

Preparation is Key

“If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I’d spend six sharpening my axe.”

Abraham Lincoln

As assisted living professionals, you live and work in a constant state of preparedness for situations that might threaten the health and safety of your residents and staff. Along with the many ways in which we prepare throughout the year for severe weather, power outages, eopements, fire, extreme temperatures, hazardous waste accidents, floods, and even a pandemic, it’s important to recognize the need for preparation as we begin the hurricane season. Statistically speaking, most natural disasters occur during the summer and autumn months, which prompted meteorologists to coin the phrase, “hurricane season.”

As with most disasters, preparation is key in mitigating property damage, loss of life, and a major disruption in quality of life. One of the ways you can prepare for severe weather is to actually have a severe weather drill, similar to fire drills, eopement drills, etc. Conducting periodic drills is the best way to prepare staff and empower them to take charge during actual emergencies. A prepared staff is also the best tool to maintain a sense of calm and order among residents. I’ve seen firsthand how well residents respond when well-trained and prepared staff members proceed with confidence and assuredness in situations that would otherwise create chaos, fear, and panic.

Here are some suggestions that can help you to prepare for hurricane season and severe weather emergencies.

1. Have an actual written plan for severe weather response. Conduct an in-service training for all staff and distribute the plan to all. As you review the plan, make sure that everyone is aware of their roles and responsibilities in executing the plan, similar to how fire responses and eopement responses are executed. At a minimum, the plan should be reviewed at the beginning of each hurricane season and again prior to severe winter weather season.
2. Engage and participate in MassMAP as a source of support for a time when your community is in need or to respond to the needs of other communities, when appropriate. The MassMAP program will assist with information on setting up emergency kits that will accompany residents that need to be transported to other locations and ensuring a smooth process during the transition. Factored into the emergency response is information about each resident’s medication, mobility issues related to evacuating the building, oxygen use, and information about which residents would be able to go with family on a temporary basis if there was a need for off-site temporary housing.
3. Prepare an emergency evacuation plan. (MassMAP can assist with this, also.)
4. Contact local hotels well in advance to identify those who might be in a position to temporarily house residents in the event they are displaced.
5. Consider developing an emergency plan with your purveyors of food, supplies (including paper goods,) emergency water, ice, gas/oil for heat and cooking, rubbish removal, and medical supplies. This will be critical if there is a need to shelter in place.

6. Have emergency toiletries and bedding supplies in order to accommodate staff who may need to remain in the building for their own protection or to cover the shifts of those who may not be able to get into work.
7. Maintain a binder with all emergency information at the front desk or in the executive director's office. Be sure to include the following:
 - contact information (aside from 911) for police, fire, and rescue
 - utility companies' contact information, including emergency and off-hours contacts
 - all suppliers of goods and services that you typically use for your community, including emergency and off-hours contacts
 - a current list of residents, including face sheets, with emergency contact information
 - a current list of staff, including emergency contact information
 - An up-to-date floor plan of the building, identifying all electrical outlets that receive power from a generator during a power outage.
 - Agreements with local hotels, ambulance/emergency transport, purveyors of food and supplies.

In order to keep this binder current, replace any documents that gets changed regularly. For example, when a new resident moves in or a new employee is hired, replace the old list with the updated one.

If severe weather is imminent, take immediate precautions to ensure the safety of residents and staff. The bathroom is often the safest place to be during a severe weather emergency because it is often located in the interior part of the building, away from windows. Also, the plumbing in the bathroom can add structural strength within the walls of the room. Please see below for additional safety suggestions.

- Stay away from windows; close blinds and shades.
- Unplug appliances
- Consider having portable LED lights (one for each resident) for distribution to residents in the event of a power outage. It would be a good idea to keep these lights in a suitable location for storage and have distribute them at the beginning of a power outage and collect them after the issue has passed. This will ensure their availability when they are needed.
- Also, consider having LED headlamps for staff in order to free up their hands when assisting with medications.
- Monitor the situation on local media throughout the storm, if possible.
- Encourage all residents and staff to stay inside during the storm.
- Following every drill or after an actual storm has come and passed, conduct a thorough debriefing with all staff involved.

Mass-ALA is pleased to provide information regarding the many ways assisted living communities can provide the best care for their residents. Our annual Regulations Training event is fast approaching and will offer substantial, valuable information on best practices and important issues in the industry. Please be sure to join us for that event on June 17th. You may register [here](#).

In addition to our ever-popular Boot Camps being offered in August, October, and December, we are currently working to bring you a spectacular Annual Conference on September 29th and 30th. Please watch for announcements about that, as well as our annual Dementia Training in November.

As we enter into what appears to be the most promising days since the pandemic began, I invite your comments and suggestions for fulfilling the vision of our 2021 Annual Conference, which is *Moving Forward Together*. Let's move forward together as we embrace new, exciting, and positive challenges in meeting the needs of a rapidly growing older adult population. Please feel free to contact me with your ideas on educational events and topics at lcashman@mass-ala.org.

Laurie

Laurie Cashman, Mass-ALA Director of Education