

Disaster Planning with Cecilia Warren

Announcer 0:03

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Ashley M. Biggs 0:21

Hi, everyone, it's Ashley Biggs with the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Print Disabled and today we are talking all about disaster preparedness. And we are so fortunate today to have Cecilia Warren, the Director of Emergency Preparedness policy for the Maryland Department of Disabilities with us, and she's going to be talking to us about this very important topic. As the Director for emergency preparedness policy for the department disabilities. Cecilia ensures that emergency operation plans address the access and fundamental needs of people affected by disaster. She collaborates with partner agencies and organizations to incorporate access and functional needs planning into all emergency response and recovery aspects. She has her MBA and her master's in technology with a concentration in Homeland Security. She has a BS and fire science and an AAS in Emergency Medical Services. She is quite a force to be reckoned with for over 20 years as a fire officer and a paramedic and the local fire department. And she is now partnered with Yale a Labrador Retriever who has received his professional training from guiding eyes of the blind in New York. So Cecilia, welcome. Thank you so much for being here.

Cecelia Warren 1:38

Oh, thank you. Actually, we're delighted to be invited.

Ashley M. Biggs 1:41

I have to know how did September become known as Disaster Preparedness Month?

Cecelia Warren 1:47

Well, the National Preparedness Month was initially designated in 2004. and Maryland preparedness month actually became a recognized event as the program grew. So now we know September is National and Maryland Preparedness Month, and the Maryland Department of Disabilities, joins Maryland Department of Emergency Management, and asking all Marylanders to be prepared for the various types of emergencies they might encounter. This year's theme is a lasting legacy. The life you've built is worth protecting, prepare for disasters to create a lasting legacy for you and your family. During this month, we seek to build awareness and encourage everyone to take steps to prepare for emergencies in their home, school businesses and places of worship. Being prepared. Start by knowing your risks, and taking the appropriate actions before during and after a disaster strikes.

Ashley M. Biggs 2:48

So what steps or actions are you recommending that people do to prepare for disasters?

Cecelia Warren 2:54

Well, we always start with making a plan. A plan for my family could look very different than the plan for your family or colleagues, family, and your plan to consider the hazards and risks that you are most likely to experience. For example, in Maryland, we know that flooding is a common hazard. And the Atlantic hurricane season runs from June 1 to November 30, with the peak seeds in here occurring between mid August and late October. So your disaster plan should consider all of the derivative impacts that could occur if there was a multi day incident such as, you know, a hurricane that hits Maryland, or perhaps some type of weather event that causes you know, tremendous flooding. So some of these impacts that could occur in a multi day incident could be limited food and water. You may need to occupy a disaster shelter, medical and health services could be interrupted. Government Services may be suspended. Public Safety could be stretched beyond their available staffing. Many people forget that financial transactions and gas stations may be out of service if there's no electricity, and some roads could become impassable or closed, limiting your ability to evacuate or to buying shelter, you know, away from your residence. So if we imagine that an incident goes on for days, you know, it is not uncommon for communities to be with it without electricity for a week in a very significant incident. There could be sweltering heat and no air conditioning. And a disaster of this size can also impact commercial businesses. ATMs can't dispense cash without electricity. The demand for food and water reaches a tipping point within days and then in an event where there has been plenty of notice. Their supplies could be depleted before the actual death. such as a blizzard or hurricane. And in considering this, we have to consider what happens to public safety and other government services. The need for help quickly outpaces the resources available. So even with mutual aid agreements, the local jurisdiction can deplete all of its resources for a large incident. So we also recommend a communication plan in case the members of the household become separated. And at minimum, the family disaster plan should include all of the household members names and phone numbers. Most people in the household have cell phones or other devices to communicate. If a family has pets, that info should also be included. It should include specific plans of action, and a communication plan, a Shelter In Place plan and also a task summary. The family disaster plan should include the steps one should take to be safe and return to pre disaster status. There are templates available online, and the plan should also include a future date for review. It is common to review disaster plans annually at a minimum, and it is wise to also review the plan after a disaster to see if there were areas that could be improved at the beginning of the school year, if there are minor children in the household. They may be attending different schools and need to have that information updated. Always include a rally point or meeting location should the family become separated during an evacuation. For large scale disasters, families can become separated and have difficulty locating their loved ones. reunifying families is important in disaster recovery. And like to also remind everyone that citizens that are located outside of the United States, for example, they may be a student who was traveling or on business outside of the US, they should always register with the State Department, even if they are students or simply traveling for a personal enrichment. And this helps helps to locate them if there is a disaster in the location where they're visiting.

Ashley M. Biggs 7:23

What comes after making the plan?

