U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

DHS/Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties and DHS/FEMA

Tips for Effectively Communicating with Protected Populations during Response and Recovery

While the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and its federal partners remain in close coordination with state and local governments to coordinate and provide resources as needed in connection with response and recovery following Hurricane Sandy, states and localities are reminded of their obligations to carry out their federally assisted activities in a manner that does not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, including limited English proficiency (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964), and disability (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990), and to ensure their sub-recipients do the same. Further-more, section 308 of the Robert T. Stafford Emergency Management and Disaster Assistance Act (the Stafford Act) prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, disability, nationality, sex, English proficiency, age, or economic status in all disaster assistance programs.

The following practices regarding effective communication can help jurisdictions meet their obligations to carry out their disaster related activities in a non-discriminatory manner:

1. Translate written materials in the major languages spoken in the community and provide oral interpretation to ensure LEP populations are informed and receive meaningful access to information or other programs and services.

2. Notify impacted LEP populations that language services are available and that these services are free.

3. Arrange to have sign language interpreters available at press conferences and in other televised or in person announcements to the public.

4. Review staffing and capabilities for 911 call centers to ensure personnel can effectively communicate with LEP callers and callers who are deaf or hard of hearing or have other communication disabilities.

5. Reach out to local ethnic media (television, radio, internet) to help get information out to impacted communities.

6. Maintain open lines of communication with non-profit, community and faith-based organizations that serve diverse racial and ethnic populations and those serving people with disabilities to assist in communicating emergency related information.

7. Identify bilingual employees and volunteers who can provide assistance to LEP populations, keeping in mind that individuals who serve as translators and interpreters must be competent to do so. Sign language interpreters must be qualified.

8. Provide auxiliary aids to communication such as Braille, TDDs, hearing aid-compatible telephones, or interpreters. This is especially important for emergency assistance providers (such as mass care shelters), along with health and social service programs.

9. Review websites used to provide information to the public during disasters to ensure they are accessible to persons with disabilities. (Simple features built into a web page will assist someone who, for instance, cannot see a computer monitor or use a mouse. Accessible features include using alt tags for graphics, using accessible online forms and tables, and posting documents that have been created in accessible text-based formats. For technical assistance regarding Section 508 Standards and how to make web pages accessible to people with disabilities, please visit the U.S. Access Board: www.access-board.gov/508.htm.

10. Review the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) fact sheets summarizing the closed captioning and access to emergency information rules at the FCC's Web site at http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/closedcaption.html, and http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/emergencyvideo.html.

For more information, to request technical assistance, or to report concerns or file a complaint:

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Office of Equal Rights
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
http://www.fema.gov/office-equal-rights
(Complaints alleging discrimination by recipients of FEMA financial assistance)

Office of Disability Integration & Coordination
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