Crisis Communication: Understanding and Communicating with an Evolving Audience

**Produced by the Alabama Department of Public Health
Video Communications and Distance Learning Division**

Emergency Preparedness is Everyone's Business

The Experience of Disaster

- Technological Disaster: San Francisco, 2001
  - 2 deaf blind citizens – confined at home without staff assistance/ no Braille pagers available

The Experience of Disaster

- Deaf and HH people could not hear the radios/ read closed captions due to power outage
  - Meals on Wheels
  - Cooking schedules
  - Cold meals

The Experience of Disaster

- Man-made Disaster: New York and the Pentagon, 2001
  - Deaf employees at the World Trade Center learned the reason for escaping the building 45 minutes to 1 hour later than they should have

The Experience of Disaster

- Pentagon
  - The deaf employees felt a loud thud
  - There was no buddy system set up for deaf employees
- My trauma experience as a deaf parent, trying to locate my 5 year old son from school - Pentagon

The Experience of Disaster

- **Natural Disaster – Gulf Coast 2005 (Hurricane Katrina)**
  - **Accessible communications plans were not in place and alerts were not set-up for those with hearing or visual impairments**
  - **Deaf blind people forced to evacuate without personal assistance**

The Experience of Disaster

- **Deaf and HH people were denied to have sign language interpreters**

Katrina Evacuees Survey

- **Special Needs Assessment for Katrina Evacuees (SNAKE)**
  - **Fewer than 30% of shelters had access to American Sign Language interpreters**
  - **80% did not have TTYs**
  - **60% did not have TVs with open caption capability**

Katrina Evacuees Survey

- **Only 56% of the shelters had area where oral announcements were posted so people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or out of hearing range could go to a certain area to get or read the content of announcements**
  - **People who were deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf blind had no access to vital information**

The Experience of Disaster

- **Natural Disaster – Alabama – 2011 (April Fury - Tornado)**
  - **Lack of media access for deaf, HH and DB community**
  - **Lack of emergency notification/planning for Deaf, HH and DB individuals**
    - **Shelters and other services**

The Experience of Disaster

- **They were forced to take care of each other internally**
  - **Social media – Facebook**

Disability Population in U.S.

- **More than 54 million people in the United States have a disability**

- **61% of people with disabilities have not made plans to quickly and safely evacuate their homes**

- **Only 24% of people with disabilities make emergency plan preparations specific to their disability**

Disability Population in U.S.

- **35 million people (13% of the US population) are 65 years and older**
  - **By 2030 that number will increase to 65 million people**

Fast Facts

- **Among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, the highest disability rates are in the South**
  - **West Virginia**
    - **Highest median age**
    - **Highest disability rate - 24.4%**

Fast Facts

- **Other top 4 states**
  - **Kentucky – 23.7%**
  - **Arkansas – 23.6%**
  - **Mississippi – 23.6%**
  - **Alabama - 23.2%**

Fast Facts

- **Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia had disability rates that were significantly below the national rate**

- **Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, and West Virginia also registered high rates for each of the individual disabilities**

Incidence

- **In the U.S. there are 640,000 people who are culturally deaf**

- **1,600,000 people who are late-deafened**

- **29,760,000 who are hard of hearing**

- **These totals represent about 10% of America's population**

Incidence

- In Alabama there are approximately 225,400 persons of working age with a hearing loss
  - Approximately 172,100 are hard of hearing
  - Approximately 7,800 are deaf

Definition

- The functioning ability of deaf/hard of hearing individuals can generally be separated into distinct categories:
  1. Hard of hearing
     - Communicates orally by speaking and listening

Definition

2. Deaf
   - Communicates using sign language and are part of Deaf Culture

Definition

3. Late-deafened
   - Individuals who were hearing or hard of hearing and can no longer communicate orally
   - Not part of the Deaf Culture

Definition

4. Deaf-blind
   - Communicates using language and depends on tactile interpreter

Definition

5. Deaf-low vision
   - Communicates using sign language
   - Depends on sign language interpreter within range of sight

Know Your Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Deaf Blind Community

- **Identify the deaf people in your community**
  - Profoundly deaf, cognitive development, deaf-blind, deaf-low vision
  - Do they need care givers?
  - Do they need equipment, etc.?

