted fire strobes and other alerting devices to supplement audible alarms. Lighted strobes should not exceed five flashes per second due to risk of triggering seizures in some individuals.
- For a participant who asked about alternatives to strobe lights, vibrating pagers were recommended. There was concern that such devices do not work, because individuals may not carry their pagers or receive the message in time. Other participants stressed the value of having multiple means to communicate with all employees.
- Alerting devices, vibrating paging devices, wireless communicators, or two-way paging systems to alert individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

- Braille signage, audible directional signage, and pedestrian systems for employees who are blind or have low vision. These products may also benefit others in navigating smoke-filled corridors and hallways.
- Alphanumeric pagers or other communication devices may assist individuals with speech impairments in communicating with emergency management personnel.

Cognitive/Psychiatric Impairments:

Find ways of communicating with people who have cognitive impairments. Some individuals may benefit from pictures of buddies, color-coding of escape doors and areas of rescue assistance, or listening to the information on tape or CD-ROM.

Keep in mind that some employees with psychiatric disabilities may benefit from frequent emergency drills, while others may find them anxiety-producing. In any event, give employees the option of participating. Not taking part in such drills may be seen as a “reasonable accommodation,” in which case an alternative method of practicing emergency evacuation procedures may be required (i.e., providing detailed written instructions).

Respiratory Impairments:

Employees with respiratory impairments may have difficulty breathing when walking distances or descending stairs. Smoke, dust, fumes, chemicals, and other odors often exacerbate such limitations. Consider purchasing products such as emergency evacuation hoods, masks, and respirators. Keep in mind that some individuals may have difficulty putting on or taking off a hood or mask. In such situations, practice and/or assistance are helpful. Using areas of

rescue assistance until emergency personnel arrive was also suggested as an option.

Whatever the disability, Loy said it is important for employees, managers, and emergency response personnel to work together in implementing the evacuation plan and prioritizing evacuation options.

C. On-Site Virtual Tour of Department of Labor’s Emergency Preparedness Effective Practices

This forum provided a multi-media and tactile presentation of significant enhancements made to the Department of Labor’s Frances Perkins Building following the events of September 11, 2001. These enhancements to the facilities included the addition of new equipment and tools, and recruitment of scores of volunteers. The intent was, and continues to be, to provide effective and responsive emergency planning and procedures in order to ensure the safety of all building occupants.

Zoë Fearon, who works as a Program Specialist in the Department of Labor’s (DOL) Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management (OASAM), presented the agency’s plan. She underscored that while DOL has developed an effective plan for the employees in the Frances Perkins Building, each federal agency has its own characteristics that influence emergency preparedness plans and procedures. Fearon reviewed key aspects of the DOL plan and highlighted the basic principles that guide the agency’s on-going emergency preparedness planning process.



Zoë Fearon showcased the Department of Labor emergency preparedness system.

Prior to September 11, 2001, evacuation drills occurred once a year and were both predictable and not taken seriously. In addition, emergency preparedness procedures mainly addressed fires. There was also a lack of employee knowledge regarding the *Frances Perkins Building Evacuation & Emergency Response Handbook*, and procedures related to evacuation, what to do once outside, and re-entry into the building. Furthermore, people with disabilities were often told to “stay put” or were confused about exactly where they should go.

Plan Enhancements

Fearon stressed that plan enhancements are ongoing, but following the September 11th attacks, significant enhancements were made at the Department of Labor. These included strengthening security measures, communication and accountability, alarm systems, and the designation of exit/re-entry routes. Drills were and

continue to be conducted on a more regular basis. The following additional enhancements were made:

- **Establishment of the emergency response team (ERT).** The team was established by Secretary Chao and is chaired by the Deputy Secretary and the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management. The main goal of the team is “to develop and implement strategies to safeguard occupants of all Department of Labor facilities.” The team met frequently following September 11th and still meets on a quarterly basis. Recommendations are implemented with input from a number of agencies within the Department to ensure that all necessary issues are appropriately addressed.

Initially, forums were conducted to discuss emergency evacuation strategies for people with disabilities. These forums served several functions. First and foremost, they gave individuals from the Department’s disability community the chance to provide valuable input/recommendations for enhancing procedures. Such meetings also served as an opportunity to update personnel on ERT evacuation planning for people with disabilities, respond to concerns, conduct trainings/demonstrations, and hear rationales for recommendations.

- **Assessments by the Office of the Inspector General of national and regional facilities.** This activity resulted in the conclusion that a “cookie cutter”

“The intent was, and continues to be, to provide effective and responsive emergency planning and procedures in order to ensure the safety of all building occupants.”



approach was not appropriate. Instead, DOL officials determined that it would be more effective to address the specific situation and develop procedures that considered the needs of all employees, including people with disabilities.

■ **Shift from a “security manager force” to a “building occupant force.”**

Previously, the focus had been on the roles and responsibilities of security personnel in the event of an emergency, rather than ensuring employees were aware of emergency procedures. So, greater emphasis was placed on equipping employees with appropriate knowledge. As part of this shift, DOL revised its evacuation handbook to include general floor plans of the DOL facility, and an illustration of collection points for people evacuating the building.

- ### ■ **Formalized program for Floor Wardens and Zone Monitors.**
- This involved establishing a volunteer program to “recruit, train, and equip” Floor Wardens and Zone Monitors as well as ensuring that every floor had radios, making it easier to verify the building is clear and all who may need assistance receive it.

Zone Monitors, in conjunction with Floor Wardens, help supervise evacuation of personnel into hallways leading to exits. Zone Monitors wear brightly colored baseball caps. Floor Wardens, identified by yellow hard hats and orange vests, assist in the evacuation of building occupants from the hallways and related areas of the building, out through the exit stairwells and main exits.

Basic Principles

Below are some key principles DOL has kept in mind as it continues to implement and upgrade procedures that are both effective and responsive to the needs of all its employees at the Washington, DC headquarters:

- *Be aware of everyone in the building:* Be aware of employees’ needs; however, remember to consider the needs of others in the building. This may include children in the daycare center, cafeteria workers, contractors, sales representatives, and personal visitors.
- *Communicate, Relate, Educate:* Fearon urged participants, “Train, Train, Train! If the plan is not practiced, it won’t work!” Refining the plan, then practicing it is essential.
- *Make a commitment to awareness, improvement, and constantly rethinking safety:* Agencies must respond to emerging issues, including new threats. Fearon acknowledged Secretary Chao’s commitment to continuously rethinking and developing DOL’s emergency preparedness plan. She expressed appreciation that Secretary Chao understands the plan must be flexible and can always be improved upon, especially as workplace circumstances or threats change.

Following each drill, OASAM distributes surveys to the employees to gauge the effectiveness of the current plan. Based on feedback changes are made. Agency emergency preparedness handbooks and other materials are revised as emerging issues arise and as additional equipment (i.e., LifeSliders®, evacuation chairs, and emergency packets) are purchased.

- **Redefine “Disability”:** Agencies should pre-identify staff with disabilities, including those with specific needs. Fearon suggested that perhaps agencies should reconsider their definitions of disability, or at least the means of identifying who will need assistance during an emergency. She offered this definition with regard to emergency planning: “a debilitating condition that causes one not to be able to keep up with the standard flow of traffic during an evacuation and/or those who may impede the flow of the traffic, thus causing harm to themselves or others.” Examples include the elderly, overweight, and persons with temporary disabilities (e.g., a broken leg, a sprained ankle) or episodic conditions (e.g., panic attacks, asthma, seizures).

Seminar participants had a variety of questions and comments related to the DOL plan, as well as its implementation and maintenance. The topics addressed below summarize the discussion:

Shelter-in-Place

The designation of shelter-in-place rooms was made based on the location and characteristics of the area. DOL officials generally selected internal areas with no windows; on the 6th floor, though, there are some areas that do have glass windows. This is due to the design of the building rather than a conscious decision to have areas with windows.

DOL has implemented two separate procedures for a shelter-in-place, depending on the nature of the emergency. Posture I Advisory requires that employees remain at their individual workstations and wait for further instruction. Posture II Advisory, used in situations deemed highly critical, requires that staff move to the nearest designated shelter-in-place. Employees are given laminated cards that provide written reminders of the procedures and designated areas. In both cases, no one is allowed to leave or enter the building; the doors are locked for everyone’s protection. Fearon explained, “If DOL is in lock down, chances are your spouse’s or children’s facilities are as well.” Additionally, staff is not free to move about the building (e.g., go to the restroom), except under extenuating circumstances.

