

Burlington County OEM is Planning for Seniors

We in Emergency Management are responsible not only for responding to emergencies, but more importantly, to write plans that provide an All Hazards approach to emergency operations.

One of the first steps to take in planning is to do a needs-assessment of the most likely types of emergencies to confront your community. Once you have done this you can look to see if there are any particular segments of your population that would be at risk during these emergencies.

One at-risk population is on the rise and will most likely have a drastic effect on any evacuation plans for your community. I am talking about the nursing homes that have been increasing not only in size, but also locations. Remember, we not only have to evacuate the residents of the nursing homes, we have to make sure the facility that accepts them is capable of caring for them. This could deplete many of your resources very quickly.

We decided to take a closer look at this situation by inviting a number of nursing home administrators to a meeting to do some brainstorming on the subject. Our first meeting took place on December 14th, 2000. It was enlightening to say the least. All agreed there was a great need to make individual nursing homes better prepared to deal with an emergency that would call for a partial or full evacuation of their facility. One critical area that we discovered was that many nursing homes may have plans for evacuation, but the plan has not been tested and the facility they plan to evacuate to may not be prepared to accept new patients.

Since that initial meeting we have met a number of times and even had our first tabletop exercise at the Masonic Home on October 23, 2001. Over 40 people took part in this exercise including nursing home employees, Burlington Township Officials as well as County Officials.

We now have nine nursing homes involved in our working group and are looking to add more. We have developed a Nursing Home Evacuation Booklet that lists vital information on each facility that includes emergency contacts, directions to the facility, diagrams of rooms to be used for housing incoming evacuees and transportation resources at each location. The County will take on the responsibility of maintaining and updating this booklet each year. We are planning our next tabletop exercise and would welcome anyone who would like to observe so that they can be better prepared to deal with nursing homes in their communities.

We often make the mistake of seeing Emergency Management as that group that we call up during times of emergency. The real work of Emergency Management is the development of plans to deal with emergencies and then the continual exercise and refinement of that plan. If your looking for a good area to test your

evacuation plans, try involving the very special people who live and work in your local nursing homes. They are not only fun to work with, they are also another valuable relationship you can build to help you better serve your community.

If you need further information on this nursing home project, call Mike Anderson at **609-265-7152**