If You Gotta Go, You Gotta GO!

A Message from CIEP for National Preparedness Month 2022
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The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has designated September as the National Preparedness Month, an annual reminder that emergencies can happen at anytime, anyplace, and anywhere. This past weekend Washington State had 14 active wildfires, two of which closed major highways through the mountains. At the time I am writing this, one mountain pass has reopened, while the other one remains closed although evacuation levels have just begun to ease in some areas.

Unfortunately, according to news reports from KIRO-7, approximately half of the residents in the fire zone were able to heed the warnings from local emergency responders to leave their homes. Officials had been pleading for those remaining to reconsider and leave. There are several factors to consider that may impede an orderly and quick evacuation:

- **Lack of planning** – Plan your evacuation routes, including destinations. Plan ahead on how to contact family and other members of your household, including an out of area contact where everyone in your household can leave a message.
- **Confusion over emergency alerts** – Sign up to receive your local county emergency alerts. Monitor your local news and social media for updates, which can evolve rapidly. Know your rights to receive effective communications during disasters.
- **Unmet Access and Functional Needs** – Plan for temporary disruptions to your support system. Develop a buddy network with people who live close by such as your trusted neighbors. Discuss with your family, personal attendants, interpreters, and others responsible for your care. Call or text 9-1-1 (if available) whenever you need emergency assistance.
In planning for Access and Functional Needs (AFN), we have identified several things that help people survive disasters using the CMIST memory tool. The letters stand for the following functional areas:

- **C – Communication** In order for us to understand what is happening, all emergency notifications must be accessible to be easily understood in a variety of formats and channels, available in different languages with captions and video description so we can respond appropriately if the message comes in a way that we can understand.

- **M – Maintaining Health** is vital to our well-being. Not everyone has access to stable housing, human services, or health care. As long as our needs are met, we can minimize the load on the hospital network, saving space for those who are actually sick or injured.

- **I – Independence** enables us to fulfill our daily living activities and contribute our knowledge and strengths to personal response and recovery efforts.

- **S – Security, Self-Determination** allows us to make decisions to sustain our own well-being.

- **T – Transportation** for those who are not able to travel independently for various reasons.
In order for us to understand evacuation protocols used in wildfires, flooding, and other catastrophic events, your local emergency management agency may use a tiered approach based on the urgency of the impending disaster.

- **Level 1 Alert** (Green/Be Alert) means conditions are ripe for possible evacuation. Whether it is a wildfire or a flood, officials are constantly monitoring the weather forecasts for adverse trends. This is the time when you need to get your “Go-bag kit”, a backpack or a suitcase filled with essentials that you may need to bring with you to a shelter or a friend’s home to stay for a few days until the emergency passes.

- **Level 2 Alert** (Orange/Be Ready) means that conditions are worsening and if you can evacuate, do so. Follow your communication plan to inform family and friends of your status. An early start will give you more time to travel further and be settled in a place that is safe.

- **Level 3 Alert** (Red/Leave Now) means that dangerous conditions are imminent and there is no time to pack. Get out now while you can.

In other situations, officials may advise that people **Shelter-In-Place** if it is safe to do so. This depends on where you are at the time of the announcement. If you are at home, be sure that you have enough food, water, and other supplies to last up to **two weeks**. Depending on the severity, an earthquake for example may knock out bridges and make highways impassable. Emergency vehicles will not be able to get to you if the roads are blocked.

This is why the Coalition on Inclusive Emergency Planning (CIEP) and the Washington State Independent Living Council (WASILC) believe that National Preparedness Month is an important time to remember, but you can always prepare anytime throughout the year. Assemble your go-bags (for your home, office, and vehicles), and your emergency Shelter-in-Place kits by **budgeting a few dollars** each month towards supplies. Check with your local emergency management agency to lend your perspectives during community planning meetings or to take CERT classes. Work with your local Center for Independent Living (CIL) or your local Regional Service Center administered by the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) if you need further assistance in developing an emergency plan.

To learn more about best practices in AFN using CMIST in Washington State, CIEP hosts an online Stakeholder Call using Zoom on the first Wednesday of each month from 10-11am. **Contact** CIEP to be on the mailing list and receive the quarterly CIEP ALERT newsletter and announcements.

Be prepared, and be safe.