Each shelter-in-place area has telephone(s), food, other emergency supplies that are stored in secured cabinets. There is enough food and supplies for both employees and visitors. Floor Wardens, Zone Monitors, and security personnel have key access to these cabinets. Although agencies should prepare for their employees and visitors, she also urged staff to store any specific personal supplies (e.g., medications, supplies for service animals) they may need at their desks. Fearon reminded attendees that typically the length of time for a shelter-in-place is relatively short. “The need to shelter-in-place [due to an airborne substance] only lasts for 4-6 hours.” When the need for a shelter-in-place has passed, authorities explain the reason for it.

Working with Local Entities

Fearon said communication and coordination are keys to working with local emergency personnel and nearby agencies. DOL has its own command center, but is also connected to the police department. The agency has worked closely with authorities to establish protocols regarding

who will respond in specific situations. Sometimes the trained DOL staff (e.g., security personnel) handles issues, while at other times local entities are called in. The Department has also worked with nearby employers and first responders to designate assembly areas following an evacuation. Information, resources, and other assistance are provided to regional and field offices. “We dialogue,” said Fearon.

Medical staff from the Department’s Health Unit also serve as first responders in certain situations. Even though their radios are single-channel frequency, they work closely with local emergency response personnel in the event of an emergency.

Department of Labor Egress

The Department has an “everyone out” policy, and does not utilize “areas of refuge.” There are five entrances and twelve stairways for use during an evacuation. Text messaging conveys information to employees who are deaf or hard of hearing, either via pagers or via a desktop computer. Currently, the message is sent out manually, but the Department is working on linking the system directly to the alarm system. Braille signage is in place for those who are blind. Extra wheelchairs are kept in the stairwells and in the main lobby for use if necessary. Specific accommodations are also made on the basis of need. “It helps to have a “buddy system” [or other type of support system] in place.”

The use of elevators depends on the nature of the emergency. Due to the steel and stone makeup of the elevators, there is a low incidence of burning. In the event of an emergency, some elevators return to the first floor. Others are manually operated by Emergency Elevator Operators (EEOs) and serve as a means of assisting persons with disabilities out of the building. If all the elevators

were deemed unsafe, Fearon said, “We would use our last line of defense [the stairwell and a LifeSlider®] to evacuate people with disabilities from the building.” There were questions regarding the effectiveness and usability of the LifeSlider®. Fearon stressed that the device was chosen because it met “the global needs” of the Department. She said each agency must make a determination what works best given its unique characteristics. Training and practice are also critical to ensure the equipment is properly used.

Once everyone is out of the building, an accountability tree is used to make sure all are safe. Staff determine who is at the assembly area, off site, or out sick. Once the “all clear” is given by security guards and/or emergency response personnel to the security guards or Floor Wardens in each of the designated assembly areas via radio, employees are allowed to re-enter the building, but must display their identification cards upon doing so.

D. Egress

Egress is defined as “the act of coming in or going out [especially from an enclosed area]; emergence.” It is also defined as “a path or opening for going out; an exit.” Therefore, it makes sense that developing an effective emergency preparedness plan involves considering specific egress options. This breakout session provided participants the chance to explore the pros and cons of various evacuation procedures, including the use of elevators and the establishment of safe areas. For example, it has become widely accepted to avoid using the elevators for evacuation purposes in the event of a fire, but there are situations in which elevator use is appropriate. Specific discussion included determining, evaluating, and prioritizing evacuation options.

The breakout session consisted of presentations by June Issacson Kailes and Edwina Juillet. Kailes serves as the Associate Director of the Center for Disability Issues and the Health Professions at Western University of Health Sciences. Juillet is the Co-Founder of the National Taskforce on Fire/Life Safety for People with Disabilities.

As Kailes and Juillet reminded participants, the first step in determining egress options is planning. Agencies must consider such issues as elevator use, “areas of refuge,” the type of equipment available, and who will require assistance. Training, practice, and research are essential in helping both agencies and individuals determine the most effective practices and evaluate the options. Moreover, engaging in drills and soliciting feedback allow an agency to continually refine its practices. Finally, when evaluating and prioritizing options, it is also critical to consider the nature of the emergency.

using elevators during an emergency. However, elevators can be used in certain circumstances. Consequently, safe use of elevators needs to be a learned response.

Following an emergency (where an alarm is activated), elevators automatically move to the main floor (or floor exiting to the outside) and lock down in Phase I. According to The American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME), Phase I is also referred to as Emergency Recall Operation. It is defined as “the operation of an elevator where it is automatically or manually recalled to a specific landing and removed from normal service because of activation of firefighters’ service” (ASME A17.1). Once fire personnel arrive and ensure the elevators are safe to use, authorized personnel can operate them manually (Phase II). New elevators have buttons (marked with a red fire hat) that flash when they are unsafe for use.

“According to Kailes, the disability community motto, ‘Nothing about us without us’ should be a guiding principle in emergency preparedness planning.”

Planning

According to Kailes, the disability community motto, “Nothing about us without us” should be a guiding principle in emergency preparedness planning. Employees with disabilities must actively participate throughout the decision-making process. Kailes identified the following as primary issues to be considered in egress planning:

- *Determining appropriate instances for elevator use.* Juillet reminded attendees that we, as a society, are conditioned to avoid

One participant, who oversees security in several buildings near the Capitol, explained that his agency developed the following procedures regarding elevator use:

The [specific agency personnel] have been trained to evaluate the safety of elevators in these buildings and operate them in Phase II, if appropriate. They then stop at each floor to determine if there is anyone with a mobility impairment who needs to use the elevator. Those requiring assistance are instructed to board designated elevators only if they are operated by [specific agency personnel]. Building occupants

know that in an emergency the elevators are to be used only by people who have mobility impairments. However, if necessary, those with temporary disabilities can also use the elevators.

- **Designating “areas of refuge” or “areas of rescue assistance”:** Juliet pointed out that (while there is no such requirement in the ADA), the Access Board’s ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) define areas of refuge or areas of rescue assistance as a part of the requirements for “accessible means of egress.” Such areas are only necessary in new buildings. Structures with an approved sprinkler system are an exception and do not require an area of refuge.

ADAAG has six configurations, each with specifications for signage, communication, etc. Juliet stated her bias for only three of these configurations: elevator lobby, exit stair landing, and the horizontal exit (e.g., where two buildings are connected by a fire-rated corridor (or bridge)). If an aerial evacuation (fire department equipment with a ladder and/or a “cherry picker”) is utilized, be sure the equipment can reach the room window. The rule of thumb is that the equipment can reach up to the seventh story. However, that is only when the area below the window is perfectly level and has a solid “footing.”

- **Developing personal support networks (in lieu of the “buddy system”):** Substitute the buddy system with a personal support system. Encourage employees to build relationships with a number of individuals, so they will not be without assistance in an emergency. Facilitate this through staff training.

- **Carrying and lifting people with disabilities:** Participants had questions about assisting an employee who uses a wheelchair out of a building. Kailes and Juliet recommended talking with the individual in order to develop a plan with that person. Some people have a preference. They said there are several choices: using an evacuation chair or carrying the person out. Make sure people are trained on the use of evacuation chairs, and have regular practice sessions. Carrying a person can be somewhat cumbersome and even dangerous. Talk with the individual to determine the best way to move them, and again, make sure to rehearse the procedure. If there is absolutely no one available to assist the individual, instruct him or her to go to a designated area and contact emergency personnel.

- **Selecting appropriate devices:** There is no one model or piece of equipment that is appropriate for every situation or for every individual. In fact, with regard to evacuation chairs there has been little, if any, research. Juliet and Kailes underscored the importance of agencies doing their own research, talking with other organizations, and working with local fire departments.

One participant, for example, said his agency found that evacuation chairs were difficult to use and required extensive training. As a result, the agency issues them only when the person with a disability agrees and the staff is trained. Another accommodation has been the smoke hood. This agency has distributed smoke hoods to some people with mobility impairments, in the event that it takes them longer to evacuate the building. Employees have also been instructed to evacuate to other buildings, since several are connected by passageways.

Another participant pointed out that egress planning is complicated by the fact that federal agencies often occupy only portions of a building, which are shared by private companies. Coordination can be difficult unless you have a strong landlord. It was suggested that agencies encourage landlords to use a coordinated emergency evacuation plan as a selling point for lease of space.

tance will self-identify. Cast a broad net. Word questions in a manner that encourages the greatest number of employees to respond. For example, avoid using the word disability, since individuals with such conditions as asthma, panic attacks, significant allergies, heart conditions, and age-related conditions may not consider themselves disabled. However, even the most carefully crafted inquiries will not cause all

“...even the most carefully crafted inquiries will not cause all to self-identify, so plans should take into account these individuals, as well as visitors.”

