

Being Prepared!

Things To Do *Before, During, and After* an Emergency

These recommendations are based on subject matter expertise and Ombudsman program experience. This information is provided for Ombudsman program consideration; however, representatives need to follow their state Ombudsman program policies and procedures.

Before an Emergency

1. **Safety Plan.** Develop a safety plan for your immediate family and any individual for whom you are a caregiver.
2. **Fuel.** If you have advance notice of possible emergencies, get fuel for vehicles and generators, and extra cash.
3. **Supplies.** 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.
4. **Safety Kit.** 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, personal protective equipment (PPE), etc. Duct tape can repair many things at least temporarily.
5. **Evacuation Plans.** 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.
6. **Safety Bag.** Have a safety bag at work. The bag should include bottled water, protein rich snacks, a flashlight with batteries, a whistle, personal protective equipment (PPE), and comfortable walking shoes.
7. **Plans for Your Children.** Know the safety and evacuation plans at your child’s school or

daycare. 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.

8. **Documents.** Keep paper copies of important names and phone numbers (colleagues, volunteers, long-term care facilities, regulatory/licensing agency, emergency management agency) at work, home, and in your vehicle. 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.

a. Smartphones.

- i. 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.
- ii. There are many apps available for free or low-cost (both Apple and Android). Consider researching these categories of apps that will be helpful to you and in your work assisting others.

1. Weather related apps

- a. General weather apps
 - i. NOAA - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (U.S. Department of Commerce).
<https://www.noaa.gov/>
 - ii. Commercial apps such as the Weather Channel.
<https://weather.com/>
- b. Specific weather apps
 - i. Search for apps that cover typical weather emergencies in your locale such as tornadoes, floods, earthquakes

2. Emergency apps

- a. Search for emergency apps in Apple or Android online stores or apps that you sign up with via county/city/state emergency management agencies
- b. General emergency apps such as 911
- c. In Case of Emergency "ICE" feature which allows you to put contact information for emergencies on your smartphone for medics to view

3. Communication apps

- a. Consider apps for translation of American Sign Language, and languages other than English

- iii. **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.arrrl.org/public-service>.

During and After an Emergency

1. **Ombudsman programs are *not* first responders.** Leave this work to be done by law enforcement, fire department, EMTs, and other first responders designated by local authorities.
2. If you are a volunteer or paid first responder in addition to being an Ombudsman program representative, notify your employer that during emergencies you will be a first responder.
3. 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 supervisor and/or State Ombudsman about what has happened.
4. After first responders have done their work and local authorities permit others to be in or near the scene of the disaster, you may then begin your duties as an Ombudsman program representative (representative).
5. **Ombudsman program 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 representatives to visit.
6. After the emergency, everyone including representatives may be asked to assist in recovery efforts. Common additional assignments for representatives include: manning phones at emergency response operation centers and assisting people in completing forms at the disaster recovery centers (DRC) or mobile DRCs.
7. Assignments that are best left to other professionals include: transferring, transporting, personal care, and medical care for individuals. However, advocating for such services is within the Ombudsman program role.
8. If you are in a nearby region or share state boundaries with a region or state impacted by a Federal/State declared emergency you can assist by:
 - a. Notifying the LTCOP in the impacted State of nearby long-term care facilities (LTCFs) with empty beds available for relocation of residents.

- b. When residents are transferred to your region/state, visit with the relocated residents 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.
- c. If available, offer to go to the affected disaster area to assist with LTCOP work. This offer is especially helpful if LTCOP representatives in the disaster area are affected by the disaster and unable to work.
- d. 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

Ombudsman programs have always known how to do a lot with little. Ombudsman program 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.

Examples of LTCO Work During & After Emergencies

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 (APS) 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.



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