ready, set, go!

Faith Community Emergency Preparedness Toolkit

Sponsored by
Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS) and Bloomington Public Health

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The purpose of the MMRS is to support the integration of emergency management, health, and medical systems into a coordinated response to mass casualty incidents caused by any hazard and to reduce the consequences of a mass casualty incident during the initial period of a response by augmenting existing local operational response systems before the incident occurs. MMRS is a coordinating and planning entity that provides grant funds that work towards identifying gaps, buying down risk and assuring operational readiness in the target capability areas that support a mass casualty incident response.

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Foreword

The potential for an emergency situation occurring has increased. Not only do we need to worry about natural disasters such as floods and fires, but also biological and man-made emergencies. Churches, mosques, temples, and synagogues are now being called upon to join the wider efforts to prepare people for all types of emergencies. A Gallop survey in 2009 indicated that in the United States, an average of 42% (44% in Minnesota) of the population reports they go to a house of worship weekly or almost weekly. Only about 16% of Americans reported that they do not identify with a specific religion. By strengthening the capacity of faith-based organizations to respond, we are strengthening the capacity of our entire communities to respond to emergencies and enhance the recovery process.

Community organizations also provide a direct link to the local communities and vulnerable populations. Community engagement and collaboration can achieve the level of training, communication and coordination that is needed if planning is going to be truly inclusive. Comprehensive preparedness is possible through the integration of the knowledge and skills of governmental and local public service providers, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, civic organizations and public health collaboratively working toward a common goal of enhancing communication, response, and recovery efforts. This level of community engagement and collaboration can strengthen preparedness and response efforts not just for vulnerable population groups, but for the general population as well.

No matter how much government agencies are chartered to assist communities in crises, it has been non-profits and faith groups that seem to make the biggest difference. They're the "first in" and the "last out". For the most part they are able to raise the largest amount of relief funds and to assure those funds are distributed as needed. Non-profits and faith groups quite literally have their fingers on the pulses of our communities. These organizations also have extensive knowledge about the needs of the vulnerable populations which they serve. Faith-based organizations have expertise in outreach, information referral, volunteer management, and special services, and offer the opportunity for collaborating or contracting for specific disaster services. These entities are often the places people trust most to provide for their needs. They maintain close relationships with ethnic communities and vulnerable people and provide a bridge for communication, service provision and problem solving. In addition, they offer community connections and local resources that can enhance response and recovery effectiveness. It is essential that these organizations plan and prepare now for how they will respond in an emergency situation, including a pandemic influenza event.

As part of the community, congregations have the opportunity and responsibility to respond to emergencies. The deep human needs and psychological scars left after an emergency require care beyond the restoration of physical needs. Putting lives back together after an emergency requires care, hope and love. Counseling, understanding and direction enable people to cope with their anger, guilt, tests of faith, loneliness and turmoil.

This toolkit was created to assist congregations in preparing for emergencies. It asks questions such as: What is an emergency plan? Is your facility ready? Does your congregation have evacuation plans? What can your congregation do to prepare to care for members and others in your community in response to an emergency? A variety of resources and information about congregational emergency planning have been collected in one document for use by faith-based communities. Because each faith community is unique, this toolkit should be used based on the needs and capacity of each individual congregation.