Kailes cautioned that planning should not be seen as a one-time event with beginning, middle, and end, but rather as an on-going process. An agency plan should be viewed as a living document. If necessary, additional plans should be developed for those who work after hours or on the night shift. The plan must be continually revised and updated to reflect changes in technology and procedures. Both research and practice drills are essential to continuously strengthening a plan.

Implementation

The following aspects are key to the implementation phase. Keep in mind that an agency plan should be available in a variety of formats. The plan should be reader-friendly (bulleted lists versus long paragraphs) and available in languages other than English.

- *Identifying employees who will need assistance during egress:* Kailes reminded participants that no one knows better than employees with disabilities the type of accommodations needed in an emergency situation. She stressed it is critical to keep in mind that not everyone needing assis-

to self-identify, so plans should take into account these individuals, as well as visitors.

Participants had questions regarding both individuals who may be reluctant to self-identify and planning for visitors. There are individuals who feel strongly about being identified as having a disability or medical condition. There are also those who think they will not need assistance. Questions surfaced regarding how to account for these individuals. The presenters reminded attendees to be observant and take note of who takes more time to exit than his/her peers. Plan for several additional individuals, including guests and visitors, when purchasing devices and training employees to assist with egress.

With regard to planning for visitors, Juillet and Kailes recommended putting a map and emergency numbers on the back of Visitor’s badges. But, as one participant explained, this could be a problem, especially if there is a high volume of visitors per day. Agencies may not have the funds to produce the badges. In addition, visi-

tors may forget to return them. However, as another attendee pointed out, the same could be said of current Visitors' badges. Some agencies use paper badges and/or ask visitors to temporarily surrender identification. Another recommendation was that visitors be escorted at all times. In the latter scenario, the escort would assist his/her visitor out of the building in the event of an emergency.

- *Training for both those requiring assistance and those providing assistance:* Training and cross training is essential. Individuals (and their co-workers) needing to use emergency evacuation devices, such as evacuation chairs, should be trained regarding their proper operation. This will allow these employees to better direct others on the use of the equipment, in the event that "trained" personnel are not available. Keep in mind that separate training may be necessary for those who work after normal business hours.

imbedding "stumbling blocks" is vital to helping employees prepare for the unexpected. Both announced and unannounced drills should be conducted several times a year. Drills should vary (evacuation and shelter-in-place) and pose a variety of challenges, such as closed off hallways, blocked doors, or unconscious individuals, along designated evacuation routes.

Practice also makes a difference. In 1993, during the World Trade Center bombing, a woman could not figure out how to leave the building until two co-workers came by and reminded her about the evacuation chair under her desk. Human factor studies support the idea of practice: people tend to come and go from the same place using the same route. It is important that employees practice using the stairways, because in many cases, they may not know the location of the stairs until they are required to use them.

"...[W]hile conducting standard drills are important, varying the drills and imbedding 'stumbling blocks' is vital to helping employees prepare for the unexpected."

Some participants raised the issue of embarrassment or self-consciousness on the part of individuals who need assistance in egress. For example, there may be individuals who are uncomfortable practicing evacuation procedures in a group setting. For these employees, consider one-on-one training or trying out different evacuation methods and devices.

- *Conducting various types of drills:* Juliet explained that while conducting standard drills are important, varying the drills and

There are three types of drills: walkthrough drills, scheduled drills, and unannounced drills.

- *Walkthrough drills:* These allow personnel to discuss possible difficulties and slowly practice evacuation techniques. For example, people might practice using an evacuation chair or carrying someone.
- *Scheduled Drills:* Such drills provide an opportunity to practice evacuating people with disabilities in a slow and controlled environment. The procedures are methodically practiced by all.

- *Unannounced Drills:* It is critical that unannounced drills occur only after scheduled drills. This ensures that the kinks are worked out and people do not practice incorrectly. In addition, do not hold surprise drills when emotions are high (e.g., around the anniversary of September 11th or the sniper attacks). Juillet recommended that emergency response staff (e.g., Floor Wardens) be notified prior to such drills, so that they can practice their responsibilities.

There were additional questions related to both staff and visitors participating in drills. Since there are no penalties for not participating, many employees ignore or avoid the drills. Suggestions included developing creative educational techniques, such as fun exercises, or making participation in drills part of the annual performance evaluations. Additionally, visitors may not want to be detained during a shelter-in-place drill. Those who intended to be in the building for only a brief time (e.g., delivering a document), and have other commitments, may protest about participating in such drills. Consider establishing a safe exit route for such exceptions.

- *Debriefing and asking for feedback:* Make sure to conduct debriefings after drills. Revise and update the plan based on feedback then redistribute the plan. It may also be beneficial to request assistance from a local fire department. The Arlington County Fire Department, for example, was described as being helpful in evaluating procedures and providing feedback.

Research

Since technology is constantly evolving, it is critical to keep abreast of new devices and current

research. The primary technology areas for egress are alarms, elevators, and evacuation chairs.

Alarms. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA-72) sets the standards for alarms.

Elevators. The protocol regarding elevator use during emergencies is changing; in fact, Juillet made reference to an upcoming conference that will address elevator issues. Europe is developing standards that will enable elevator use during emergency evacuations. These standards will address fire ratings and the need for water protection (e.g., waterproof components, safety brakes, switches).

Evacuation chairs. Kailes stated that there are no objective evaluations or ANSI (American National Standards Institute) standards regarding evacuation chairs, leaving emergency managers responsible for independently researching and selecting them.

E. Support Mechanisms

Using the U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) emergency preparedness plans as case studies, this session examined factors related to determining whether to establish a cross-training system, a “buddy system”, or to rely extensively on high-tech informational alert systems.

Additionally, many fundamental principles related to support mechanisms in the workplace were to be highlighted. For example, because many Access Board employees have varied work and travel schedules, it is difficult to predict which employees may be in the office in the event of an emergency. Thus, the Access Board has focused

on cross-training in order to ensure that as many employees as possible can provide assistance and perform the various roles called for in their emergency preparedness plan.

Bruce McFarlane, Director of the USDA's TARGET Center, explained how the USDA embarked on its road to emergency preparedness. The process began after a 1993 fire drill where multiple employees with disabilities were left behind or not able to evacuate. Following that event, a panel consisting of six employees convened to ensure this would not happen again. Fortunately, there were key management personnel who were personally affected by the issues related to having a disability. They took interest in the topic and began to listen. In 1994, the panel prepared *Occupant Emergency Plan Review for Employees with Disabilities*. A key recommendation of the report was the call for autonomy and independent decision-making authority in emergency planning.

Peg Blechman, Compliance Specialist at the Access Board, said the events of September 11, 2001 led her agency to re-examine its plan. Staff took an inventory of the following, which she believes is key to planning and development:

- 1. *Who is on-site (i.e., staff, board members, and visitors):*** The Access Board relied on individuals to self-identify, then worked with each person individually to determine their needs, choices, and preferences. The office flow pattern, number of staff, and out-of-office frequency were also studied.
- 2. *Location of the building and office:*** For example, the offices of the Access Board are located on the 10th floor of a building near the White House.
- 3. *Building characteristics:*** This includes the stairways, landings, exits, alarms, elevators, etc. This is important in developing plans, identifying problems (i.e., trash in stairways), and establishing methods to address these issues. It is best to do so prior to an emergency or incident.
- 4. *Building management:*** Talk with the building management and security staff. Determine the building plan, relationships with police and fire departments, location of the building command center, etc.

The Access Board learned that the police and fire department go to the front desk first. This gives them an overview of what is happening in the building. It is here the Access Board posted a list of all the people with disabilities and their preferences for evacuation (i.e., staff members who preferred to wait in the office's safe area for firemen or police rather than use an evacuation chair). Briefings were held for local fire departments regarding Access Board plans.

Additional follow-up action included the purchase of appropriate equipment (e.g., evacuation chairs, radio walkie-talkies) and the establishment of offices designated as "waiting areas" and assembly areas. Emergency equipment is stored in the "waiting area" offices when not in use. Blechman noted the agency consistently practices, revises, and updates its plan. She said, "The key is practice, practice, practice."

McFarlane highlighted several fundamental principles to emergency preparedness planning:

- ***Timely and accurate information:*** People with disabilities need timely and accurate information in order to make decisions.