Cecelia Warren 7:25

The next step after creating a plan is to take the time to build a kit for yourself and your family. Depending on your circumstances, you may need to build multiple kits. There are many online resources to get you started on what a disaster kit should contain. But I encourage everyone to keep it simple and not include extraneous items. So the basic categories of items to include are water, shelf stable foods, clothing, medications, flashlight, and manual can opener or crank radio, personal hygiene products and first aid items, I would add an additional category in your disaster kit. And that is for vital documents and cash. survivors need to have important documents like birth certificate, social security card, government issued ID to apply for various benefits and help. You may require additional items in your disaster kit that pertain to one specific needs. And this could also include supplies for service animal or pet. So some examples of the other types of supplies to consider for people with disabilities is durable medical equipment or supplies for that tire sealant for a wheelchair. dust mask which of course masks have become much more commonplace since the pandemic assistive technology, spare eyeglasses and it could even be supplies like cane tip. It is important for people who have unique needs to customize their kit. And I want to note that for assistive technology is just as important to have the charging device or the assistive technology may not be operable for the duration of the emergency. So Maryland Department of Disabilities and Maryland human services have assistive technology kits for all of our statewide shelters, and any type of mass care operation and the kits include a variety of chargers and charging stations. mobility devices that have parts that may need frequent replacement, such as cane tips, should also be considered. Individuals who receive home health care should have a plan with your service provider so that extra supplies batteries or medication can be provided in it ban of unknown event purchase a hurricane or Blizzard for food and nutrition is another consideration when building a disaster kit. shelf stable food that has an expiration date should be taken out of rotation prior to expiration. Of course, food should not require cooking in order to be consumed, we must realize that there may be no electricity, no microwave, refrigerator or stovetop to use. The storing non perishable food is one of the easiest preparedness steps one can take a person that has dietary restrictions, food allergies, or medical conditions that require an eating schedule. And, you know, that's those are additional planning considerations. And don't forget to include food for any household animals. And of course, infants and toddlers nutrition needs should also be included.

Ashley M. Biggs 10:58

How does the disaster affect families and other ways?

Cecelia Warren 11:02

Well, disasters can have a significant impact on household finances. Even a resilient financial plan can be negatively impacted by a disaster. It is imperative to be properly insured for both renters and homeowners. I encourage everyone to examine their insurance policies with meticulous attention to detail. Be aware of what your financial responsibility will be in the event of a catastrophic loss. I also like to recommend that you dial into presentations from the Maryland Insurance administration. They are very knowledgeable on these issues and want you to be well informed too. Oftentimes, they offer presentations about once a month to the public. And in post disaster situations, the Maryland Insurance administration often will stand up a virtual Recovery Center where homeowners and renters can get help in understanding their policy and deciphering. You know what steps to take. Insurance and finances are definitely impacted by a disaster. And as I said, it doesn't matter how much resilience one has. It's going to be a cost associated with it.

Ashley M. Biggs 12:25

Do you have any final remarks?

Cecelia Warren 12:27

So one recommendation that we have is once you've made the plan, talk with your family about the plan and practice it practice the plan, revisit the plan at least annually or when your household experiences changes. We oftentimes go through where we store the kid, we go through this together as a family. And also keep an eye on places where you can get additional resources and information in addition to Maryland Department of Emergency Management, and of course, my agency Maryland Department of Disabilities. There are national groups that offer many preparedness resources, National Organization on disabilities course and the Federal Emergency Management Agency or FEMA. It is very helpful to consider some other situations that may not be as common such as Do you have a household member who relies on electric medical equipment, equipment that depends on having power, such as perhaps an infusion pump is one example. Some some types of ventilation or oxygen concentrators may require electricity. So having a plan for what can you do in advance of an event if you have a power dependent user, and that's where it's really important to contact the provider for your your electricity, and they have programs that people can apply to be in so that it doesn't make the person as having some priority on on keeping their electricity maintained. Of course, there is no guarantee and it doesn't substitute for having some plan of what type of backup power can be arranged. And so I would also encourage people not to wait that disasters, don't wait and making a plan. Now will will pay return many times over if an event occurred. When it comes to the kit, just want to return to that permit return to that for a minute. The documents of course are important and the finances having some cash available because the ATM It may be out of service and point of sale machines may not be working. And, you know, consider what you may need at your office, if you are going to be outside of the home, if you need a disaster, if you have a disaster, excuse me, for example, I have several days worth of dog food in my office, because I have a guide dog. And of course, I would not want to be stuck anywhere without him having proper nutrition, and not even for a day. So and

then, lastly, keep in mind that flood damage water damage can cause several \$1,000 of cost in terms of having it repaired. So please, please go and examine your insurance policies because most homeowners insurance does not cover flood damage, and see if you may consider getting flood insurance. And I think that about wraps it up. Thank you so much, Ashley.

Ashley M. Biggs 16:06

Thank you. That was definitely a lot of great information. Along with this recording on Anchor FM I will place links to the Department of Disabilities and to the Maryland FEMA and all that good, all the good places that people should know. So thank you so much for being here.

Cecelia Warren 16:22

Thank you and have a great day. And I look forward to to hearing this podcast when it comes out. Thank you.

Ashley M. Biggs 16:30

Thank you.

Announcer 16:32

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