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EMERGENCY PLANNING AND DISASTER RECOVERY

Description:

Emergency planning and disaster recovery is the development and maintenance of procedures to prevent, control, mitigate, and recover from a catastrophe.

Emergency planning should be an ongoing process because communities constantly change, as do threats. In addition, emergency and disaster recovery products and communication services change, including administrations and the response roles of government agencies. To maintain their effectiveness, emergency plans should be reviewed at least annually.

Decision delays during crucial times can be avoided if a community's disaster recovery and remediation plans are coordinated with its emergency plans so that the two plans exist together harmoniously. Evacuation routes should be coordinated with local, regional, and state partners to allow adequate time for a safe evacuation. Public transportation options should be clearly defined and routes should be well-identified.

Does your comprehensive plan consider the *special needs* of different population groups during large-scale public emergencies such as storms, hazardous spills, or acts of terror? Are there appropriate shelters for each *emergency level*—ranging from minor to severe? Successful emergency planning includes regular drills, involving both the first responders and community residents, particularly those with special circumstances, such as elderly persons who are frail, have mobility issues, or suffer from dementia; people of all ages who have hearing or vision impairments or who have physical or developmental disabilities; people who are homebound; those who do not speak English as their primary language; or families whose children are at school or other locations separate from their parents. Such drills can indicate problems that can be amended and result in a more effective, workable plan.

Pets: Many victims of Hurricane Katrina, especially senior citizens, chose to stay at home rather than abandon their companion pets because the shelters would not allow animals, or not enough public transportation options were available to take them and their pets to safe shelters. Louisiana now has a state law that mandates transportation for pets to shelters just as it does for people.

Under new federal and state laws, municipalities must plan for pet evacuations, and plans should include transportation options for those traveling with pets. Municipalities should carefully consider if pets should be allowed in evacuation facilities with the general public, or in separate specialized pet shelters or foster homes. Coordination with local emergency managements, the Red Cross, and

private developments could ensure that appropriate shelter space with trained staff is available for pets. Public information should stress to residents that pet owners with critical transportation needs should get to pick-up points as soon as possible as it will take additional time to register the animals. It should also be stressed that pet-friendly emergency shelters are not “stop and drop” and that owners are still responsible for their pets.

Benefits:

- A well-planned, regularly reviewed emergency plan, together with community drills and coordination with recovery and remediation plans, promotes fast, efficient, smooth-operating responses during all types of emergencies, reducing disaster-related injuries and trauma and saving lives.
- Community drills and public information increase the capacity of residents to react more calmly during an emergency, cooperate more fully with responders' instructions, and act in accordance with the provisions of the community's emergency plan.
- Community drills and public information raise the comfort level of special needs populations that their situations will be effectively addressed during emergencies.
- Including a sound, reliable system of arrangements to care for pets in an emergency plan safeguards an aspect of family life that is strongly related to the emotional and physical health of their resident owners, particularly older people, those with disabilities, and children. For anyone whose life is disrupted from a forced evacuation, the presence and familiarity of their pet can be a huge source of comfort and security in the days of uncertainty. This is especially true if they have lost all of their material possessions or, worse yet, a loved one. For people with and without strong social networks or families, the loss of a pet, or separation from a pet during this time, can be traumatic.

Impediments or barriers to development or implementation:

- Emergency situations occur sporadically. Municipalities with limited staff and resources may be inclined to postpone attention to emergency plans and drills, to work on other urgent matters.
- Residents may not be aware of evacuation or emergency planning drills, especially those who are socially or geographically isolated.
- Municipalities with limited resources may concentrate on evacuating and sheltering human lives first; they may not have the financial or human resources needed to assume emergency responsibilities for pet care during disasters.

- Municipalities may lack physical spaces large enough to properly house animals during emergencies.
- Red Cross emergency shelters do not allow pets unless they are disability-related working animals since each state has its own health and safety laws.

Resource—example:

- Florida, under continual threat of hurricane disasters, designated Emergency Management Coordinators at the regional and county levels, Regional Special Needs Coordinators, Pet Friendly Shelters in each county (ascertained from county level emergency management coordinators), Pet Friendly Hotels in each county, and other useful resources in reference to pet preparedness.
 - Misha N. Granado (May/June, 2006), *Florida Pet Friendly Shelters*, Florida Department of Health/Environmental Health:
http://flsartt.ifas.ufl.edu/resources/pet_friendly_shelters.pdf.

Resource—statutory authority:

- *New York State:*
 - Article 2-B of the New York State Executive Law—
<http://www.dhss.ny.gov/laws-policies/documents/Art-2-B-Current-10-2010.pdf>.
<http://www.dhss.ny.gov/laws-policies/documents/Exec-Law-Art-2-B-2012.pdf>.
 - Requires state and local disaster preparedness planning;
 - Created the State Disaster Preparedness Commission (DPC);
 - Shifted emphasis from Civil Defense to all-hazards preparedness activities and mission;
 - Assigned responsibility for off-site radiological emergency preparedness for commercial nuclear power plants; and
 - Created the State Emergency Assistance Program in 1993, which provides reimbursement to eligible municipalities for public damages from natural disaster.
- *Federal:*
 - Executive Order 12127 (March 31, 1979), Presidential Reorganization Plan # 3 of 1978 (43 FR 41943) created the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and shifted emphasis from civil defense to all hazards:
<http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/eo/eo-12127.htm>.
 - The federal Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, as amended, and related authorities as of June, 2007, provides for the “provision of rescue, care, shelter, and essential needs to individuals with household pets and service animals; and to such pets and animals”:
http://www.fema.gov/pdf/about/stafford_act.pdf.

Resource—written and web:

- New York State Office of Emergency Management, Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, State Office Campus, 1220 Washington Avenue, Building 7A, Suite 710, Albany, New York: <http://www.dhSES.ny.gov/>.
 - *Emergency Information Handbook*:
http://www.dhSES.ny.gov/media/documents/2011_EI_Handbook.pdf.
 - *Emergency Planning Guide for Community Officials*:
<http://www.dhSES.ny.gov/oem/planning/documents/Planning-Guide.pdf>.

- U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), 500 C Street, SW, Washington, DC: <http://www.fema.gov/index.shtm>.
Information for Pet Owners: <http://www.fema.gov/plan/prepare/animals.shtm>.

- The National American Red Cross, 2025 E Street, NW, Washington, DC:
<http://www.redcross.org>.
For links to 31 American Red Cross chapters in New York State:
<http://www.redcross.org/en/where>: click on "Browse through a list of chapter Web sites"; choose "New York" on the national map.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1600 Clifton Road, Atlanta, GA:
 - *Emergency Preparedness and Response*:
 - Preparedness for All Hazards: <http://emergency.cdc.gov/hazards-all.asp>.
 - "Animals in Public Evacuation Centers":
<http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/animalspubevac.asp>.

- U. S. Department of Homeland Security, Washington, DC:
 - *Lessons Learned: Best Practices*:
 - "Shelter Operations: Pet Friendly Shelters": for extensive information and links to numerous resources:
<http://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/FEMAPetShelteringbestpractices2007.pdf>.