

## **IV. The State Unit On Aging**

### **A. Operations**

It is the duty of the State Unit on Aging to remain calm, provide assistance, coordinate services, and play a leadership role in the event disaster strikes anywhere within the state. Some may wonder how this is to be accomplished under the great pressure of widespread disruption when it seldom takes place without that burden, but training and preparation will go far toward making a State Unit function in a positive and assistive manner.

The activities of State Units in the face of a disaster or potential disaster take place in four categories - preparedness, immediate response, recovery, and evaluation. The State Unit must coordinate the activities of the local AAAs in the event of a disaster. Whether a few communities in one AAA are effected, or an entire state, it is to the State Unit that Area Agencies and other service providers will turn to find the leadership needed.

#### **PREPAREDNESS FOR THE STATE UNIT**

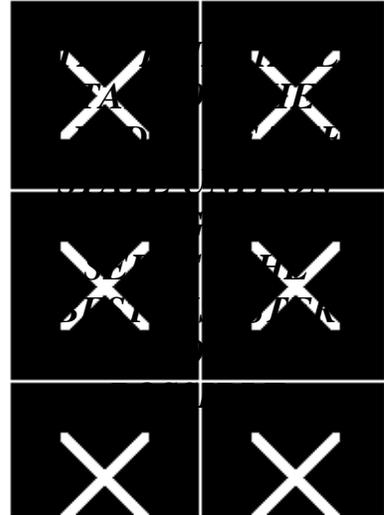
When a disaster strikes, confusion generally follows. Ordinary services and devices usually taken for granted are no longer available. Key personnel will be distracted or disabled. Links connecting State Units on Aging and local Agencies, or other elements of state government, may be destroyed or overloaded. The State Units on Aging must be prepared.

***THE WRITTEN DISASTER RESPONSE PLAN*** - In order to be prepared, a State Unit on Aging must prepare a written disaster response plan. Such a plan must be practical and it must be simple; at the same time it must be so crafted that the plan is comprehensive, covering the entire range of disasters to which all or any portion of the state might fall prey.

By following the outlines in this manual, filling in the blanks on the checklist, and spending time when the pressure is NOT on, State Units on Aging can take major steps in reaching a state of preparedness. There is no time to plan when disaster strikes, and absence of a plan can escalate a relatively modest disruption to the level of a major disaster. However, writing a disaster response plan requires significant amounts of time in preparation and conversation.

Who is responsible? Probably the first step in planning is for the State Unit on Aging to designate a **Disaster Aging Officer**. It is important that this responsibility be assigned to a senior member of the staff, one with substantial authority. This individual will be the person to whom decisions will be referred, and who will establish and maintain liaison with other elements of state government, Federal Disaster Aging Officers, and local elements of the aging network. In preparation for duties during a disaster situation, it will be the task of the **Disaster Aging Officer** to write the state aging disaster response plan.

The **Disaster Aging Officer** has as his or her first task the duty of finding the State's overall emergency planning office, meeting with representatives of that office, and learning the general plan of response to any disaster by the mechanism of state government. It is useful to learn and understand the criteria by which state proclamations of emergency or disaster are made and the effects such declarations have under the laws and regulations of the state. It is also helpful if the **Disaster Aging Officer** can take advantage of any opportunity to work with other members of the state disaster team, dealing with exercises or drills as well as with the administrative problems which face such a body. As people work together they learn the typical responses of others, and this is an important asset in situations as demanding as the presence of an actual emergency.



Like every other communicator, the Disaster Aging Officer will be required to communicate in many directions: with the executive level of state government in dealing with the State's Emergency Preparedness Plan and with other units of State Government; with Federal Emergency Management Agency personnel and persons from the Administration on Aging; with local Area Agencies and with service providers; with representatives of local and regional units of government; with key segments of communities; and, with the general public. For these reasons, it is vital that this person have excellent communications skills.

The Disaster Aging Officer MUST prepare a contact list and checklist to be used in the event of any kind of disaster.

How is all this to get done? The State Disaster Aging Officer must begin by contacting the State Emergency Preparedness Office, under whatever name it uses in that state.

