



Best Practice Model

Emergency Preparedness: Clearinghouse of Information

States' understandings and practices of establishing a "clearinghouse of information" to be used during State and federally declared emergencies vary. The key component is establishing relationships and good communications between agencies prior to disasters.

State Examples

Maryland

According to Maryland's State LTCO, the state's emergency management agency (EMA) maintains a list of LTCFs during statewide emergencies such as Hurricane Sandy. The list reflects the status of each nursing home and assisted living including whether the facility has been evacuated and if the facility has lost electricity. The Health Department in each local emergency jurisdiction is responsible for updating the list. Depending on how the local jurisdiction is organized, the local LTCO and AAAs may assist in notifying the Health Department about the status of facilities and other issues such as whether or not the facility is using a generator. When the State Ombudsman sees that the list is not accurate, she notifies the EMA liaison from the Maryland Department of Aging of the facility status based on information from the local ombudsman. The "clearinghouse of information" is maintained in Google Docs and team members access the information and update it in "real time" through the Internet. If there is no Internet service, the information is relayed to the EMA by telephone. The State Ombudsman maintains a list of land and cell phone numbers of local ombudsmen in case information needs to be obtained to update the list or for other identified problems.

Texas

The Texas State LTCO reports that the LTCOP is housed in the State Unit on Aging (SUA) along with the regulatory agency. Their department is incorporated into the overall emergency preparedness (EP) planning for the state. Regulatory services takes the lead on maintaining the "clearinghouse of information" pertaining to LTCFs. Texas uses a statewide database for the "clearinghouse" and the LTCFs are told to login or call-in their updated information about bed vacancies and evacuations. The regulatory agency coordinates with the Ombudsmen and first responders. Although the state LTCO can get information from the "clearinghouse," she states that the regional regulatory and LTCO offices have the best information.

Wisconsin

Wisconsin's state LTCO gives credit to her predecessor for laying the groundwork for excellent communications with leaders in the state. The WI LTCOP is an independent agency and the Ombudsmen are state employees. The State Ombudsman reports that she meets with the SUA director

at least every six weeks and EP topics are covered in these regular meetings. During emergencies the Department of Health Services Quality Assurance (regulatory services) maintains information about LTCF vacant beds and relocations. State LTCO has access to collected information upon request. No formal checklist for communications is used. Regulatory services staff provide the state LTCO with regular updates about any changes in LTCFs.

Ombudsmen: What would you do?

Q. What exactly is a “clearinghouse of information”?

A. The intent is that an entity in each state shall keep track of all LTCFs, bed vacancies, and “sheltering in place” or relocation plans and actions and update these data during emergencies. It is a state decision as to which entity will maintain the information. How the information is obtained, tracked, and updated is a state decision. Most frequently it is the state emergency management agency or regulatory services agency that maintains the “clearinghouse of information”. The LTCO may contribute information and have access to the information.

Q. I am not part of an emergency preparedness planning team in my state. During emergencies I may or may not receive regular updates about the impact of the disaster on LTCFs and relocations of residents. What should I do to be included in emergency planning and response?

A. Request to meet with the emergency management agency when your state is not experiencing a major crisis. Explain the role of the LTCOP and ask to participate in the EMA preparedness and response training. Volunteer to assist in being the LTC liaison in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) during a declared emergency.

Resources:

U.S. DHHS CMS Survey and Certification EP for Every Emergency Checklist:

<http://www.ltombudsman.org/sites/default/files/norc/CMS-Checklist-Persons-LTC-Facilities-Ombudsmen.pdf>