- **Representation:** Emergency planning/policy committees should include people with disabilities, and others familiar with the needs of this segment of the workforce. It is important that all types of disabilities are represented (i.e., vision, mobility, cognitive, and hearing), and that these committee members present a broad perspective rather than an individual one. Key to successful negotiations on such committees is that the person(s) who represents people with disabilities should not do so “in a demand mode.” McFarlane said members must understand the limitations (e.g., financial) management face and prioritize.

emergency. Discussion followed about the fact that sometimes it is necessary to have personnel remain in place or inform those outside the building not to return. McFarlane reiterated that in any event all notification systems should have backup alternatives. For example, messages should be repeated at least two to three times and kept very short when announced over the PA system.

The USDA uses a pager system to notify deaf employees about emergencies. These pagers have two numbers: one for the pager itself, and the other to let individuals know that there is

“Agencies must ensure that a variety of notification systems are in place. These should be well understood by all employees.”

Know how to pick your battles. Involve all key players in the organization (managers, workers, etc.). This facilitates creative thinking and innovative solutions.

- **Management Support:** The support of management is crucial to affecting change, since change usually has the most impact when it comes from the top down. One possible method of getting management on board is to present the risk(s) for the organization (i.e., One person getting hurt will impact over 100 people.).

- **Redundancy:** This is important when it comes to not only practicing a plan but also notifying employees about an emergency. McFarlane explained that the nature of the emergency impacts both the response and the means of notification. Agencies must have multiple means of relaying information to staff regarding an

an emergency. All other pagers are dialed remotely. Nevertheless, McFarlane admitted that the USDA still has unresolved issues with this system. About one third of deaf employees refuse to wear the pagers, due to either the stigma or the fact that it does not fit on their clothes. Despite these problems, Blechman commented that the USDA had gone further than many agencies in developing notification strategies.

Notification Systems

Agencies must ensure that a variety of notification systems are in place. These should be well understood by all employees. Below are some systems, and the situations in which they can be utilized.

- **Fire alarms:** Evacuation only
- **HIPS Pagers (persons who are deaf or hard of hearing):** Fire alarms only.

- *Computer Electronic Notification System (CENS)*: These can be used in all situations. Make sure the software system affords access to all. This will require it to be compatible with screen readers and speech recognition software. (Good system for shelter-in-place).
- *Warden Phones*: These are phones located at elevators that connect to a command center. The command center informs persons with mobility impairments whether or not it is safe to use elevators. A button inside the elevators allows individuals to contact the command center. One participant believed TTYs (teletypewriters) should also be installed in elevators to ensure similar access for deaf or hard of hearing employees.
- *PA System*
- *Wireless Communication Devices* (e.g., pagers, PDAs, cell phones)

The Buddy System and Cross-Training

In McFarlane's opinion, plans should not be based on the person being in their own office at the time of an emergency. He believes that planning that is person or location dependent had glaring weaknesses. Consequently, he sees the buddy system as not exclusively effective, since it is both person and location dependent.

Blechman said the Access Board chose not to use the buddy system, given staff travel and training schedules and the agency size (less than 30 staff). Instead, staff who volunteered to work with people with disabilities during an emergency situation were cross-trained.

If agencies choose to utilize the buddy system, she recommended that "participation be voluntary, volunteers be cross-trained and have volunteers assemble at central location(s)." If the buddy or the employee is unavailable, a backup system should be utilized. She emphasized that redundancy is key!

"In McFarlane's opinion, plans should not be based on the person being in their own office at the time of an emergency."

- *Short-Wave Radios*: Floor Monitors and drivers use these radios.
- *Emergency Hotline*: People off-site are able to call in and obtain more information about the situation.
- *Web Site Information*
- *Buddy System*: This system is person and location dependent. McFarlane believes that such systems generally only have drawbacks when used exclusively.

Additional Egress Issues

Many of the participants had additional questions and concerns related to egress. Specific issues raised during the discussion related to employees who may take longer to evacuate; use of elevators; equipment selection; and education and training.

One of the participants asked how to address the issue of a person who believes he/she does not need assistance, but is in fact impeding others during an evacuation. McFarlane said his

response would depend on if the person were a permanent or temporary employee. If it were a permanent employee, he would likely discuss the issue with the person one-on-one. If it were a temporary individual, the decision would be up to the hall monitor. A solution might be to suggest the individual use the elevator, if possible.

A question was raised regarding the use of elevators during fires. Fire codes in some locations, such as New York, preclude the use of elevators during fire emergencies (in high rise buildings). The panelist suggested this could be overcome in situations where there are multiple banks of elevators. An “enunciator panel” allows on-site safety/security personnel (e.g., the fire department) to determine the location of the fire. If the elevator is on an independent power source and not in the vicinity of the emergency, people could possibly be directed to another part of the building.

Participants suggested two other possible solutions: designating a particular stairwell for use by people with disabilities or using evacuation chairs. One of the presenters pointed out that the first suggestion presents a problem, especially if the emergency (i.e., bomb, fire) is in that area. It is important to prepare for use of all stairwells in the building. Using an evacuation chair may present some problems as well. Blechman pointed out that an individual’s wheelchair might need to be left behind, making it difficult for the person to get around once outside. In addition, there has been little research regarding the safety of various chairs. One solution at some agencies has been to leave spare wheelchairs in the stairwells or lobbies.

Blechman contended agencies and safety personnel need to be educated as to what can and cannot be done regarding emergency preparedness for employees with disabilities. She said federal

agencies and federal contractors must understand their responsibilities under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. She reiterated the importance of receiving support from upper management. Safety personnel should also be made aware of those who need assistance. To this end, she encouraged both agencies and individuals to be proactive when addressing barriers both inside and outside the building. For example, make sure that security barricades are not blocking accessible routes away from the building. Finally, she encouraged agencies to continue working together following the Seminar. Both she and McFarlane said they would like to see the establishment of an interagency working group to address the issue of emergency preparedness for people with disabilities.

F. Regional and Field Office Considerations

Regional and field offices face unique challenges when it comes to emergency preparedness planning. Federal agencies and offices must consider the needs of employees with disabilities, personnel previously unidentified as having a disability, and the public. It is



Elizabeth Davis, Director of NOD’s Emergency Preparedness Initiative (EPI), and Alan Clive, FEMA Civil Rights Program Manager, led a discussion on regional emergency preparedness.

vital that federal safety plans do not conflict with other agencies and/or business tenants sharing building locations. This session was to examine the importance of involving all stakeholders in planning and implementation as well as identifying and working with nontraditional planning partners, such as local emergency professionals, property management, and building safety directors. There were to be additional references to planning methodology, situational differences among agencies, and support materials.

Dr. Alan Clive, Civil Rights Program Manager for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), began by explaining that agencies have to contend with three main issues when developing emergency plans.

- **Location/type of building:** federal agencies throughout the country have unique characteristics. Some are located in Government-built and owned buildings. Others are located in skyscrapers, where the government leases several floors. Some are sole occupants, while others share space with other federal agencies or private employees. Some occupy entire campuses, while others may be isolated industrial-style facilities, such as warehouses.
- **Population:** Agencies must take into account who is in the building. Some federal agencies (e.g., Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and FEMA) have very few non-government personnel in the building. Other offices, especially those that provide services to the public, have a constant flow of visitors and non-

Government personnel (e.g., Social Security Administration (SSA) and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)). Such factors should be considered in evacuation planning.

- **Hazards:** Clive encouraged participants to be prepared for a variety of hazards, including natural and man-made disasters, chemical spills and power outages. He cited such events as the September 11th attacks and the 2003 power outage in the Midwest that impacted much of the East Coast. Such events galvanized many, including the disability community, to consider needs they may have in an emergency.

It was stressed that ultimately each office needs to customize its plan, determining the most effective practices given location, population, financial constraints, and emergency preparedness needs.

Rethinking “Special Needs”

While accommodations can and should be made for those with distinctive needs (e.g., elderly, people with disabilities, those with unique medical needs), Elizabeth Davis, Director of the National Organization on Disability’s (NOD) Emergency Preparedness Initiative (EPI), explained that there is no consensus on the best strategy, technology, or tools to assist people with disabilities in an emergency. There are complaints that with the quick growth in the market for emergency equipment for people with disabilities, no standards exist to advise purchasers on the effectiveness or safety of specific equipment. Until such standards exist, she said, “Buyers beware.”

“Davis urged agencies to plan for a gap in ability during an emergency, not for disability.”

