



Best Practice Model

Emergency Preparedness Ideas and Advocacy for LTCOPs and Long-Term Care Facilities (LTCFs)

This best practice model focuses on the creative ideas of others in how best to serve and protect LTCF residents. Ombudsmen from Ohio, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Maryland, and New York share practices of their program, LTCFs, and advocacy strategies.

Utility Outages Impacting Residents

In 2008, the Ohio AAA 11 LTCOP started monitoring utility outages in their four counties region. Staff primarily monitors the First Energy website which provides real time information and mapping of power outages and the local news media outlets. The Ombudsmen call all the LTCFs in the area with utility outages to see if their power has been restored within a reasonable time. If power has not been restored, the Ombudsmen call and advocate with the utility company to place a high priority on the restoration of power to affected facilities. The LTCOP has worked diligently to try and locate internal contacts within the utility companies. If the Ombudsmen have difficulty in influencing the utility company to restore power to a LTCF in need, they contact their local senators' offices. Constituent services staff in the senators' offices assists in advocating for the LTC residents. In addition if the Ombudsmen are successful in getting utilities restored to a facility, they will call the senators' offices to let them know. The Area 11 LTCOP Director, John Saulitis, reports that this effort does not take too much of the Ombudsmen's time and is greatly appreciated by the residents, facilities, and senators' constituent services staff.

FEMA Disaster Assistance

Typically when FEMA establishes a FEMA Disaster Center in a federally declared disaster area, they will insist that citizens wanting to apply for assistance come in person to the center. The Ohio AAA 11 LTCOP successfully advocated with a FEMA Disaster Recovery Center to provide the assistance forms to the LTCO who would travel to the LTCFs to assist the residents in completing the applications. Ombudsmen helped residents, whose belongings inside the LTCF were destroyed by floodwaters, complete individual applications for assistance. Each application had to have a different address so the residents' room number would be used along with the street address. The Ombudsmen were successful in getting residents' FEMA disaster

assistance payments that were helpful in replacing their destroyed clothing, shoes, and other personal items.

Emergency Preparedness for Residents

Carol Dieffebach is the PA BSST AAAA LTCO covering four very large rural areas of Pennsylvania bordering NY State. Ms. Dieffebach reports that their area has frequent power outages. Facilities have backup generators; one facility has gone one step further by providing each resident a small flashlight. Residents are informed of emergency plans and feel more prepared by having their own flashlights. Another facility has the practice of providing each resident with an extra pillowcase. During one evacuation due to flooding, residents' chart, medicines, and one change of clothing was placed in the extra pillowcase and transported with them. In addition the residents' wear an identification bracelet with colored dots that symbolize specific care needs. The volunteer first responders, EMTs, and others are aware of the coding system on the identification bracelets.

Facility Emergency Preparedness – Community and Volunteer Participation

Debi Lee is with the NC Centralina AAA LTCOP. In her region, one LTCF has a once year practice drill for a complete evacuation of their building. Families, community volunteers, law enforcement, fire fighters, EMTs, and many others are invited to attend and, if appropriate, to assist in the drill. After the drill, the firemen sponsor a cookout and everyone enjoys a great picnic. Additionally, Ms. Lee reports that the volunteer Ombudsmen do "in-reach" directly with residents and the resident and family councils about emergency preparedness and their facility's plan. Frequently the "in-reach" efforts are done during the months regarded as tornado and hurricane awareness months.

Ombudsmen: What would you do?

Q. As an Ombudsman I think that the majority of my facilities do care about the safety of the residents, but they seem to have very few ideas about how to educate and involve residents and families in emergency preparedness planning. How can we as Ombudsmen help?

A. These planning examples from Ombudsmen in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina are just a few ideas of how to creatively involve residents, families, volunteers, and first responders. Ask the LTCF administrators and managers in your region about their ideas. Collect and write their examples and share them with administrators/managers when they are perplexed or searching for new ideas. This also gives you an opportunity to showcase facilities that have best practice models for emergency planning.

Q. I have worked in the FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers after disasters in my region and state. They would never have allowed us to take the application forms and go visit with residents who were living in facilities affected by the disaster. How can we effectively advocate for a change in how the Centers' operate?

A. Ombudsmen are the best advocates for systemic change. Before the next emergency happens in your state, begin to advocate with your employer, the State Emergency Management Agency, and the regional office of the Department of Homeland Security Federal Emergency Management Agency (DHS FEMA) to allow for "mobile" FEMA Disaster Recovery Center workers. The U.S. DHHS CMS checklist for emergency preparedness for LTCFs recommends the establishment of a "process for the emergency management agency representative (FEMA or other agency) to visit the facility to which residents have been evacuated, so residents can report loss of personal effects." Explain that for many older adults and people with disabilities, it is a barrier to receiving aid if they have to arrange transportation and go elsewhere to complete an application at the Center. In addition, adults with cognitive impairments or intellectual disabilities may need an advocate to complete the paperwork for them.

Q. How can we get the local utilities companies to make it a priority to restore power to LTCFs?

A. It may be as simple as asking the utility companies in your region to do so and providing them a listing of LTCFs and addresses. You may consider the Ohio LTCOP region 11's approach to making utility companies aware of the need during power outages.

Q. I've tried local advocacy campaigns for improvements in emergency planning and response. Is there something greater that we can be doing?

A. According to Alice Hedt, Maryland State LTCO, the Maryland state legislature is considering possible legislation to make LTCFs a higher priority to get utility services restored when there are outages. In New York State, Mark Miller, State LTCO reports that Ombudsmen are advocating that clearing road access to nursing homes be a higher priority than is currently assigned. Cleared roads allow for emergency transport services, access by utility trucks and workers, and facility staff.