- o Is the State Unit on Aging properly included in the State Emergency plan?
- o Is there a clear understanding of the chain of command in emergencies, from the Governor through to the field personnel, Area Agency Directors, etc?
- o Is there a listing of the agencies with which the State Unit on Aging must interrelate during the course of responding to a disaster? Is the relationship of the agencies understood and the responsibility and authority of each included in the State Emergency plan as well as the State Aging Disaster Response plan?
- o Is there a listing of key personnel in other agencies to whom questions, requests, etc., ought be directed during the period of dealing with the disaster?
- o Has the Disaster Aging Officer had opportunity to meet with and relate to each key person?
- o Has each significant contact person been listed on the Contact List? In case of change, has the contact list been updated in the computer and in the book?

The Disaster Aging Officer and the AAA's: A key part of the duties of the Disaster Aging Officer from the State Units on Aging is the duty to assure that each AAA has a written Disaster Response Plan, and a person assigned responsibility for coordinating disaster relief efforts. Ample assistance is afforded by this handbook, but it is the job of the State Disaster Aging Officer to make sure that each AAA has a plan, understands it, and has dealt with all possible contingencies.

## **CONSIDERATIONS IN DEVELOPING A DISASTER PLAN**

The Disaster Aging Officer from the State Unit on Aging may be guided by the following considerations when it is necessary to devise a disaster plan.

1. Consider the capabilities and limitations of the SUA.
2. Consider conjunctions with other agencies. It is vital that a full list of such agencies be made.
3. Consider the plans and responsibilities of AoA, and how they relate to the plans and responsibilities of the SUA.
4. Consider the degree of planning for disaster in the state, on an overall basis.
5. Consider the roles of the various relief agencies in the state, and state-level leadership for local elements of government and their service and assistance agencies. In order to do so, a comprehensive list of local agencies is needed to augment the list of state relief agencies.
6. Consider the organizations primarily responsible for relief authority and assistance in each community, inside and outside of government. Make a clear and simple chain of command for each organization, so that lines of coordination and control are clear.
7. Consider the appropriateness of dividing jurisdictions or the entire state into workable segments. Where possible, these ought follow natural or traditional boundaries, and respect AAA boundaries where appropriate. But if the flood divides an AAA, it may be necessary to provide higher-echelon coordination.

8. Consider the types of disaster most and least likely to occur in the state; pay attention to the relative probability of occurrence, the probable lead time involved, the potential magnitude, any factors which make one or another area more or less likely to be involved, and the kinds of effects which may be produced in specific geographical areas (effects on people, systems, facilities, resources and institutions.) Make sure that this is incorporated in the disaster response plan of each area agency. Also make sure that each service provider has made plans appropriate for its tasks.
9. Consider plans for sharing and disseminating information with and to other organizations which will be collecting data and doing needs assessment.
10. Consider the necessity for the State Unit on Aging to assume a significant degree of responsibility in disasters which are not national in nature but which are significant to a degree that an Area Agency is unable to cope, or which transcend Area Agency boundaries.

## **COORDINATION FUNCTIONS**

Under the leadership of the Disaster Aging Officer, the SUA must review the State Emergency Preparedness Plan and the Aging Disaster Response Plan, determining the planning and preparation tasks which remain to be done and which entity shall do them.

1. The SUA must assume a leadership role in disseminating information concerning the Aging Disaster Response Plan, making sure other units of state government, the AAA's, and the Administration on Aging understand what the State Unit is planning.
2. Investigate available disaster relief and assistance programs and identify gaps.

3. Secure inclusion in state disaster assistance planning. If none exists, initiate.
4. Be sure that agencies involved in disaster assistance understand what services and information the SUA can provide, and be sure the SUA and AAAs understand what services and information other agencies can provide.
5. Beginning from the inventory of community resources accumulated by Information and Referral activities, assemble a list of resources for the elderly for inclusion in the State Disaster systems, and insure that each AAA has done the same.
6. Establish a working relationship, and where appropriate, written agreements or memoranda of understanding, with other organizations. This should include a personal meeting with each organization's coordination person, and a listing of them in the directory. This requires constant monitoring and updating.
7. Be sure everyone understands the data needs of the Aging Network, and that the SUA understands the data needs of other agencies. For instance, many agencies do not record the age of the victim, merely the need, and although many Aging Network programs record age, they may not record occupation even though for example, "farmer" might generate additional sources of relief dollars.