She added that in the General Services Administration’s (GSA) Occupant Emergency Plan (OEP), which serves as a framework for federal agencies, there are no special emergency-support functions, because special needs fits into each emergency support function. Every Government agency that occupies federally-owned or leased space must have an OEP.

Certain aspects of a plan may need to be tailored to meet employees’ needs; however, Davis and Clive contend that general emergency planning for people with disabilities should be an integral part of the entire process—not a separate practice or an afterthought. Davis urged agencies to plan for a gap in ability during an emergency, not for disability.

Such an approach to planning would take into account those who may suddenly need assistance evacuating a building in the event of an emergency. For example, a pregnant woman may have difficulty walking down the stairs. If certain exits are blocked, a person who uses a

“It is helpful for agencies to develop a template and methodology around planning, (regular) testing, and updating plans. This can be as simple as a very general outline that can then be expanded upon by individual regions and field offices.”

wheelchair or scooter may need assistance. She cautioned participants not to assume what employees can or cannot do in the event of an emergency. Planning for those with distinctive needs can have application for everyone. Several participants reiterated this idea.

Others had specific questions related to individuals who may take longer to evacuate the buildings. The presenters and fellow participants recommended such alternatives as estab-

lishing “areas of refuge” or “areas of rescue assistance,” re-evaluating policies related to elevator use for evacuation, and widening stairwells in future constructions.

Planning Considerations

Even the most comprehensive plans will not be perfect. Davis said agencies should do the best they can to establish predictable certainty. In the event of legal challenges of discrimination in planning, establishing intent or disparate impact can be difficult. Remember that an emergency crisis is an equal opportunity injury-causing event. Finally, these suggestions were offered for those in regional and field offices:

- *Become advocates with regard to emergency preparedness planning.* Davis encouraged managers and decision-makers to include those who are not typically involved in the internal agency planning process (e.g., human resources personnel, and first responders). Consider the com-

munity-based organizations that can provide assistance, and establish relationships with these agencies. Be sure to utilize resources in the building as well (i.e., a medical clinic). However, do not plan for people with disabilities, but plan with all employees. By doing so, everyone has the opportunity to offer creative solutions, identify issues, and be a part of the process.

- *Keep plans updated and involve employees in the process.* Davis said she believes that most emergency plans are created in

a vacuum, then buried. Plans should be reviewed, revised, and practiced on a regular basis.

It is helpful for agencies to develop a template and methodology around planning, (regular) testing, and updating plans. This can be as simple as a very general outline that can then be expanded upon by individual regions and field offices. Keep in mind that even within field offices, plans may need to be further individualized to accommodate individuals or situations.

- *Share information with other agencies and employees.* Determine effective practices, and examine the reasons why something did or did not work. Clive and Davis explained that in such situations, it is acceptable to take ideas from another agency.

Davis said that emergency preparedness plans need to become familiar to all personnel at a site from the agency/division director to the evening cleaning crew, since an emergency can occur at any time. This ensures a cadre of people in place who are aware; alert; and able to take quick, appropriate action.

G. Individualizing Emergency Plans

Using Kailes' *Emergency Evacuation Preparedness: Taking Responsibility for Your Safety: A Guide for People with Disabilities and Other Activity Limitations* (2002, Center for Disability Issues and the Health Professions, Western University of Health Sciences, Pomona, CA), the objectives

of this session were to discuss factors and strategies for customizing emergency preparedness for people with disabilities. The session included strategies for ensuring that people with disabilities are involved in emergency preparedness; planning, tips and tools for areas of specific consideration; and suggestions on how supervisors and employees with disabilities can together develop individualized plans that incorporate the overall agency emergency plans and procedures.

Since September 11, 2001 the issue of emergency preparedness has come to the forefront. Workplace safety is of special importance, since it is where we, as a society, spend much of our time. And, for people with disabilities and activity limitations, barrier-free, as well as barrier-ridden, environments can be difficult to navigate in an emergency situation. Nevertheless, a 2001 National Organization on Disability (NOD) /Harris Poll concluded that 50% of employees with disabilities say no plans have been made to safely evacuate their workplace, compared to 44% of people without disabilities. Even more revealing is that 18% of people with disabilities feel extremely or very anxious about their safety in the event of a crisis, compared to 8% of people without disabilities.

Dr. Richard Horne, Supervisory Research Analyst in the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) at the Department of Labor (DOL), presented on the topic of individualizing emergency plans for employees with disabilities. He addressed such topics as the legal requirements of employers, determining whether an individual will require assistance, and developing an effective plan that can be integrated into the larger office or agency plan.

He began by explaining that federal agencies and their contractors must comply with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) does not require private employers to develop emergency preparedness plans for people with disabilities. However, if an emergency preparedness plan is in place, it must include people with disabilities.



Richard Horne, ODEP Supervisory Research Analyst, responded to Seminar participants' questions in the Individualizing Emergency Preparedness Plans breakout sessions.

Even if an employer chooses not to implement an emergency preparedness plan, they may still be required to address the issue of developing and implementing an emergency preparedness plan (as a “reasonable accommodation”) for a person with a

disability, under Title I of the ADA or other laws and regulations.

As such, Horne suggested employees consider the following situations when determining whether or not to request assistance:

- Limitations that interfere with walking or using stairs;
- Reduced stamina, fatigue, or tire easily;
- Emotional, cognitive, thinking, or learning difficulties;
- Vision or hearing loss;
- Temporary limitations (surgery, accidents, pregnancy); or
- Use of technology or medications.

For those who had questions about employees who may be reluctant to self-identify, Horne reiterated that the information is confidential. As Kailes (2000, p. 6) explained in her handbook, “There is a universal human tendency to avoid thinking about possible emergencies. This avoidance has greater consequences for people with disabilities than for people without disabilities.” Horne stressed that if employees do not plan, then what they need will not be in place when necessary; do not assume anything. People with disabilities must take responsibility

“People with disabilities must take responsibility for engaging in emergency preparedness and not get caught up in the avoidance tendency.”

For those employers who may be reluctant to broach the topic of emergency preparedness with their employees, Horne clarified that Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidance and federal disability laws do not prohibit an employer from gathering information for the purposes of emergency preparedness planning. He added that the best time to collect such information is after an offer has been extended or during an annual performance review. Not everyone who may need assistance will self-identify or even consider themselves as falling into this category.



Participants discussed elements of emergency preparedness plans.

for engaging in emergency preparedness and not get caught up in the avoidance tendency. Some suggestions for encouraging individuals to make needs known include avoiding use of the term disability and conducting practice drills. Practice drills can be helpful in determining whether or not assistance is needed during an emergency.

Determining who may require assistance during an emergency is only part of process. Emergency preparedness planning falls into three phases:

“Horne stressed that if employees do not plan, then what they need will not be in place when necessary; do not assume anything.”

development, implementation, and maintenance. At both the agency and the individual level, it is important that individuals with disabilities be involved in the entire process. Horne highlighted key tasks in each phase, as discussed below:

- **Development:** This phase involves not only identifying who needs assistance, but also the possible hazards and accommodations. Aside from the obvious hazards, be sure to check for such things as obstructed exit routes, unclear signage, or inaudible alarms. In deciding on specific accommodations, it is best to talk to the individual. However, it may also be helpful to consult other agencies (e.g., Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)), community-based organizations (e.g., the Red Cross, Centers for Independent Living (CILs)) or local emergency personnel.

Horne reminded participants to make sure the plan addressed after-hours situations. Attendees wondered how to ensure the employee’s safety in such circumstances. It was suggested that employees inform security when they are working late. Another

option would be to have security do routine checks.

Participants had questions regarding the DOL’s emergency preparedness plan. Horne explained that from the very onset, the needs of the employees with disabilities were considered. Following the events of September 11, Secretary Chao established a working group, of which ODEP was a part.

- **Implementation:** An important part of this phase is committing the plan to writing. Include key personnel who will likely be involved during an emergency in this process. Be sure to conduct mock drills in order to determine where improvements are needed, and make necessary modifications. Make sure that all employees take part in any training that occurs. While an individual may not be able to perform certain tasks, it is important that he/she be able to relay the information to another individual in the event of emergency. Lastly, be sure to distribute the plan in an accessible format, and integrate the concepts or plans into the larger office or agency plan. Oftentimes, emergency preparedness accommodations made for employees with disabilities can benefit all employees.

