

Preparing the Workplace for Everyone

Interagency Coordinating Council on Emergency Preparedness and People with Disabilities, Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness in the Workplace

Session Objective: To Provide the Audience with the scope of the issue, practical strategies, and actual examples related to preparing the workplace for people with disabilities in emergencies.

Session Overview

- Setting the Stage
- Necessity of the Plan
- Development of the Plan
- Implementation of the Plan
- Practice and Maintenance of the Plan
- Questions and Answers
- Resources and Contacts

SETTING THE STAGE

Executive Order 13347

Calls for Agencies to:

- Consider the unique needs of employees/individuals with disabilities
- Encourage consideration by State, local, tribal, and private organizations
- Facilitate cooperation among Federal, State, local, tribal, and private organizations

“President Bush signed an executive order to ensure that the special needs and talents of people with disabilities in the emergency preparedness effort would be a national priority.” Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, Remarks at 2005 ADA Celebration

Interagency Coordinating Council Subcommittees

- Emergency Preparedness in the Workplace
- Communication
- Transportation
- Health
- State and Local Government Coordination
- Private Sector Coordination
- Technical Assistance and Outreach
- Research
- Incident Management Team (established following Katrina)

Overview of the Issue

- Increased recognition of the importance of workplace preparedness
- Evidence: people with disabilities often overlooked in EP planning

Some Explanations for Lack of Inclusion

- Fear
- Lack of knowledge
- Failure to take potential threat seriously
- Belief that there will be no personal effect

Potential Consequences

- Safety is a shared responsibility
Example: OSHA employee, World Trade Center
- Safety concerns hinder recruitment, hiring, and promotion of qualified workers
Example: EEOC case

Seminar of Exchange December 2003

- DOL convened over 200 federal managers, decision-makers, and national experts
- 90 different agencies/offices involved in the 1.5-day event
- Documented discussions, presentations, and exchange of effective practices

Emerging Themes from Seminar

- Necessity for support and commitment from senior-level management
- Importance of timely, accurate, and accessible communication
- Value of a clear, comprehensive, and customizable plan
- Importance of varied drills and frequent practicing of plan

Preparing the Workplace for Everyone Framework of Emergency Preparedness Guidelines

- Based on Seminar of Exchange and subsequent research
- Launching point for re-evaluating agency emergency plans
- Reflects effective practices of 20 agencies
- Many principles can be applied in a variety of situations
- Four plan phases: development, implementation, practice, and maintenance
- Framework of Guidelines will be an evolving document

“Working through our colleagues at the Department of Labor, the council has developed a template that can train and guide managers in the proper evacuation of people with disabilities during times of emergency.” Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, Remarks at 2005 ADA Celebration

NECESSITY OF THE PLAN

Legal Considerations

- GSA OEP Requirements
- Homeland Security Presidential Directive-5
- Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- ADA
- U.S. Access Board ADA-ABA Accessibility Guidelines
- State and Local Laws
- Procedures governing shared building spaces

Agency Commitment

- Awareness among senior staff
Example: USDA position within ICS
- Ways to affirm agency commitment
Example: DOL Secretary Chao established ERT
- Relevant alliances within the agency
Examples: DOT and SSA involvement at all levels
- Areas of plan where improvements are needed

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN

Involving Key Personnel

- Array of disability perspectives
Example: USDA Special Needs Advisor
- Consulting first responders during all phases
- Active support and understanding of senior staff
Example: DOT Secretarial Memorandum
- Working with nearby agencies on compatibility
Examples: DOL headquarters; MR/DD offices in NYC

Involving the Disability Community

- Agency Disability Advisory Councils
- National disability organizations and/or local affiliates
- State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies
- Centers for Independent Living (CILs)
- State/local government committees, commissions, councils on disability
- Veterans Affairs (VA) regional offices
- Community-based nonprofit organizations
- Local ADA coordinators
- Citizen Corps Councils