Know Your Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Deaf Blind Community

- **Work with Deaf, HH, Deaf Blind organizations and local services**
  - AL Institute for the Deaf Blind
  - AL Dept. of Rehabilitation Services
    - Deaf and HH services, etc.
      - Provide necessary information

Know Your Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Deaf Blind Community

- **Create a special needs registry for your area if needed**

Signal/Visual Systems

- **Deaf and hard of hearing individuals tend to need highly visual systems**
  - Audible sirens
  - Paging or notification system to alert Deaf/HH via pagers

Public Message Display

- **Transportation message displays**
  - On-board transit stations or roadways
- **Critical that displays give as much information as possible**

Strategies for Communicating During Emergencies

- **Positioning**
  - Be sure the light falls on your face
    - Do not stand with streetlights or flashing emergency light behind you

Strategies for Communicating During Emergencies

- If you are aware that the hard of hearing person has a better ear, stand or sit on that side and speak slowly and clearly
- Avoid background (visual) noise to the extent possible

Strategies for Communicating During Emergencies

- Method
  - Get the person's attention before you start talking
    - You may have to touch the person lightly to attract attention
    - Face them directly while speaking

Strategies for Communicating During Emergencies

- Do not shout
  - Speak as clearly as possible or communicate through interpreters if available
- If the person does not understand what you said, rephrase it

Strategies for Communicating During Emergencies

- You may ask the person if they understood
  - Then proceed with topic clues and perhaps gestures if the subject being discussed is visible and within range of sight

Strategies for Communicating During Emergencies

- Physical
  - Do not obscure your mouth with your hands
    - Do not chew and do not smoke while talking

Strategies for Communicating During Emergencies

- Facial expressions are important clues to the deaf and hard of hearing persons
  - Feelings are more often expressed by non-verbal communication than through words

Strategies for Communicating During Emergencies

- **Attitude**
  - **Do not become impatient**
  - **Stay positive and relaxed**
  - **Never talk about deaf/HH persons in their presence – talk to them**
  - **Treat deaf/HH people with respect and help build their confidence**

Strategies for Communicating During Emergencies

  - **Ask what you can do to facilitate communication**

Building an Accessible System

- **Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing are starting to receive messages on their computers, pagers, PDAs, and cell phones**
  - **Local EMA transmit e-mail news bulletins of breaking news**
  - **Buddy Systems for Deaf, HH, and Deaf-blinds**

Building an Accessible System

- **Access for American Sign Language users**
- **Needs of deaf-blind and low vision individuals**
  - **Equipment, tactile interpreters, personal assistants, Braille, large prints, etc.**

Building an Accessible System

- **Form a Deaf, HH and Deaf-blind Triage at shelters**

Building a Local/State Network

- **Address emergency communication gaps and emergency notifications at state and local levels**
- **Develop a plan and provide technical assistance to ensure that individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and deaf-blind are actively involved in community, regional, and state planning processes**

Building a Local/State Network

- Develop a plan for programs to provide a culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health counseling/support network for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing after disasters

Building a Local/State Network

- Provide consultation and support on disability sections in CERT training modules so that disabilities such as deafness and hearing loss are included in teaching and discussion of each particular topic

Emergency Preparedness Devices for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People
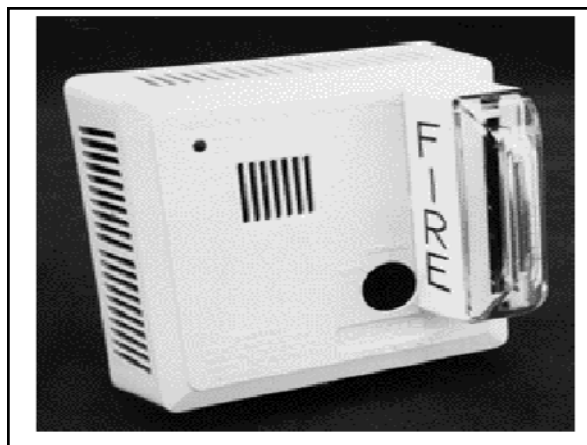
Technology Available for Deaf Blind/Low Vision People

- MP3 player for the Deaf/Deaf Alert system
- Feeling the vibration
- Light represents the rhythm of music/noise
- Shape like a small pillow - soft

Vibration/Bang "Hearing Aid"

- Feel the noise in the background
- Let the deaf people know where the noise comes from
- Can be set-up through wireless, vibration, full coil technology, and sound/equality

Braille Communicator Pager for Deaf-blind Citizens

- **A normal sighted person can use this device to send messages to the deaf-blind person**

iPad

- **Communication in particular includes language comprehension, learning facial expressions, utilizing storyboards, communicating basic needs, text to speech, Braille, learning to speak, and learning sign language**

Speech-to-Text Glasses for Deaf-low Vision People

- **Will translate speech to text**
- **Low-vision people read text on their glasses**
  - **Any speech format, like TV**

Mobile Videophone

- Qik format where deaf, HH, low vision people do not have to go home and talk on the videophone

- Communication on the go

Five Essential Best Practice Guidelines

1. Reference and resource list

   – Americans with Disabilities Acts

   – Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA)

Five Essential Best Practice Guidelines

– Federal Civil Rights laws that mandate integration and equal opportunity for people with disabilities in general population shelters

Five Essential Best Practice Guidelines

2. Training

   – Public Information Officers and elected officials should be trained on "accessible"

     • Complexity of information, alternated forms (deaf, HH, and deaf-blind)

Five Essential Best Practice Guidelines

3. Collaboration with local and state organizations

4. Communication before, during, and after an emergency

5. Updating and monitoring shelter plans

Contact Information

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