- **Maintenance:** A plan—whether for an individual, office, or agency—should be updated regularly. It is beneficial to cultivate relationships with individuals and/or agencies both internally and externally. This can assist agencies in keeping abreast

of new technology or protocol. For individuals, building relationships with co-workers increases the chances of finding/getting assistance in the event of an emergency.

There was additional discussion regarding the pros and cons of the “buddy system.” While the buddy system can be effective, it is important to recognize that alternative plans may be necessary if a co-worker is not available. The idea of a personal support network, where several people may be available to assist, is seen as a better approach.

Implement procedures for reporting new safety concerns or hazards, as well as identifying the needs of new employees. Check with personal support networks quarterly to make sure the individuals are still willing and able to assist in an emergency; also, be sure to notify them of changes in work schedules. Finally, be sure that all the equipment is in good working order.

While employers undoubtedly bear some of the responsibility for emergency preparedness planning, Horne said employees with disabilities must also take the initiative to ensure their safety. It is important that employees with disabilities not assume plans have or will be put in place for them. Furthermore, employees should keep extra supplies, such as medication, at their desks. They should also be able to clearly explain their needs to another individual. This will make it easier to get the appropriate assistance from emergency personnel and others in the event of an emergency. If the individual has difficulty communicating, it may be beneficial to put instructions in writing.

The following additional resources were shared:

Job Accommodation Network:
www.janwwu.edu/media/emergency.html

DisabilityInfo:
www.disabilityinfo.gov

Center for Disability Issues and Health Professionals:
www.cdihp.org ■



**CONCLUSION:
PREVAILING
THEMES**

The Seminar of Exchange regarding emergency preparedness for people with disabilities was well-received by both participants and presenters. In the evaluation surveys received rating the Seminar purpose and the information received, feedback indicated that participants found the presenters very knowledgeable, the content strong, and the materials practical and thought-provoking. Many respondents indicated they particularly liked finding out what other agencies are doing and sharing ideas and practices with others.

Based upon the high registration rate and the overwhelmingly positive feedback, this Seminar filled a void for many in terms of developing, implementing, and maintaining an agency emergency preparedness plan that includes people with disabilities. The sponsoring agencies, coordinators, and presenters of this event hope that the Seminar served as a catalyst to bring about greater focus and action on this important issue in the future.

A careful review of the presentations and subsequent discussion in the plenary and breakout sessions revealed four prevailing themes related to developing an emergency preparedness plan that involves people with disabilities. They are (1) communication with employees; (2) agency budget and personnel commitment; (3) flexibility; and (4) practice. *The following is a summary of the prevailing themes of the Seminar and should not be viewed as an agency prescription or policy recommendation.*

Communication with Employees

Communicating with all employees is paramount to developing, implementing, and maintaining an



emergency preparedness plan that effectively addresses the unique needs of employees with disabilities. Communication, in this regard, actually consists of three inextricably intertwined elements: outreach to employees with disabilities; sharing disability information within the confines of civil rights and privacy protections; and using effective methods of communication.

Developing, implementing and maintaining an emergency plan that involves people with disabilities cannot succeed without input from those it is designed to benefit. Throughout the Seminar of Exchange, presenters stressed that there is no greater authority on the emergency needs of an individual with a disability than the person himself/herself. Therefore, the plan should reflect the input of employees with disabilities. In doing so, an agency guarantees that its plan is as comprehensive as possible. Additionally, communicating with employees with disabilities will, in many instances, provide them with a sense of confidence, having had an opportunity to actually contribute to the process.

Obtaining necessary input from employees with disabilities is a critical factor in developing an emergency preparedness plan. However, managers may have legitimate concerns that gather-

ing information about specific individual needs violates civil rights protections afforded by federal laws (e.g., Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended). Thus, agency personnel should be carefully instructed on the legal aspects of gathering such information (e.g., type of information that can be gathered and the manner in which this is accomplished). Federal laws do not prevent employers from obtaining and appropriately using information necessary for a comprehensive emergency evacuation plan. Similarly, with respect to attitudes toward disability, it is essential an agency develop a culture where employees feel comfortable sharing the necessary information with appropriate individuals.

Finally, establishing effective means to impart emergency preparedness and response procedures is vital to the success of the agency plan. Communication challenges among federal employees with disabilities vary widely. Therefore, varied, multiple, and redundant means of emergency notification and communication are necessary.

Agency Budget and Personnel Commitment

An effective emergency preparedness plan requires support and commitment from senior-level management within an agency. Seminar presenters and participants alike commented that an agency preparedness plan will only be as good as the financial and personnel resources supporting it. The methods of securing and demonstrating managerial commitment to including people with disabilities in emergency planning vary from agency to agency. At some agencies, this has been accomplished through

direct communications from executive-level officials, such as the agency Secretary. Since the protocols and forms of communications differ from agency to agency, personnel tasked with creating emergency preparedness plans need to think creatively about obtaining and communicating the vital managerial buy-in.

Flexibility

Even the best laid plans for an emergency situation can fall prey to unforeseen circumstances. In order to minimize the chaos and disorder stemming from an emergency situation, an agency emergency preparedness plan must be as flexible as possible. Although an agency may believe it has identified and accommodated all employees with disabilities, there is a very real possibility that not everyone who needs assistance in emergencies has self-identified. Indeed, there also may be instances where an emergency situation exacerbates existing impairments or creates new impairments, affecting an individual's ability to evacuate. Recognizing that situations like these can arise, effective planning practice includes building flexibility into an agency emergency preparedness plan.

For example, during the Seminar, there was significant discussion about the effectiveness of the buddy system. As defined earlier, a traditional "buddy system" entails assigning an able-bodied person to a person with a disability for the purpose of assisting the employee with a disability during an emergency. However, reliance on a single buddy can put the employee at risk, in the event the buddy is not present, able, or willing to assist during an emergency. Therefore, "flexibility" in an emergency preparedness plan is vital.

This may mean augmenting the traditional buddy system with additional supports for the employee; in other words having multiple individuals prepared to assist in an emergency. With this approach, everyone, including the person with a disability, would be trained in issues that may arise during an emergency.

Practice

During the Seminar, presenters and experienced managers continually emphasized the importance of rigorously practicing the emergency plan on a regular basis with all employees. Practicing serves several purposes. First, it allows employees with and without disabilities to become familiar with the agency plan. This includes learning, knowing, and remembering where to go, what to do, and who to contact in an emergency. Secondly, it provides agency emergency preparedness planners with an opportunity to survey and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the plan; therefore, providing a base plan on which to improve or from which to replicate. Finally, regularly-timed drills and/or practice sessions keep the issue of being prepared on the minds of all involved, from the agency Secretary to the agency custodial staff.■

RESOURCES



U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20210
Voice: (866) 4-USA-DOL (4-872-365)
TTY: (877) 889-5627
www.dol.gov

Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)

U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20210
Voice: (866) ODEP-DOL (633-7365)
TTY: (877) 889-5627
www.dol.gov/odep

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

P.O. Box 6080
Morgantown, WV 26506-6080
Voice/TTY: (800) ADA-WORK
(800) 232-9675
Fax: (304) 293-5407
E-mail: jan@jan.wvu.edu
www.jan.wvu.edu
Calls are answered from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Eastern Time Monday through Thursday and
on Fridays from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Machines
answer after-hours calls.

DisabilityInfo.gov

www.disabilityinfo.gov

**U.S. Architectural and Transportation
Compliance Board (Access Board)**

1331 F Street, N.W.
Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20004-1111
Voice: (202) 272-0080
(800) 872-2253

TTY: (202) 272-0082
(800) 993-2822
Fax: (202) 272-0081
E-mail: info@access-board.gov
www.access-board.gov

U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

Washington, DC 20528
www.dhs.gov

**U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity
Commission (EEOC)**

1801 L Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20507
Voice: (202) 663-4900
TTY: (202) 663-4494

You can be automatically connected to your
nearest Field Office by calling:
Voice: (800) 669-4000
TTY: (800) 669-6820

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

500 C Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20472
Phone: (202) 566-1600
www.fema.gov

U.S. Fire Administration (USFA)

16825 S. Seton Avenue
Emmitsburg, MD 21727
Voice: (301) 447-1000
Fax: (301) 447-1052
www.usfa.fema.gov

Office of Personnel Management (OPM)

1900 E Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20415-1000
Voice: (202) 606-1800
TTY: (202) 606-2532
www.opm.gov

American Red Cross National Headquarters

2025 E Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20006
Phone: (202) 303-4498
www.redcross.org

Center for Disability Issues and the Health Professions

Western University of Health Sciences
309 E. Second Street
College Plaza
Pomona, CA 91766-1854
Phone: (909) 469-5380
E-mail: evac@westernu.edu
www.cdihp.org

