

## **Minutes**

### **Federal Interagency Coordinating Council on Emergency Preparedness and Individuals with Disabilities Quarterly Meeting**

**September 20, 2004**

Attendees:

Lawrence W. Roffee, Jr., Access Board  
John Carroll Surina, Department of Agriculture  
Otto J. Wolff, Department of Commerce  
K. Dane Snowden, Federal Communication Commission  
Dr. Thomas Finch, Department of Education  
Dr. Steven Tingus, Department of Education  
Vivian A. Owusu, Department of Education  
Leonora Guarraia, Equal Opportunity Commission  
Cari M. Dominguez, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission  
Mr. John Shaw, Department of Energy  
Bridget C. Shea, Environment Protection Agency  
Cheryl King, Federal Communications Commission  
Stephen A. Perry, General Service Administration  
Dr. William Raub, Health and Human Services  
Mr. Andrew Patterson, Health and Human Services  
Dr. Margaret Giannini, Department of Health and Human Services  
Alex Acosta, Department of Justice  
Gordon Todd, Department of Justice  
Ollie Cantos, Department of Justice  
Wilbur Roy Grizzard, Department of Labor  
John Kim Cook, Department of Labor  
Brian Parsons, Department of Labor  
Julie Carroll, National Council on Disability  
Mark Allen Robbins, Office of Personnel Management  
Martin Gerry, Social Security Administration  
Pamela A. Mazerski, Social Security Administration  
Jeffrey Neil Shane, Department of Transportation  
John Patrick Benison, Department of Transportation  
Charles Hopkins, Department of Treasury  
Tracy Ralph Justesen, White House Office of Domestic Policy  
Daniel Sutherland, Department of Homeland Security  
Claudia Gordon, Department of Homeland Security  
Alan Clive, Department of Homeland Security  
Mike Weston, Administration on Aging

Katherine Lacey, Sign Language Interpreter  
Dawn Hankwitz, Sign Language Interpreter

The first meeting of the Interagency Council on Emergency Preparedness and Individuals with Disabilities convened at 2:00 PM on Monday September 20, 2004 at the Department of Homeland Security Headquarters, Nebraska Avenue Complex.

## **Introductions and Welcome**

Daniel Sutherland opened the meeting and welcomed participants. Representatives introduced themselves and identified the agency that they each represented. Sutherland offered regrets on behalf of Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge who experienced a last minute schedule change due to the hurricane situation in Florida and thus unable to be present at this meeting as originally planned. Sutherland commented on the importance of the President's Executive Order No. 13347 – Individuals with Disabilities in Emergency Preparedness. He summarized the function of the Interagency Council as being one of coordinating activities in this subject matter area, identifying gaps, and stimulating work to fill the identified gaps. He stated that there is a tremendous amount of interest in this issue within and outside of the federal government, and all have demonstrated a high level of energy and momentum. There is a lot of work to be done, and because of the work of this Interagency Council, some people will live who would not otherwise have lived. Homeland Security Secretary, Tom Ridge, has been designated as the Chair of the Council by the terms of the Executive Order and he possesses a high level of interest in this particular subject matter area. Sutherland pointed out that the Secretary is scheduled to deliver the opening keynote address at the first Conference on Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities on September 22, 2004, hosted by the National Capital Region, in partnership with the National Organization on Disability with the support of the Department of Homeland Security.

## **Meeting the Preparedness Challenges**

Sutherland commented on the preparedness challenge and stressed the importance of securing a general sense of what are some of the major challenges faced by people with disabilities in emergencies and disasters. In attempt to put a 'human face' on the issues, Sutherland introduced Mike Weston, a consultant to the U. S. Administration on Aging. Mr. Weston was stationed in Orlando, Florida at an operations center with a coalition of Federal, state and local officials handling the daily, on-the-ground issues arising from Hurricane Charlie, Frances and Ivan. He joined the meeting by telephone. With Mr. Weston was Ms. Georgianne Cherry of Florida Department of Health, who at that time was managing a special-needs shelter. Mr. Weston and Ms. Cherry provided an update about the situation in Florida with special attention to the special needs population.

Mr. Weston informed members of the Council that in the past 31 days, Florida has had 21 years worth of severe weather activities. There are a total of 11,219 people with special needs in 119 shelters throughout the state. Hurricane Charlie hit an area of Florida with a high concentration of people with special needs. These individuals are the first to be moved and the last to be resettled. The special needs shelters are in schools, churches and senior centers.

These shelters are designed to provide expanded levels of care to a medically frail

population. Ms. Cherry took the council members through a day at such a shelter. Once at the shelter, special needs persons were triaged, and the most attention given to those with the most serious problems.