This coordination process is an outstanding opportunity to make other agencies aware of the needs of the elderly and of the SUA and the Aging Network. SUA's on the state level and AAA's on the local must initiate an educational process which makes emergency organizations aware of the special needs of older persons.

## STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

Based on information acquired in the planning process and in the coordination effort, devise a written Standard Operating Procedure which outlines the response process when a disaster is reported. This should include:

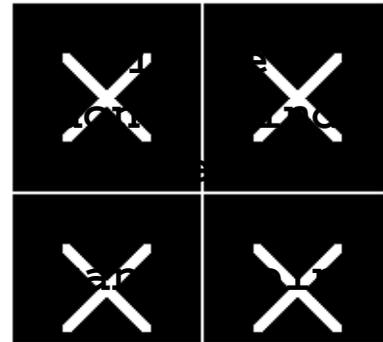
1. *WHO* is involved, primary and alternate respondents.
2. *WHAT* are the duties and responsibilities of each primary respondent.
3. *WHAT* are the alerting and mobilization procedures when a disaster is reported, during working hours and during non-working hours.
4. *HOW* will communications be maintained if the phone system is out? if the electrical system is out?
5. *WHERE* will the SUA operate if its office is located within the disaster area?
6. *HOW MUCH* will personnel be allowed to claim on a reimbursed employee expense basis?
7. *WHO* will be located where during the disaster? immediately following a disaster?
8. *WHO* is responsible for what during a non-presidential emergency, or before a Presidential Emergency is declared?

The actual arrival of a disaster is ALWAYS too soon, too much, too confusing and stressful. Preparation helps; indeed it is the **only** help available when disaster strikes. Whether the arrival is sudden and unheralded like an earthquake or anticipated, as some floods or blizzards, or whether the disaster arrives abruptly like the strike of a tornado or has grown to become a disaster, as a heat wave does, when the disaster is finally upon the community, much of the potential for diminishing the damage depends on the preparation of professionals. In the aging network, that means YOU.

## LOCATION AND IDENTIFICATION

The actual listing of older persons will probably always remain the task of the Area Agency. The SUA must be able to indicate how many might be expected in a given area, based on AAA figures or other sources. Immediately after any disaster the SUA and AAAs involved will be called upon to estimate the numbers of elderly effected by the disaster.

SUA Tasks for location and identification: The State Unit ought have a set of maps which generally displays the density of older persons, key sites where older persons may be found, and which also displays the general location of sources of assistance for older individuals. These maps must be compiled from more detailed maps which are developed by each AAA.



Area Agencies ought to identify older persons, using procedures set forth in the Area agency portion of this handbook, and SUA activities in this area ought include review of AAA efforts, identification of potential sources of information, and working on the state level to assure a smooth and uninterrupted flow of information.

## COMMUNICATIONS

In any situation of great stress, organizations and individuals behave as though they were starving for information. One of the more significant results of every disaster is the damage to the communication system. In every disaster, communication has been a major problem. Communication occurs in two directions -

*HORIZONTALLY*- with other state-level organizations, including SEMA.

*VERTICALLY* - within the aging network.

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In both instances, the SUA occupies a "crossroads" situation - it is charged with assuring the flow of information and directives between the AAA and the AoA as well as initiating or receiving messages from both directions; it is also charged with assuring the smooth flow of information from agency to agency across the structure of state government.

In addition, the SUA occupies a "switching" function, gathering information from other horizontal elements of state government and sending it upward or downward, and disseminating vertical information laterally across state-level agencies.

Because the SUA has these transmitting functions, as well as duties in gathering and analysis of information, it is vital that the disaster plan provide for constant and effective communication. This in turn requires decisions which are technologically and systematically appropriate; modem and fax might be appropriate links between the SUA and AoA but not for transmittal of flash flood information from an AAA far up a valley, where electric and telephone communication could be highly threatened.

### *GRAPEVINES*

Remember the "grapevine" technique of network communications. In order to apply this approach, preparation is required.

The "grapevine" plugs local units on aging into individuals who know the community and its elderly residents - postpersons, delivery people, meter readers, church groups, and other who reach into the daily lives of large numbers of people.

