

**INTERAGENCY COORDINATION COUNCIL ON EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND  
INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES  
4<sup>TH</sup> QUARTERLY MEETING**

**NOVEMBER 9, 2005 ♦ 10:30A.M. – 11:30A.M.**

**DEPARTMENT OF LABOR**

**200 CONSTITUTION AVENUE, NW ♦ CC5515-1A**

**Meeting Participants**

Participants included representatives from the following organizations:

Peg Blechman, Access Board  
David Belton, American Red Cross  
Mary Elizabeth Cisernos, American Red Cross  
Victor Melvin, American Red Cross  
John Surina, Department of Agriculture  
Department of Commerce  
Dennis Legel, Department of Defense  
Bonnie Gracer, Department of Education  
John Hager, Department of Education  
Carol Baker, Department of Health and Human Services  
Margaret Giannini, Department of Health and Human Services  
Jennifer Johnson, Department of Health and Human Services  
Faith McCormick, Department of Health and Human Services  
Margaret Shaefer, Department of Health and Human Services  
Heather Blanchard, Department of Homeland Security  
Debbie Fulmer, Department of Homeland Security  
Kristin Hogan, Department of Homeland Security  
Megan Hogan, Department of Homeland Security  
Claudia Gordon, Department of Homeland Security  
Daniel Sutherland, Department of Homeland Security  
David Blackwood, Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Liz Brzezowski, Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Jeanine Worden, Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Milton Turner, Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Ollie Cantos, Department of Justice  
Roy Grizzard, Department of Labor  
Susan Parker, Department of Labor  
Brian Parsons, Department of Labor  
Brenda Harris, Department of State  
Patricia Huff, Department of State  
Eliza King, Department of State  
Maggie Morse, Department of State  
John Benison, Department of Transportation  
Michael Trujilo, Department of Transportation  
James Carr, Environmental Protection Agency

Christopher Kuczynski, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission  
Cheryl King, Federal Communications Commission  
Jeff Rosen, National Council on Disability  
Kitty Kobert, Office of Personnel Management  
Sally Atwater, President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities  
Kathy Hargett, President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities  
Pete Monaghan, Social Security Administration

**Welcome and Introduction by Dan Sutherland, Department of Homeland Security  
Officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties**

On November 9, 2005, the Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) met for its fourth quarterly meeting at the Department of Labor. Daniel Sutherland welcomed participants; and thanked Brian Parsons, Department of Labor, for hosting the meeting. Mr. Sutherland explained the purpose of the meeting: to provide a broad overview of the work the Council has done in the past months with regard to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

***Presentation of The Impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on Individuals with Disabilities***

Mr. Sutherland presented a PowerPoint slide summarizing the impact of the hurricanes on the disability community in the Gulf Coast region. The presentation included statistical information stating that when the hurricanes made landfall, 25 percent of the population in the Gulf Coast region were categorized as individuals with a disability. The slide show also shared the results of a poll conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation indicating why evacuees did not leave when they had the opportunity. Through a series of questions posed to evacuees in the AstroDome and other large areas in Houston, the poll indicated 22 percent of the evacuees did not evacuate when initially instructed to do so because they were physically unable to leave; another 23 percent did not evacuate because they were caring for someone who was physically unable to leave. The presentation followed with a series of photographs depicting images of people with disabilities affected by the hurricanes.

Mr. Sutherland continued to report to Council members the specific activities that commenced in direct response to Hurricane Katrina. Such activities include the following activities:

*Formation of the Incident Management Team (IMT)*

- Conducted daily conference calls plan, mitigate, and respond to a multitude of specific issues affecting the disability community;
- Provided advice directly to Secretary Chertoff;
- Placed subject matter experts in the Joint Field Offices in Baton Rouge, LA and Austin, TX to work directly with the Principle Federal Officer to help ensure the needs of evacuees with disabilities were being considered and met;
- Toured shelters for a first-hand assessment of the aftermath of these hurricanes' impact on persons with disabilities; and
- Opened dialogue with disability service providers in the Gulf region that informed the IMT of what challenges they were facing and issues requiring resolution. One specific issue involved citizens in Louisiana who were evacuated to Texas and were not able to obtain prescription medicines in pharmacies because they evacuated to other states. To remedy this, Dr. Giannini, Health and Human Services, worked with Medicaid and within the first 24 hours this dilemma was resolved.

Additional ICC activities in direct response to the hurricanes include the following:

- Issued a public notice reminding television stations to have captioning for all emergency information;
- Facilitated the delivery of a truckload of durable medical equipment to the region;
- Ensured various SWERN web sites were 508 compliant for donations of durable medical equipment;
- Recruited an accessible housing architect to survey temporary housing and building specifications; and,
- Established strong connections with leaders of the American Red Cross.