Sutherland next introduced Mr. Alan Clive. Mr. Alan Clive is a Civil Rights Program Manager in the Office of Equal Rights at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and a nationally recognized expert on emergency preparedness and people with disabilities. Mr. Clive recounted an incident from Hurricane Andrew in 1992, during which, 96 individuals with a variety of severe developmental disabilities had to be moved to safety from their group homes. The only shelter available to them was the downtown Miami headquarters of the United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) organization. Totally unprepared to serve as a shelter, the building had no food, medication, or backup generators. Without air conditioning, several of the sheltered individuals began to experience severe medical problems. UCP staff was forced to make a public appeal on television for food and generators. Even then, the generators proved inadequate in size and staff had to search continuously for gasoline to power them. After two days, the sheltered residents were evacuated to an abandoned hospital. Unable to carry out the educational and skills training that were a major part of UCP's services, the staff could only watch as some of those individuals with severe disabilities lost their ability and independence. In summary, because of the lack of preparedness and planning, this incident came close to being a disaster within a disaster.

### **Implementation of the President's Executive Order on Emergency Preparedness and Individuals with Disabilities - Executive Order No. 13347**

Claudia Gordon gave a PowerPoint presentation outlining the policy of the Executive Order and an overview of how the Council will function:

#### Policy Statement

To ensure that the Federal Government appropriately supports safety and security for individuals with disabilities in situations involving disasters, including: earthquakes, tornadoes, fires, floods, hurricanes, and acts of terrorism, it shall be the policy of the United States that executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government (agencies):

- a) consider, in their emergency preparedness planning, the unique needs of agency employees with disabilities and individuals with disabilities whom the agency serves;
- b) encourage, including through the provision of technical assistance, as appropriate, consideration of the unique needs of employees and individuals with disabilities served by state, local and tribal governments and private organizations and individuals in emergency preparedness planning; and,
- c) facilitate cooperation among federal, state, local and tribal governments and private organizations and individuals in the implementation of emergency preparedness plans as they relate to individuals with disabilities.

## Members of the Interagency Coordinating Council

Access Board  
Dept. of Education – NIDRR  
Environmental Protection Agency  
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission  
Federal Communications Commission  
General Services Adm.  
Dept. of Homeland Security  
Dept. of Housing and Urban Development  
Dept. of Justice  
Dept. of Health and Human Services  
Dept. of Labor – ODEP  
National Council on Disability – Advisor  
Office of Personnel Mgmt.  
Social Security Adm.  
Dept. of Transportation

Gordon emphasized that the list of agencies currently identified as members of the Interagency Council is not exhaustive. It will be updated on an ongoing basis to reflect the responses received from agencies invited to participate in the Council that has yet replied to the invitation. It will also be updated to reflect feedback and recommendations regarding agencies whose involvement are regarded critical to the work of the Interagency Council.

## Functions of the Interagency Council

Function of the Interagency Council will be to:

- 1) coordinate to ensure that the unique needs of individuals with disabilities are taken into consideration in emergency preparedness planning by federal government agencies; state, local and tribal governments; private organizations; and individuals;
- 2) identify current gaps in the work that is being done to address these issues; and,
- 3) stimulate new work so that all aspects of the emergency preparedness equation are being addressed.

## Structure of the Interagency Council

The work of the Interagency Council will be carried out in subcommittees to be chaired by appropriate agencies sitting on the Council. The Interagency Council Subcommittees are: Emergency Preparedness in the Workplace, Emergency Transportation, Emergency Communications, Research, Technical Assistance & Outreach, Private Sector Coordination, State, Local and Tribal Government Coordination.

### Chairs of the Interagency Council Subcommittees

Emergency Evacuation in the Workplace - Department of Labor

Emergency Transportation - Department of Transportation

Emergency Communications - Federal Communications Commission

Research - Department of Education, NIDRR

Technical Assistance & Outreach - Department of Homeland Security

Private Sector Coordination - Department of Homeland Security

State, Local and Tribal Government Coordination - Department of Homeland Security

### Interagency Council Meetings

The Interagency Council shall host a quarterly meeting of the principals (agencies' designated representatives) and the Interagency Council Subcommittees shall meet as often as needed.

### Resource/Staffing Interagency Council

Commitment of \$100,000 from the Department of Homeland Security, Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties.

Possible detail(s) from other federal agencies to assist in the implementation work. Agencies chairing subcommittees are asked to provide staff and resources to make the effort successful.

Other contributions to be identified by the Interagency Council.

### Interagency Council – DHS Point of Contact

Daniel Sutherland, (202) 772-9816, [daniel.sutherland@dhs.gov](mailto:daniel.sutherland@dhs.gov)

Claudia L. Gordon, (202) 772-0910, [claudia.gordon@dhs.gov](mailto:claudia.gordon@dhs.gov)

## **Agency Announcements**

Several senior government officials shared reports regarding significant new policy initiatives that will better integrate people with disabilities in the emergency preparedness effort.