Disability Preparedness Center

(National Center on Emergency Planning for People with Disabilities)
1010 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.
Suite 340
Washington, DC 20007
Voice/TTY: (202) 546-4464
Fax: (202) 338-7216
E-mail: NCEPPD@inclusioninc.com
www.disabilitypreparedness.com

National Council on Independent Living (NCIL)

1916 Wilson Boulevard
Suite 209

Arlington, VA 22201
Voice: (703) 525-3406
TTY: (703) 525-4153
Fax: (703) 525-3409
Email: ncil@ncil.org

For a listing of Centers for Independent Living (CILs) by state visit www.virtualcil.net/cils/

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)

1 Batterymarch Park
Quincy, MA 02169-7471
Phone: (617) 770-3000
Fax: (617) 770-0700
www.nfpa.org

Customer Sales/Member Services:

Voice: (800) 344-3555
(617) 770-3000
Fax: (800) 593-6372
(508) 895-8301

National Organization on Disability (NOD)

910 Sixteenth Street, N.W.,
Suite 600
Washington, DC 20006
Phone: (202) 293-5960
Fax: (202) 293-7999
TTY: (202) 293-5968
Email: ability@nod.org
www.nod.org

National Taskforce on Fire/Life Safety for People with Disabilities

637 Riverside Drive
Luray, VA 22835-2910
Voice/Fax (by appointment): (540) 743-4601
E-mail: edwina@shentel.net

APPENDICES



**EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS FOR
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**
An Interagency Seminar of Exchange for Federal Managers

U.S. Department of Labor
December 2-3, 2003

Tuesday, December 2, 2003

7:45 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. **REGISTRATION / CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST**
Location: U.S. Department of Labor Great Hall

8:30 a.m. – 8:40 a.m. **WELCOME**

The Honorable W. Roy Grizzard, Jr., Ed.D.
Assistant Secretary
Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)
U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

Location: U.S. Department of Labor Great Hall
(Open to Media)

8:40 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. **SETTING THE STAGE: THE IMPORTANCE
OF EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS IN A TIME
OF UNCERTAINTY**

Dan Sutherland, J.D.
Officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

Location: U.S. Department of Labor Great Hall
(Open to Media)

9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. **PLENARY SESSION I: LESSONS LEARNED:
PERSPECTIVES FROM FEDERAL MANAGERS
AND EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES**

Lawrence W. Roffee, Jr.
Executive Director
U.S. Architectural and Transportation
Barriers Compliance Board (U.S. Access Board)

Mary Ann Wilson
Director
U.S. Department of Housing and
Urban Development (HUD) in Richmond, VA

Location: U.S. Department of Labor Great Hall
(Open to Media)

10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. **PLENARY SESSION II: FEDERAL AGENCY
SHOWCASE: EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS
PLANS THAT INVOLVE PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES**

10:00 a.m. – 10:40 a.m. **PART I**

A. **U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Plan
Presentation**

Al Stewart, M.A., J.D.
Director
Business Operations Center
Office of Assistant Secretary for Administration
and Management
U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

B. **U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Plan
Presentation**

John Benison
Disability Policy Advisor
Office of Civil Rights
U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT)

10:40 a.m. – 10:50 a.m. **BREAK**

10:50 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. **PART II**

C. **U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) / Defense
Intelligence Agency (DIA) Plan Presentation**

Pamela A. Butler
Deaf and Disabled Persons Employment Program
Manager
Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity Office
Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA)
U.S. Department of Defense (DOD)

Location: U.S. Department of Labor Great Hall
(Open to Media)

11:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. **REMARKS FROM THE SECRETARY OF
LABOR**

Location: U.S. Department of Labor Great Hall
(Open to Media)

12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. **LUNCH**

1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. **BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

**Breakout Session Topic #1: Communicating
with Employees**

Dr. Carl T. Cameron
President
Disability Preparedness Center

Cheryl Heppner
Executive Director
Northern Virginia Resource Center for
Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons

Sharon Rennert, J.D.
Senior Attorney Advisor
ADA Division
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

Location: U.S. Department of Labor Conference
Center, C-5515 (Closed to Media)

Breakout Session Topic #2: Equipment Decisions

Dr. Beth Loy
Human Factor Consultant
Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

Linda Batiste, M.S., J.D.
Human Factor Consultant
Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

Location: U.S. Department of Labor Conference
Center, C-5515 (Closed to Media)

Breakout Session Topic #3: On-Site (Virtual) Tour of Department of Labor's Emergency Preparedness Effective Practices

Zoë Fearon, M.A.
Program Specialist
Office of the Assistant Secretary for
Administration and Management
U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

Location: U.S. Department of Labor Auditorium
(Closed to Media)

Breakout Session Topic #4: Egress

Edwina Juillet
Co-Founder
National Taskforce on Fire/Life Safety for People
with Disabilities

June Isaacson Kailes
Associate Director
Center for Disability Issues and the Health Professions
Western University of Health Sciences

Location: U.S. Department of Labor Conference
Center, C-5515 (Closed to Media)

Breakout Session Topic #5: Support Mechanisms in the Workplace

Peg Blechman, J.D.
Compliance Specialist
U.S. Architectural and Transportation
Barriers Compliance Board (U.S. Access Board)

Bruce A. McFarlane, Sr.
Director
TARGET Center
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Location: U.S. Department of Labor Conference
Center, C-5515 (Closed to Media)

Breakout Session Topic #6: Regional and Field Office Considerations

Elizabeth Davis, Ed.M., J.D.
Director
Emergency Preparedness Initiative (EPI)
National Organization on Disability (NOD)

Dr. Alan Clive
Civil Rights Program Manager
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Location: U.S. Department of Labor Conference
Center, C-5515 (Closed to Media)

Breakout Session Topic #7: Individualizing Emergency Plans

Dr. Richard Horne
Supervisory Research Analyst
Office of Disability Employment Policy
U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

Location: U.S. Department of Labor Conference
Center, C-5515 (Closed to Media)

2:40 p.m. – 4:10 p.m.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS REPEATED

(Closed to Media)

4:20 p.m. – 4:50 p.m.

**(OPTIONAL) ON-SITE (VIRTUAL) TOUR OF
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR'S EMERGENCY
PREPAREDNESS EFFECTIVE PRACTICES**

Zoë Fearon, M.A.
Program Specialist
Office of the Assistant Secretary for
Administration and Management
U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

Location: U.S. Department of Labor Auditorium
(Closed to Media)

Wednesday, December 3, 2003

8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS REPEATED

(Closed to Media)

10:10 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

**PLENARY SESSION III: SITUATIONS AND
SOLUTIONS: EXCHANGING INNOVATIVE IDEAS**

Dr. Beth Loy
Human Factor Consultant
Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

Linda Batiste J.D.
Human Factor Consultant
Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

Location: U.S. Department of Labor Great Hall
(Open to Media)

11:00 a.m. – 11:40 a.m.

**PLENARY SESSION IV: PUTTING IT ALL
TOGETHER: STRENGTHENING YOUR
AGENCY'S EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLAN**

Elizabeth Davis, Ed.M., J.D.
Director

Emergency Preparedness Initiative (EPI)
National Organization on Disability (NOD)

Edwina Juillet
Co-Founder
National Taskforce on Fire/Life Safety for People
with Disabilities

June Isaacson Kailes
Associate Director
Center for Disability Issues and the Health Professions
Western University of Health Sciences

Location: U.S. Department of Labor Great Hall
(Open to Media)

11:40 a.m. – 11:55 a.m.

CLOSING REMARKS

The Honorable W. Roy Grizzard, Jr., Ed.D.
Assistant Secretary
Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)
U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

Location: U.S. Department of Labor Great Hall
(Open to Media)

Opening Remarks Prepared for Delivery for Assistant Secretary for the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)

W. Roy Grizzard, Jr., Ed.D.

Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities
An Interagency Seminar of Exchange for Federal Managers
U.S. Department of Labor
Tuesday, December 2, 2003

Good morning. I am Roy Grizzard, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), in the U.S. Department of Labor. It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you all here today to the Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities Interagency Seminar of Exchange.

This is an important event for us for several reasons, but before I get into that, I would like to share with you a little background about ODEP, its mission, and its activities.

ODEP BACKGROUND

- ODEP is the only agency in the Federal Government led by an Assistant Secretary that deals solely with disability employment policy.
- ODEP recommends policy.
- ODEP does not regulate, investigate, or adjudicate.