Regional and Field Offices

- Building location - busy streets, construction, and security barriers
- Representation on the Building Security Committee (BSC)
- Building traffic flow throughout the day and week
- Different agencies/entities occupying the building

Shelter-in-Place Plans

- Process for evaluating emergency and taking action
- Multiple methods of relaying information to all staff and visitors
- Clearly marking all shelter-in-place (SIP) areas
- Methods for communicating with staff who have sensory disabilities
- Keeping extra supplies or medication on hand
Examples: DOL headquarters; USDA headquarters

Evaluating Employee and Customer Needs

- Collecting disability information consistent with Rehabilitation Act
- Post offer, prior to employment
- On the Job
- Employees with Obvious Disabilities
- Only sharing relevant information with relevant personnel
Example: DOE Self Identification/Needs Form

Making Equipment Decisions

- Contacting other agencies, first-responders, and community organizations
- Differing needs of individuals and all building occupants
- Architectural realities, budgetary constraints, and agency characteristics
- Providing training to staff
Example: SSA

Personal Support Networks

- Risk of relying on a single buddy
- Multiple individuals prepared to assist – support networks
- Cross-training on procedures and equipment critical
Examples: USDA; U.S. Access Board

Service Animals

- Individual and his/her service animal are a team
- Practicing drills with the individual and his/her service animal
- Considering disorientation of animal during emergency
- Notifying first responders about the service animal
- Keeping extra food and supplies on hand for service animal
- Plans for customers and visitors with disabilities who have service animals

Communicating and Distributing the Plan

- Disseminate with same frequency and level of detail to all employees

- Make info easy to locate and available in text versions
- Hold meetings in accessible locations and provide sign language interpreters
- Place plan in prominent locations and on agency intranet

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

Employer Responsibilities

- Ensure no segregation or discrimination
- Consider all requests for reasonable accommodations
- Address privately and directly employees who impede evacuation
- Direct threat is tied to nature and severity of risk
- Involve people with disabilities in all stages
Example: USDA OEP review by employees with Disabilities

When 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)
- Use of technology or medications

Working with First-Responders

- Notify first-responders of particular needs related to employees with disabilities
Example: U.S. Access Board list
- Involve first-responders throughout the process
Example: DOD/DIA work with firefighters
- Priorities of first-responders and people with disabilities sometimes seem at odds
Example: Waiting for first-responders versus evacuating
- Explore all options in order to inform choices
Example: DOL headquarters prior to 9/11

Areas of Refuge/Rescue Assistance

- Required for new buildings under the ADA, UFAS, and IBC
- Exception for structures with approved sprinkler system

Rethinking the Elevator Policy

- Specific conditions for using elevators in emergencies
Example: U.S. Department of State
- Elevator policy – specify who, what, where, when, how
Example: DOT headquarters

- Determine alternatives if elevators are inoperable
Example: DOL headquarters

Emergency Notification Systems

- Redundancy in communication is key
Example: USDA over a dozen forms of notification
- Accessibility includes timeliness and clarity
Example: OPM wireless handheld devices and E-POP system
- Communicating with people who are away from their desk or out of the building
Example: USDA pager system
- Individuals with communication difficulties able to convey info quickly

PRACTICE AND MAINTENANCE OF THE PLAN

Practicing and Drills

- Policy regarding the regular and continual practice of plans
- Participation by people with disabilities
- Involvement of first responders in practice
- Varied drills in type and time of day, incorporating obstacles
- Employees, visitors, or customers who may need to leave during a practice drill

Evaluation and Maintenance

- No plan is truly complete
- Regular assessment and updating of the plan
- “Nothing about us without us”

Additional Resources

- Department of Homeland Security
www.disabilitypreparedness.gov
- Office of Disability Employment Policy
www.dol.gov/odep/programs/emergency.htm
- DisabilityInfo:
www.disabilityinfo.gov
- U.S. Office of Personnel Management
www.opm.gov/emergency

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