### Department of Justice

R. Alexander Acosta, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice, announced the release of a new technical assistance document, "Making Community Emergency Preparedness and Response Programs Accessible to People with Disabilities." The document provides assistance to local officials in making emergency preparedness plans consistent with the requirements of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Mr. Acosta also reviewed the Department's work promoting emergency preparedness for people with disabilities through "Project Civic Access." Through this program, the Department has signed over 100 agreements with towns and counties across the country ensuring access to their public facilities, programs, and services, including emergency preparedness efforts.

### Federal Communications Commission

K. Dane Snowden, Chief of the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau at the Federal Communications Commission, announced that the FCC has issued new policies and launched outreach efforts to ensure that facilities that provide Telecommunications Relay Services for persons with hearing and speech disabilities are designated priority for restoration of service in cases of emergency. In addition, he described new efforts by the FCC to improve the emergency alert system to make it more accessible for people with disabilities.

### Department of Education, National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research

Troy Justesen, Acting Assistant Secretary of the Office for Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, announced that the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research has committed close to \$1 million to emergency preparedness research. Areas of research include the development of a web-based software program that assists people who are deaf or hard of hearing in learning emergency preparedness skills; and a research project to improve the exit/egress of individuals with disabilities from buildings and other settings in emergencies. NIDRR will continue to expand its research in this area and will host a two day conference in October on these issues. In addition, the Rehabilitative Services Administration has awarded \$1 million to the National Organization on Disability's Emergency Preparedness Initiative to assist communities, governments and federal agencies in developing plans that will ensure the safety and security of people with disabilities in emergencies.

### Department of Labor

W. Roy Grizzard, Assistant Secretary of The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) at the U.S. Department of Labor, announced the release of a report involving employees with disabilities in emergency management planning. This comprehensive report resulted from DOL's *Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities: An Interagency Seminar of Exchange for Federal Managers*. ODEP is distributing the report to state emergency coordinators as well as public and private sector employers nationwide. In addition, ODEP is making available technical assistance on emergency planning for employees with disabilities and their employers through its Job Accommodations Network ([www.jan.wvu.edu](http://www.jan.wvu.edu)).

### Department of Transportation

Jeffrey Shane, the Under Secretary for Policy at the Department of Transportation, announced that the Department will develop transportation-related technical assistance information that can be used by people with disabilities, their families, and emergency response organizations. The information will be uploaded to the Department's main website and it will be linked to critical emergency preparedness sites like [ready.gov](http://ready.gov).

DOT will also assist the Emergency Preparedness in the Workplace Sub Committee by sharing its guidelines and technical resources on emergency preparedness and people with disabilities. As one of the first Federal agencies to develop guidelines on emergency preparedness for people with disabilities, the Department has a lot of information that will be useful to other government and private organizations.

Additionally, the Department plans to issue proposed guidelines on addressing the transportation needs of people with disabilities during an emergency. These guidelines will be issued within one year from the date of the Executive Order.

#### Department of Homeland Security

Daniel W. Sutherland, Officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties at the Department of Homeland Security, announced several initiatives undertaken by Homeland Security, including:

- The Office of National Capital Region Coordination, in partnership with the state and local jurisdictions within the National Capital Region and the National Organization on Disability, will host a major conference on emergency preparedness for people with disabilities. The conference will take place from September 22-24, 2004 and Secretary Ridge will be a keynote speaker.
- Ready.Gov, the Department of Homeland Security's citizen preparedness web site, includes new and updated information to help people with disabilities prepare for and respond to emergencies of all kinds. The Council's work will lead to the inclusion of more comprehensive guidance for people with disabilities.
- Citizen Corps will establish a National Citizen Corps Council subcommittee on emergency preparedness for people with disabilities. This subcommittee will be a key component of the federal government's efforts to reach out to communities across the country on these issues. The subcommittee will be comprised of many leading advocates from the disability community, and will hold its first meeting in October.

#### **Next steps**

Sutherland asked agencies that are chairing a subcommittee to prepare a draft "charter" of what each propose the respective subcommittee do. Draft charters should be emailed to Claudia Gordon by October 5, 2004. Charters will be circulated to the entire group for comments and reactions. Subcommittees can begin meeting as soon as they are ready. Agencies not chairing a subcommittee should volunteer to work within the established subcommittees.

On the subject of staffing, Sutherland asked agencies to dedicate some talent, authoritative people to this work. Each agency should be sure to submit the name of the designated official that will sit on the Council, as well as, name(s) of Point of Contact who will work on a daily basis on these issues.

Sutherland reminded everyone that staff level members of the Council will meet regularly and the official Council will meet quarterly to receive updates on the work. Members should also be interacting with private organizations and state and local government officials who share an interest in this issue. Next meeting will likely be in December. Advance notice will be sent.

**Adjourn: 3:30 PM**