

## **DISASTER STRIKES: TO EVACUATE OR NOT TO EVACUATE? *That is the question!***

Recently FAHSA members have asked questions regarding evacuations during a disaster. As the administrator or owner, you are ultimately responsible for this decision --especially considering the safety and welfare of your and residents and staff.

You will need to consider whether the local emergency management services has officially issued a mandatory evacuation in your area. Because of the destructive power of a hurricane, you should never ignore an evacuation order. Authorities will most likely direct you to leave if you are in a low-lying area, or within the greatest potential path of the storm. If they have not issued a mandatory evacuation, consider the safety reasons for evacuation carefully.

In consideration of the safety and needs of your residents, please the following protocols:

### **= Shelter in Place -- If you are ordered NOT to Evacuate and plan to shelter in**

**place:** The great majority of injuries during a hurricane are cuts caused by flying glass or other debris. Other injuries include puncture wounds resulting from exposed nails, metal, or glass, and bone fractures. Stay away from all windows and exterior doors, seeking shelter in a bathroom or basement. To get through the storm in the safest possible manner:

1. Monitor the radio or television for weather conditions.
2. Stay indoors until the authorities declare the storm is over.
3. Do not go outside or allow staff and residents to go outside. Even if the weather appears to have calmed—the calm "eye" of the storm can pass quickly, leaving you outside when strong winds resume.
4. Prepare to evacuate to a shelter or other designated area if your facility is damaged, or if you are instructed to do so by emergency personnel.

### **= Shelter in Place -- Hosting another Facility:** If the facility is to be used as a shelter

for an evacuating facility, the facility's plan must describe the sheltering/hosting procedures that will be used once the evacuating facility residents arrive. Procedures should include the following:

1. A description of the receiving procedures for arriving residents from evacuating facility.
2. Identification of where additional residents will be housed. Provide a floor plan which identifies the space allocated for additional residents.
3. Identification of provision of additional food, water, medical needs of those residents being hosted at receiving facility for a minimum of five days.
4. A description of the procedures for ensuring 24-hour operations.
5. A description of the procedures for providing sheltering for family members of critical workers.
6. A description of when the facility will seek a waiver from the Agency for Health Care Administration to allow for the sheltering of evacuees if this creates a situation which exceeds the operating capacity of the host facility.
7. A description of procedures for tracking additional residents sheltered within the facility.

**= Leaving Your Facility -- If You are Ordered to Evacuate:** Because of the destructive power of any disaster, you should never ignore an evacuation order. If a hurricane warning is issued for your area or you are directed by authorities to evacuate the area:

1. Establish a plan to evacuate and prepare for it. The National Weather Service will issue a hurricane watch when there is a threat to coastal areas within 24-36 hours.
2. Prior to evacuating to another facility, an agreement should be reached as to supplies/resources that will be provided and by whom.
3. Obtain a map of the evacuation routes. Follow the designated evacuation routes—others may be blocked—and expect heavy traffic.
4. Take only essential items.
5. Be sure that residents turn off stoves and remove all items from the tops of stoves.
6. In case you lose power, ask residents to empty their refrigerators and freezers before they evacuate.
7. If you do evacuate, please remember to notify a family member or close friend of your residents and let them know where their loved one will be taken.
8. All evacuated residents should have some sort of identification (hospital bracelet, name tag, etc.) on their person.
9. Evacuated residents must be sent with clothes, food, medications and supplies for five days. Clinical records and staff must also accompany residents.

**= Staff Preparation for Resident Evacuation:** In the event of evacuation (i.e. flood, storm surge, structural damage) confirm:

1. The availability and accessibility of pre-determined locations where residents will evacuate.
2. Person responsible for implementing facility evacuation procedure.
3. Transportation arrangements for residents who don't drive.
4. Logistical support for moving medications.
5. Process for moving records and necessities of daily living.
6. Method for tracking patients/residents/staff and communications to be used.
7. Determine point to begin the pre-positioning of necessary medical supplies.

**= Reporting to the Agency for Health Care Administration:** The Agency for Health

Care Administration has developed a data system to allow providers (including ALFs and nursing homes) to enter emergency-related profile information through the Internet. This web based system is called the Emergency Status System (ESS) and enables reporting of information that has traditionally been collected through phone calls and fax responses, including emergency contacts, evacuation status, power and generator status, available beds and more. ESS is available to AHCA-regulated providers that offer 24-hour care or a residential setting, and dialysis centers. Please access Emergency Status System (ESS) link:

<http://ess.myflorida.com/>

- Re-Entry:** Once a facility has been evacuated, procedures need to be in place for allowing residents to re-enter the facility. In order to set up the procedures:
1. Identify who is the responsible person(s) for authorizing re-entry to occur.
  2. Identify procedures for inspecting the facility to ensure it is structurally sound.
  3. Identify how residents will be transported from the host facility back to their home facility and identify how you will receive accurate and timely data on re-entry operations.
  5. Prior to readmitting any residents to the facility, you must notify the Plans and Construction Office at the Agency for Health Care Administration for them to determine the facility safety (850) 922-6469 or (850) 487-0713. Receiving facilities should also contact their Area Office to inform them of the acceptance of new residents.