For the State Unit, particularly during the stressful times of a disaster, the parallel program is to tap into the elements of the state-wide system with similar widespread contacts - delivery shuttle drivers, law enforcement agencies, public utilities, Highway Department or Road and Bridge personnel. The idea here is to use these alternative sources of information to aid in understanding the picture in local areas and understanding how this effects the elderly clientele of SUA's.

Possible "grapevine" sources on the state level include such emergency service centers as law enforcement coordination offices, National Guard command points, etc. These are facilities which might identify problem areas on the borders between two AAAs, or point out that the northern part of an Agency's area is isolated from the remainder of the service area by rising rivers, and assistance will be required from an adjacent agency because of the inaccessibility of the location.

Just as FEMA conducts a daily meeting in the disaster area, a daily meeting or conference should be conducted on a state level. State Units on Aging must be sure to attend this conference. In addition, daily reporting requirements must be devised for information from the AAAs, and for reporting to the AAAs by the SUA. Further, a routine for dissemination of information laterally must be organized.

**The Disaster Diary:** Senior coordinating officials are not going to be able to remember every critical fact, every critical event, every material or program shortcoming. A diary is a necessity. Keep a small one, keep it private, and keep it for yourself. The diary must be honest, blunt, uncompromising. Later, this diary can serve as the basis of a written and detailed report which can be useful in evaluation of the SUA's efforts, listing of points of improvement, and so forth. But after the disaster is a good time to revise the manual to report actual experiences. In the stress of the disaster response, simple and uncomplicated language is best. In it, record triumphs as well as shortcomings. Keep track of where you have been, what you have seen, to whom you have spoken. The diary will prove to be invaluable.

**ALL OF THESE MUST BE PLANNED IN ADVANCE.**

**State Units On Aging must:**

1. Devise and monitor procedures to assure the orderly flow of information under conditions of difficulty;
2. Devise a system of regular debriefings from AAAs, its own field staff, and any other sources regularly appearing in the SUA operating headquarters;
3. Demand daily information from each AAA involved, establishing disaster impact on the elderly and indicating, where appropriate, actions to be initiated, and monitor compliance.
4. Keep others informed, particularly of decisions pending and as made, alerting AAAs and others of resources as they become available, and conducting and reporting on institutional advocacy efforts at the state level.
5. Conduct regular conferences, personally or by phone, with AAAs and key on-site elements of the Aging Network.
6. Plan patterns of communication procedures for AAAs and other elements of the Aging network, disseminate those procedures before a disaster, and require training and practice in the use of those procedures.

*A brief note here - personal communication and cooperation DURING a disaster is much more likely to occur when there has been personal communication and the establishment of some personal rapport BEFORE a disaster. State Disaster Aging Officers ought get out of the office and meet the folks with whom they will be working when the time comes.*

## DIMINISHMENT OF NEEDS AND DE-ESCALATION

As the crisis is passed and disturbance in routine operations wanes, the SUA must lead the return to normalcy of the elements of the Aging Network.

1. **Restore attention to program basics:** The continuing conduct of service programs for the large number of persons who were not directly effected by the disaster will serve as a steadying influence on the AAA's and Service Providers; as the effects of the disaster are dealt with, geographic or program areas ought be returned to routine services.

*NOTE - There is a tendency among many people to seek to continue the crisis mentality. Dealing with the urgent demands and coping with unexpected problems leads to a sort of euphoria among some who are confronting the immediate needs of large numbers of folks, and some of those who experience this euphoria are reluctant to see it as part of the past. This needs to be guarded against.*

2. **Be sure to deal with all of the remnants of the crisis.** It is sometimes impossible to read everything from the field as it comes in. It is vital that everything be read and reviewed to permit all lessons to be drawn, gaps in service to be identified, shortcomings noted, etc.
3. **Deal with the problems which flow from the crisis.** It is sometimes necessary to hire temporary help for brief periods. These people must not leave without being debriefed, and without an evaluation of their work being carried out.

## Final Efforts - Debriefing

The response to a disaster is not concluded when the water recedes, nor when the last aged victim is safely provided for, nor when the equipment is put away, nor when the use of temporary help is ended. Disaster Aging Officers must then sit down and go over the experiences gained during the periods of stress. This can be organized in several ways; one such way is to focus on material and equipment, then on individual members of the team, and then on programs.

