



Being Prepared!

Things Ombudsmen Should Do *Before, During, and After* an Emergency

Before an Emergency

- ✓ Develop a safety plan for your immediate family and any persons for whom you are a caregiver.
- ✓ If you have advance notice of possible emergencies, get fuel for vehicles and generators, and extra cash.
- ✓ Prepare a box of food, water, batteries, flashlight, and weather radio for your home. A supply for at least 72 hours is recommended. If you have storage capacity, consider having enough supplies to live at home without utilities or road access for two weeks. Do not forget to add items needed by family members and pets such as medicines, diapers, pet food, etc. Think of common disasters in your region and pack items such as masks for fire and dust storms and rubber boots for flooding.
- ✓ Prepare a safety kit for each vehicle. Recommendations include a First Aid Kit, bottled water, flashlight with extra batteries, blanket, gloves, traction gripper such as “kitty litter,” small shovel, phone charger, notepad & pen, some cash, etc. Duct tape can repair many things at least temporarily.
- ✓ Know the safety and evacuation plans at the office. Request and participate in emergency practice drills. Know your office’s plan for the continuation of work if your office becomes uninhabitable due to the disaster. Offices should have at least two plans: telework from employees’ homes and alternate work site.
- ✓ Have a safety bag at work. The bag should include bottled water, protein rich snacks, a flashlight with batteries, a whistle, and comfortable walking shoes.
- ✓ Know the safety and evacuation plans at your child’s school. Discuss the plan with your child. If you are a caregiver for someone living in a LTCF, know and discuss safety plans with the care recipient.
- ✓ Ombudsmen should have at work, home, and in their vehicle paper copies of important names and phone numbers, such as work colleagues, volunteers, and long-term care facilities. You cannot rely on phone numbers stored on your landline phone, cell phone, or computer database. You cannot assume that you will have power or access to the Internet.
- ✓ Smartphone advice. In hopes that you have cell phone use, prepare by having at home, work, and in your vehicle extra chargers for your phone. Store important names and numbers (including work and personal cell) for coworkers, emergency management agencies, regulatory/licensing agency, and long term care facilities.
- ✓ Communications options. Well ahead of emergencies, develop as many communications resources and relationships as possible. The National Communications System, www.ncs.gov, has both the Government Emergency Telecommunications System (GETS) priority service for landlines and Wireless Priority Service (WPS) for cell phones, <http://wps.ncs.gov>. Both the GETS and WPS allow priority calls to be processed first during emergencies. Satellite phones may be purchased through federal/state grants for emergency preparedness; pre-paid phone cards could cover the costs for the use of the satellite phone. When all else fails, ham operators are able to establish communications during disasters. For more information go to the national association for amateur radio, <http://www.arrl.org/public-service>.

During and After an Emergency

- ➔ Ombudsmen are not first responders. Leave this work to be done by law enforcement, firemen, EMTs, and other first responders designated by local authorities.
- ➔ If you are a volunteer or paid first responder in addition to being an Ombudsman, notify your employer that during emergencies you will be a first responder.
- ➔ If you and your family are personally affected by the emergency, take care of yourself and your family first. As soon as possible notify your employer and the state LTCO about what has happened.
- ➔ After first responders have done their work and local authorities give approval for others to be in or near the scene of the disaster, you may then begin the work of an Ombudsman.
- ➔ Ombudsman responsibilities are consistent before, during, and after emergencies. You are the residents' advocate. Visit with residents: at the facility if they were "sheltered in place"; and in mass care shelters, hospitals, or other facilities if they were transferred from their residence. If you are not physically able to visit with residents due to road closures or personal impact of the disaster, contact others to check on the residents' welfare or ask nearby Ombudsmen to visit.
- ➔ After the emergency, everyone including Ombudsmen may be asked to assist in recovery efforts. Common additional assignments for Ombudsmen include: manning phones at emergency response operation centers and assisting people in completing forms at the disaster recovery centers (DRC) or mobile DRCs.
- ➔ Assignments that are best left to other professionals include: transferring, transporting, personal care, and medical care for individuals. (However, advocating for such services is the Ombudsman business.)
- ➔ If you are an Ombudsman in a nearby region or share state boundaries with a region or state impacted by a Federal/State declared emergency you can assist by:
 - Notifying the LTCO in the impacted State of nearby LTCFs with empty beds available for relocation of LTCF residents.
 - When LTCF residents are transferred to your region/state, visit with the relocated persons as soon as possible to inquire of their safety, comfort, medical care, and communications needs. Visit with the relocated residents frequently, advocate for their needs, document, and share findings with the LTCOP from their home state.
 - If available, offer to go to the affected disaster area to do Ombudsman work. This offer is especially helpful if the local LTCO is impacted by the disaster and is unable to work.
 - Offers of food, clothes, blankets, water, etc. are appreciated. However, the best option is to donate money to legitimate organizations offering on-site assistance.

Doing A Lot with Little

Ombudsmen have always known how to do a lot with little. Ombudsman responsibilities are consistent before and after emergencies. You are the residents' advocate. But we know in reality that being an advocate may be the only consistent thing about your work after the emergency.

- Unique disasters may require very unique and creative solutions.
- If one resident has this complaint, many others may also. Think of systematic resolutions.
- Weeks, months, and maybe years after the disaster, you may still be working on residents' issues related to an emergency.

Note: You may find it useful to educate your employer ahead of emergencies that you will be doing such “unusual” tasks during disasters.

Communications. Immediately after the disaster residents may want assistance contacting family and friends. Family members and friends may be calling the LTCOP to ask where particular residents have been relocated. Relocated residents may be moved more than once. Prepare a spreadsheet (a database would be even better) to keep up with residents, temporary housing, and family contacts, and/or connect with the designated Clearinghouse that is tracking this information.

Financial. Residents may need assistance in obtaining their personal needs allowance from their home LTCF. Weeks after the disaster new LTCF residences will want residents to pay for their board and care. Negotiations between facilities and electronic payment systems regarding residents’ funds will be arduous. Keep good records and be persistent. Also be vigilant about the potential for scam artists who will try to defraud victims of a disaster. Report incidents of financial exploitation to the state Adult Protective Services program, local law enforcement, district attorney, and Better Business Bureau.

Mental Health Services. It would be beneficial to have mental health professionals participate in the emergency preparedness planning and response. If a resident tells you, if family indicates, or you sense that a resident is struggling mentally with the effects of the disaster, seek help for them by calling on local mental health professionals or the state’s mental health services agency.

Personal Belongings. During emergencies people may lose: clothing and shoes, glasses, hearing aids, dentures, purses and wallets, durable medical equipment, medicines, etc. First, check to see if any of their items are salvageable from the disaster. Second, advocate for physician orders to get replacement prescriptions, durable medical equipment, etc. Negotiations may need to occur with Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance, to assist with replacement costs. Third, assist residents with applying through the Disaster Recovery Center for FEMA assistance and private insurance claims. Red Cross and others’ donations of clothing and small stipends may help in replacing items.

Transportation. People in need of specialized transportation to get back to their community after the disaster and cleanup may find it difficult to find accessible and affordable transportation. Search for free or low cost medical transport services. Also, do not hesitate to ask for---profit transportation providers to consider providing some pro bono services.