ODEP Mission and Approach

- ODEP's mission is to provide leadership to increase employment opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities.
- ODEP's approach is market-based: demand and supply

ODEP Goals and Activities

- ODEP's overarching goal is to eliminate employment barriers for people with disabilities.

- To achieve its mission, ODEP funds a variety of initiatives, then measures and analyzes the results to inform the policy development process & to share promising practices with employers, providers, and others in the workforce development system.
- Through its Employer Assistance Referral Network (EARN) and its Job Accommodation Network (JAN) initiatives, ODEP provides technical assistance to private sector employers.
- ODEP's Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) gives employers access to a pool of talented college and university students with disabilities to fill summer or permanent positions.
- ODEP serves as a catalyst to bring together federal agencies that address issues and policies that impact on the employment of people with disabilities. This seminar is an example of what we do.

WHY AN EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS SEMINAR?

ODEP's goals rest on several core fundamentals. Key among these is that increased employment opportunities for people with disabilities can be best achieved through a balanced distribution of elements:

- access to appropriate education and training,
- affordable and decent housing,
- reliable transportation,
- personal and professional supports, and
- physical safety.

Imagine if you will a balanced scale, with the elements I just mentioned distributed equally on both sides of the scale. To remove even one of the elements will throw the balance off completely, resulting in missed employment opportunities.

This seminar is important because it addresses the element of physical safety for people with disabilities while they are at work. A 2001 Harris Poll, commissioned by the National Organization on Disability (NOD) showed that among people with disabilities who are employed full- or part-time, 50% say no plans have been made to safely evacuate their workplace! With a statistic like this, is it any wonder that people with disabilities are more anxious about their personal safety post September 11th than the general population, as the survey also indicated?

Did you know that workers with disabilities make up 7.0% or 123,000 of the 1.8 million employees in the federal workforce? Whether these figures strike you as larger or smaller than you may have expected, the point is that the Federal Government's diverse workforce includes people with disabilities. As such, it is imperative that emergency preparedness processes and strategies address the unique needs of employees with disabilities.

You are here today because your agency or organization recognizes that emergency preparedness for employees and customers with disabilities is important. Throughout this day and into tomorrow, you will hear from some of the premier experts on issues ranging from egress to individualized emergency preparedness plans. While you are here learn all that you can. Ask questions. Challenge the responses. Share your agency's experiences.

There is no "one-size-fits-all" when it comes to emergency preparedness. I am telling you now; you will hear that phrase repeatedly while you are with us. However, by sharing what we know with each other and asking the critical questions, we will be able to create thorough and comprehensive emergency preparedness plans that provide for an appropriate course of action for all employees in an emergency situation.

On behalf of my colleagues at ODEP and the Department of Labor, I wish you all a successful and engaging Seminar.■

Keynote Remarks Prepared for Delivery for U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao

Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities
An Interagency Seminar of Exchange for Federal Managers
U.S. Department of Labor
Tuesday, December 2, 2003

Thank you, Roy [Roy Grizzard].

I would like to recognize the staff of the Office of Disability Employment Policy for planning this intensive two-day seminar. And I would like to thank Assistant Secretary John Henshaw and Assistant Secretary Pat Pizzella for their support of this important event.

I would also like to welcome the more than 20 presenters who have agreed to share their expertise on a number of key preparedness issues—especially Dan Sutherland, from the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Civil Rights, who took time from his busy schedule to be this morning’s keynote speaker.

I would also like to recognize the participation of the National Organization on Disability and its Director, Elizabeth Davis—thank you for your leadership in this critical area.

Today is truly an important milestone for federal emergency planners. We have 225 representatives from more than 90 federal offices and agencies with us today. This is the first time ever that senior personnel from emergency preparedness, security, office safety and disability programs have gathered together to address emergency preparedness for federal employees with disabilities.

At the Labor Department, we are working hard to bring people with disabilities into the federal workplace. As President George W. Bush said, when he announced his New Freedom Initiatives for people with disabilities, “We must speed the day when the last barrier has been removed to full and independent lives for every American with or without disabilities.”

To meet this challenge, the Department is involved in a number of key initiatives for people with disabilities. We’re developing new training initiatives, offering creative placement services and adapting new technologies. We are encouraging flextime and easing transportation

challenges. Equally important, we're making the federal workplace a model workplace by ensuring a safe and secure environment for employees with disabilities.

We are committed to taking the steps necessary to ensure that all federal employees with disabilities are protected during an emergency.

The events of September 11th set up a new challenge in the workplace for people with disabilities—the ability to quickly evacuate employees with disabilities during terrorist threats, attacks and other disasters.

At the Department, we have always taken the safety requirements of our over 1,000 employees with disabilities very seriously. We are constantly revising and fine tuning our emergency preparedness plans. Even prior to September 11th, the Labor Department had plans in place for the speedy and effective emergency evacuation of employees with disabilities. Since then, we have strengthened these plans. I convened a Secretarial-level Task Force to improve the workplace safety of all Department of Labor employees, and people with disabilities were a key focus of our action plan.

Let me illustrate the importance of planning for these emergencies with a story involving some of our OSHA colleagues in New York.

In August 2001, OSHA staff at the Manhattan Area Office completed an uneventful evacuation drill from their offices on the top floor of Building 6 of the World Trade Center complex. Managers felt confident that everyone could escape the building safely in an emergency—including an employee who had recently returned to work in a wheelchair. The evacuation plan had specifically been revised to accommodate his needs.

Within weeks, the practice proved more valuable than anyone could have imagined.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, OSHA employees had begun a routine day when an explosion shook the building. The Assistant Area Director immediately issued the order to evacuate. As the first plane hit the North Tower of the WTC, debris began falling on Building 6. OSHA staff rushed into the hallway. Three employees helped their co-worker in the wheelchair down the corridor and into a freight elevator they had used during the practice drill. They descended to the basement, into a garage, down some steps, and into another garage, where they escaped from the building.

The group moved outside just as the second plane hit the South Tower. As the group moved away from the site, the North Tower collapsed, destroying OSHA's Manhattan Area Office as it fell. We are so thankful that no Department of Labor employee was lost during that tragic day. Thanks, in no small part to OSHA's careful emergency planning, everyone knew what to do—even in this unprecedented circumstance.

This is a perfect example of why we must have emergency preparedness plans in place for people with disabilities and why we must perfect these plans with constant practice. Practice save lives, prevents injuries and helps create the conditions for a calm and professional evacuation should it ever be needed.

Every single day, more than 120,000 employees with disabilities go to work in the national headquarters buildings, regional offices or field locations that are owned by or leased by the Federal Government. Their safety—and the safety of all federal workers—is our number one priority.

That's why we're having this conference, to guarantee that no federal worker is left behind in an emergency. We must ensure that everyone has a safe and secure workplace environment. As leaders in your field, we'll be looking to you to come up with creative solutions to the challenges ahead.

During the next two days you will hear from a number of speakers on a wide variety of subjects—from developing communication plans to applying technologies to help in evacuations. It is critical that you attend these breakout sessions and general panel discussions. We need everyone's participation if we are to create federal emergency preparedness plans that save lives.

So please take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to learn from your colleagues and expert consultants.

We hope you will return to your agencies with new insights and practical tools to help create an ever better emergency management plan for your agency.

Working together, we can create a safe and secure workplace—ready for any emergency.

Thank you for joining us, and have a great seminar! ■

¹ The EEOC has identified nine categories of severe disabilities as targeted disabilities for tracking purposes in an agency's federal affirmative employment program for individuals with disabilities. These disabilities include: deafness, blindness, missing limbs, partial paralysis, complete paralysis, convulsive disorders, mental illness, mental retardation, and distortion of limbs or spine.

² A berm is an architectural security design meant to serve as a barrier or to provide insulation; similar to a moat.

³ Every federal agency has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which has a goal to restore employees to full productivity. More specifically, the EAP provides free, confidential short-term counseling to identify the employee's problem and, when appropriate, make a referral to an outside organization, facility, or program that can assist the employee in resolving his or her problem. It is the employee's responsibility to follow through with this referral, and it is also the employee's responsibility to make the necessary financial arrangements for this treatment, as with any other medical condition.

⁴ Brick, K.N., & Heppner, C.A. (2003). *Excerpts from Personal Experiences of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons: September 11, 2001 and Its Aftermath*. Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumer Advocacy Network & Northern Virginia Resource for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons.



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