

12 CONSIDERATIONS FOR ACCESSIBLE EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center for Wireless Technologies

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There are over 50 million people in America with a disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006) who are frequently overlooked in emergencies. This document is an introduction to select considerations to help meet the distinctive needs of people with disabilities (PWD) during an emergency.

TECHNOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS:

1. **Develop or provide accessible formats to disseminate alerts and information to PWD.**

In order for alerts and other emergency information to effectively reach all people it is essential that they be disseminated in a variety of formats (text, audio, multi-media) utilizing multiple methods (broadcast, datacast, Internet/e-mail) to a variety of devices (cell phones, PDAs, TVs, radios).

2. **Manufacture/procure cost effective, universally designed (UD) devices to receive emergency communications (EC).**

UD communications technologies can reduce the need for high-cost assistive devices. Accessibility solutions should be built into devices because existing technology often requires add-on accessibility software and/or hardware to make it usable by PWD.

3. **Develop software/hardware solutions and interoperable networks for receiving alert feeds from multiple sources.**

Subscription-based alert services can send emergency alerts via wireline and wireless networks as text messages, voicemails or e-mails in accessible formats to PWD.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS:

4. **Ensure that EC rulemakings consider the needs of PWD.**

Before deployment of a national system like the Digital Emergency Alert System (DEAS) the FCC releases rulemaking proceedings seeking the valuable insights and comments of stakeholders. Participation in FCC comment periods will facilitate inclusion of stakeholders such as PWD.

5. **Ensure responsible federal agencies enforce laws safeguarding PWD.**

The FCC, DHS's Interagency Coordinating Council on Emergency Preparedness and PWD, DOJ, and FEMA enforcement actions helps to ensure PWD are considered during emergencies.

6. **Develop EC related policymaking and regulatory initiatives.**

The NCD, the Access Board, NOD and others are a model for public and private organizations that have not yet considered or are unaware of the specific needs of PWD in emergencies.

TRAINING & EDUCATION CONSIDERATIONS:

7. **Integrate PWD into emergency management planning, exercises and simulations.**

8. **Educate emergency/public safety personnel, and relevant community entities on how to provide communications to people with different disabilities in emergency situations.**

9. **Train emergency personnel in use of accessible communications technologies.**

10. **Provide emergency/public safety personnel, and relevant community entities with sensitivity training on needs and abilities of PWD.**

11. **Educate end-users on the benefits of receiving alerts/subsequent emergency information.**

12. **Convene stakeholders for regional workshops on emergency preparedness/communications.**

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The following is a selected list of web sites with topic specific information:

TECHNOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS:

American Foundation for the Blind: www.afb.org

The Carl and Ruth Shapiro Family National Center for Accessible Media:

Access to Emergency Alerts for People with Disabilities: <http://ncam.wgbh.org/alerts/> and www.incident.com/access

Access to Locally Televised On-Screen Information: <http://ncam.wgbh.org/onscreen/>

Captioning Solutions for Handheld Media and Mobile Devices: <http://ncam.wgbh.org/mm>

Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons: Emergency Preparedness and Emergency Communications Access, Lessons Learned Since 9/11 and Recommendations: <http://www.nvrc.org/content.aspx?page=5138§ion=5>

The Smith-Kettlewell Eye Research Institute: Emergency Information for People With Visual Impairments: Evaluation of Five Accessible Formats: <http://www.ski.org/Rehab/WCrandall/EgressIIIWeb/egressIIIabstract.html> and www.ski.org/rehab

Trace Research & Development Center: <http://trace.wisc.edu/>

Wireless Emergency Communications Project of the Wireless RERC: www.wirelessrerc.org

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS:

Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Interagency Coordinating Council on Emergency Preparedness and People with Disabilities: http://www.dhs.gov/xprepresp/committees/editorial_0591.shtm

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): Accommodating People with Disabilities in Disasters: A Reference Guide to Federal Law: <http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=38990>

The FCC's Commercial Mobile Service Alert Advisory Committee's technical standards and protocols for the delivery of alerts to mobile devices: <http://www.fcc.gov/pshs/cmsaac/>

The FCC's Second Report & Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking Regarding the Emergency Alert System: http://fjallfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-07-109A1.doc

Congressional Research Service's Report for Congress: The Americans with Disabilities Act and Emergency Preparedness and Response: <http://www.ncseonline.org/NLE/CRSreports/06Jul/RS22254.pdf>

National Organization on Disability's (NOD) Information on Accessible Emergency Communications: http://www.nod.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page_viewPage&pageID=1430&nodeID=1&FeatureID=1134&redirected=1&CFID=10558214&CFTOKEN=13069388

Impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on People with Disabilities: A Look Back and Remaining Challenges, NCD Report 2006: http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/2006/pdf/hurricanes_impact.pdf

Research and Policy Recommendations reported in the proceedings of the "Accessible Emergency Notification and Communication: State of the Science Conference" held at Gallaudet University by the RERC on Telecommunications Access. 2006: <http://tap.gallaudet.edu/emergency/nov05conference/emergencycommconf.asp>

TRAINING & EDUCATION CONSIDERATIONS:

American Association of People with Disabilities: http://www.aapd.com/News/emergency/index_emergprep.php

The Center for an Accessible Society's Disaster Mitigation for People with Disabilities: <http://www.accessiblesociety.org/topics/independentliving/disasterprep.htm>

Community Emergency Preparedness Information Network (CEPIN) at TDI: <http://www.cepintdi.org/>

EAD & Associates, LLC, Emergency Management & Special Needs Consultants: <http://www.eadassociates.com/>

Emergency Preparedness: Addressing the Needs of People with Disabilities. Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health: www.ncdp.mailman.columbia.edu

National Center on Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities: www.disabilitypreparedness.org

NOD's Emergency Preparedness Initiative: http://www.nod.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page_viewPage&pageId=11

Saving Lives: Including People with Disabilities in Emergency Planning, NOD 2005: http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/2005/saving_lives.htm

Special Needs Assessment for Katrina Evacuees (SNAKE) Project Report, NOD 2005: http://www.nod.org/Resources/PDFs/katrina_snake_report.doc