Mr. Sutherland then asked John Hager of Department of Energy, to share his experience while touring the Gulf Coast region.

### **Update from Department of Education, John Hager**

Mr. Hager thanked Mr. Sutherland for his report and stated that during his visit to the Gulf, his group worked closely with area vocational rehabilitation programs and disability works centers. Via helicopter, he viewed the damaged buildings, two of which were completely demolished. The Department of Education worked to get additional funds to affected states by waiving the matching requirements for their annual funds. He reported that his group worked closely with the Independent Living Centers in Houston,

and were in communication nearly every day. They also were able to provide the centers with additional funding and support. Furthermore, they worked with educational information centers designated to assist parents with their children's education.

Mr. Hager then provided a briefing of Research Subcommittee activities. He informed Council members that his group released the 2004 report on *Emergency Evacuations from Buildings*. The report is available on the Department of Education's web site, and provides information regarding building safety codes, emergency management, and state research on equipment.

Mr. Hager followed by addressing the needs of the Research Subcommittee, and asked for input from the Council. He stated that their mission is to access and promote federal research. The Subcommittee has been working diligently to conduct reviews of eight or nine federal research projects focusing on emergency preparedness and people with disabilities. He stressed the importance of the Council's input for future funding on the most important research topics. Mr. Hager directed the Council's attention to Susan Parker and Bonnie Gracer as points of contact for feedback.

Mr. Sutherland acknowledged Dr. Giannini of Health and Human Services. He commended her productivity in the first 24 hours after the hurricane made landfall and her efforts to help victims. He then asked Dr. Giannini to provide an update of Health and Human Service's actions in the past months.

### **Update from Health and Human Services, Dr. Margaret Giannini**

Dr. Giannini thanked Mr. Sutherland for his kind words, but emphasized that the accomplishments were a result of collaborative efforts. She described a few specific tasks her office provided, which included connecting the public, private, and governmental sectors together. In effect, her office was able to assist in the following actions:

- Deploy Public Health commissioned officers to the region to create medical health shelters to assist the disability community;
- Identify medical centers in New Orleans that were still functioning and had not been affected by the hurricane;
- Create a waiver for states to accept health care participants from other states;
- Provide uncompensated health care to individuals who have unique needs to ensure they would be 100 percent covered;
- Deploy workers to states that were in need of staffing for call centers;

- Work with FEMA and the Red Cross to allow Protection and Advocacy Grantees to enter the shelters and identify people with disabilities; and,
- Deploy mental health and substance abuse professionals to deal with the magnitude of mental health issues brought on by the hurricanes.

Dr. Giannini concluded by stating that her office is responsible for sending a weekly report to the White House involving the actions of the entire Council.

Audience members interposed the following questions/comments to Dr. Giannini:

- *To whom does this report go to within the White House?* It goes to Claude Allen in Domestic Policy.
- *What will happen to some of the students who were in the New Orleans area, particularly medical students from Dillard which produces many minority physicians, this question is directed to HHS and DOE, what long-term plans are being made in terms of keeping those students in school?* Dr. Giannini responded by stating that HHS is trying to support whatever is physically possible; some of the schools were totally wiped out and students were relocated. Mr. Hager with DOE responded by explaining that the emphasis has been on short-term changes to deal with the situation. Long-term plans involve the Institution and its plans. DOE is still in the short term phase. *The problem is that some institutions do not have large endowments behind them. The smaller institutions may need more help than others.* Much of that is tied up right now in Congressional funding debates.

Mr. Sutherland asked to hear from the IMT members, Claudia Gordon and Cheryl King, who were deployed to the Gulf Coast.

### **Ground Report from Baton Rouge, Claudia Gordon, Department of Homeland Security**

Ms. Gordon began by recalling what an emotionally charged, eye-opening experience she had in Baton Rouge. She stated that it was critical to have a member from the Council there to represent the issues of people with disabilities—to make them more visible and their needs more apparent.. Ms. Gordon witnessed systems that did not incorporate the needs of people with disabilities, and observed the ongoing struggles resulting from the obvious lack of planning.

Ms. Gordon worked very closely with the Civil Rights Office, the housing staff, and a “special needs” organization. She spent a large portion of her time tackling housing issues. Ms. Gordon referred to a photo in Dan Sutherland’s presentation of men building a ramp on a home. She commented that the ramp took an excessive amount of time, money, and manpower to construct when it should have been built simply and easily with far less effort.. This photo was used to demonstrate some of the frustrations involved with housing issues. Ms. Gordon remarked on the void in the human aspect of this issue. She worked to bring the issue to the forefront of employees, contractors, and housing workers so they could connect with people with disabilities and take into account their special needs.

Ms. Gordon stated that another current focus is transportation. Many of the evacuees were sent to areas without public transportation, so families were unable to get to pharmacies or grocery stores. Some other priorities include:

- Working with the Civil Rights Office and other advocates to identify people who were placed unnecessarily in nursing homes as a result of the lack of accessible housing;
- Acting as a liaison for the advocates; and,
- Elevating the awareness of issues to leaders and ensuring results occur at a faster pace than in the past.

### **Ground Report from Austin, TX, Cheryl King, Federal Communications Commission**

Ms. King stated that rather than recounting stories from her stay in the Joint Field Office, she would offer some recommendations. She remarked that many of the recommendations in the ICC Annual Report corresponded with recommendations she developed as a result of the trip. One example is to incorporate disability issues into the National Response Plan and National Incident Management System. Now the plans are currently void of any disability specific language.

Ms. King also commented on work that needs to be done regarding preparation, warning, and evacuation phases in ESF 8.

### **Council Question and Answer Segment**

Mr. Sutherland opened the meeting to a Question and Answer forum focusing on the five main issues with which the Council faced in the wake of these hurricanes. These issues are as follows:

- Housing;
- Transportation;
- Identification;
- Compensation for disability service providers; and
- Accurate after action review in order to develop a comprehensive and effective After Action Report (AAR).

Mr. Sutherland stated that the process of creating the AAR has not been fully approached because the Council is still in a reactionary mode; however, he emphasized that it is now appropriate to begin documenting ideas and capturing salient points in order to develop a report that provides viable and implemental recommendations to improve emergency response for persons with disabilities. Mr. Sutherland commented that he has kept a legal pad readily accessible and used it as his personal method of logging major issues that should be included in the AAR, and encouraged the Council to do the same. He also shared that Susan Parker sent an email of ideas for consideration for after action activities, and that the National Organization on Disability completed a field report containing recommendations that are worthy of inclusion in the Council's AAR, as well.

Mr. Sutherland stressed that now is the time to make real changes. People are listening and the Council should press forward to make significant changes for the inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of emergency planning. He suggested organizing a core group of people from the Council to lay out a strategy to move forward in a systematic and strategically sound approach. Additionally, he suggested the Council survey people in the regions affected by these hurricanes to both capture their suggestions for improving emergency response for persons with disabilities, and to let them know that the government is listening and working to remedy the existing issues. For the purposes of developing a compelling AAR, Mr. Sutherland recommended the Council inventory and review past AARs and related materials such as the report FEMA commissioned after 9-11, which identified issues that individuals with disabilities face in a disaster and recommendations to address those issues and the California wildfires report. He stressed the importance on working quickly because of the limited window of opportunity.

Mr. Sutherland opened the floor to questions and comments.

Audience members interposed the following questions/comments:

- *John Hager, Department of Education, commented that Mr. Sutherland should add communications to his list. He stated that he often wondered what the ICC was doing and felt he was in a void. He suggested some sort of mechanism in place to keep the ICC informed of things they can do in emergency situations. Mr. Hager also remarked that all resources are allocated through FEMA, when FEMA may not be aware of all issues that need attention. There was a lapse in time until FEMA was convinced that funding should go to certain places. He suggested that in future planning, funding should be specifically allocated for educational purposes, health purposes, and housing purposes so money can be distributed quickly in the event of an emergency.*
- *Michael Trujilo, Department of Transportation, commented on a lack of functioning networks. He stated that during the emergency it was the American spirit of work that went beyond all of the bureaucrat protocols. Many American civilians arrived and knew they had to help, but could not connect with anyone on the ground. He suggested that citizens of DC should pick a ward to use as a model and identify who the people with disabilities are, where they are, and what we need to prepare for in case of a catastrophe.*
- *Jeff Rosen, National Council on Disability, began by thanking the Council members for their reports so far. He then suggested the formation of an interim report to spread the information of what has been accomplished thus far. Mr. Rosen asked Mr. Hager about the status of grant distribution to consumer organizations. Mr. Hager responded that much of the distributions were done quickly, for example to Independent Living groups. Funding in these groups went to the utilization of assistive technology and medical equipment.*
- *Sally Atwater, President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities, asked the Council if future plans include working with FEMA and state governments to develop plans for future disasters. Dan Sutherland responded that in addition to FEMA, the Red Cross is also included in future preparedness plans with the ICC.*
- *Peg Blechman, Access Board, added that faith-based groups need to be included in the Council's plans with FEMA and the Red Cross.*
- *Claudia Gordon, Department of Homeland Security, commented that a focus of the Council should include traditional and consumer organizations that volunteered to help after the hurricanes. Ms. Gordon explained the necessity of having an infrastructure in place ahead of time to train volunteers to be capable of identifying people with disabilities in shelter and to be able to appropriately assist individuals.*

Dan Sutherland adjourned the meeting and expressed appreciation to the Department of Labor for hosting the Council meeting. He thanked the ICC for its collaboration and hard work and looks forward to the "Lessons Learned" phase in the upcoming months.