



Emergency Readiness Plan

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Emergency Readiness Plan

Introduction

The events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent terrorist activities in our area have made us keenly aware of the need to be prepared in case of emergency. Following the lead of the Fairfax-Falls Church CSB and the Northern Virginia Regional Commission, we have prepared this guide for use by ICON management and staff to ensure that we are prepared for both natural and terrorism-related emergencies.

Because all of ICON's services take place in the community, on an individual basis, there can be no one-size-fits-all plan for any given type of emergency. And, as we saw only too clearly in 2001, there is no way to anticipate some of the situations to which we may be exposed. Therefore, ICON's readiness plan focuses on individual planning for each person served and maintaining a multi-faceted communications system through the duration of an emergency.

This document is a guide to this individualized planning process, suggesting the issues that must be considered with respect to ICON's business operations, those who receive employment-related services, and those who receive in-home support through ICON's community living services.

Nature of Potential Emergency Situations

Severe Weather Emergency

A severe weather emergency such as we experienced in the "Blizzard of '96" can cause us to be confined to our homes, perhaps with loss of power or water service. An "Emergency Preparedness Kit" should be available in every household. The recommended contents of such a kit are detailed on the attached "Emergency Preparedness Kit" checklist.

Threats Requiring Evacuation

Terrorist threats or natural or man-made disasters may require that we evacuate our homes or places of employment. In the event of widespread evacuation, each individual will need to take certain personal items. A checklist of recommended items to be maintained in a personal evacuation kit is attached to this document.

In addition, fire or localized threats may require evacuation of a home or place of employment. Each individual should know, for both home and work environments, at least two ways to leave the building should emergency evacuation be required.

Bioterrorism

In the event of a chemical or biological emergency, we will most likely be advised to "shelter in place". This involves remaining indoors, preferably in an interior room without windows, and sealing the house or apartment so that outside air cannot enter the living space. The "Sheltering-In-Place Procedures Checklist" attached to this document details procedures to be followed in the event of this type of emergency. It must also be expected that this type of emergency may last for several days; as a result each household should have an "Emergency Preparedness Kit" of food and supplies.

Communications

Because of the decentralized nature of ICON's operations, the maintenance of diversified avenues of communication is an essential part of our business at all times. All full-time staff carry pagers and many carry cellphones as well. All staff have voicemail. Nearly all staff have email access at home, and our internal password-protected, encrypted website is capable of being maintained remotely so that specific emergency information may be disseminated efficiently. All staff are provided with an up-to-date paper copy of other staff's email address and pager, voicemail, and home numbers; this information is also available on the staff website. Email, pager, and voicemail numbers are available to the public on ICON's public website.

In an emergency which disrupts normal operations, staff are responsible for contacting their supervisor as well as those individuals they support who may be affected by the situation. Supervisors in turn contact the Executive Director so that ICON's response can be coordinated from a central position. A wallet card containing emergency information and contact numbers will be provided to each staff person reference in case of emergency.

Should ICON's office phone system be rendered inoperable, the Executive Director's home and mobile phones will serve as a central communications point.

If the nature of the disaster is such that phone service in a broad area around Alexandria is affected, it may still be possible to place a long-distance call. In this event, staff should attempt to reach our out-of-state communication point. Phone and email contact information for this point will be included on staff emergency response cards.

Should telephone service be disrupted to the extent that such coordination is not possible, staff's first obligation is to our consumers. As covered in detail below, each individual consumer and staff person should have an emergency plan which includes what to do in such a situation.

ICON Business Operations

Physical Plant

The only physical location operated by ICON is the business office, located at 1240 N. Pitt St. in Alexandria, Virginia. An office staff of four to five individuals work there on a daily basis; at any given time one or two direct service staff or managers may also be in the office. On rare occasions a customer may be visiting the office but this happens very infrequently; nearly all of our interface with our customers takes place in the community.

ICON's office is in the basement and has a direct door to the parking lot as well as two fire stairs which lead up one flight to the front door of the building. The office is sprinklered and has a fire alarm system which automatically notifies the Fire Department when smoke is detected by the smoke alarms. The office maintains an emergency broadcast radio for notification of other types of emergencies. A cache of food, a first-aid kit, and containers for water are also maintained for use in an emergency in which we are advised to 'shelter in place'.

In the event of an emergency, the decision as to whether to evacuate the office or shelter in place will be made by the most senior member of the administrative team who is present (in the order of Executive Director, Administrative Director, Controller, Office Manager) based in information received from emergency broadcasts and any other communications systems which may be available. This individual will also make the decision as to whether there is time to make a backup of the computer systems before evacuation if the nature of the emergency is such that there is a threat to the survival of the physical plant.

Communication Systems

ICON's voicemail and email systems and webserver are located in ICON's offices in Alexandria. Any emergency which results in the loss of electrical power will render all these systems inoperable temporarily. The loss of telephone service will also render the voicemail system inoperable; the mailserver and webserver may be affected, depending upon the cause of the loss of service.

The general procedure for coping with loss of telephone service is set out in the section on Communications above. It is worth noting that all of ICON's administrative staff carry personal cellphones which could be used for communication to and from the office should the phone system go down.

ICON's servers are connected to uninterruptible power supplies which will enable them to stay online for a few minutes following the loss of power – long enough to shut down safely. Should the power outage last a significant period of time, it would be possible to restore mail and web service at a different location, using backups which are stored at an offsite location. This would take between six and twelve hours to accomplish,

assuming that the offsite location and ICON's internet services provider are unaffected by the emergency.

Computers

ICON maintains a regular system of backups for its servers as well as individual staff computers. These backups are stored in a fire-resistant safe in ICON's offices. Each month a set of CDs containing a full backup of these systems is forwarded to an offsite location outside the DC metropolitan area. If the government escalates the terrorism warning to Code Red, or in any other type of emergency situation when adequate warning is available, a set of the most recent backups will be forwarded to this offsite location.

Essential Business Documents

At the end of each fiscal year, a CD containing scanned images of ICON's most essential business documents (Articles of Incorporation and By-laws, IRS 501(c)3 letter, audits, current contracts, etc.) is prepared and forwarded to the offsite location.

Employment Services

Individual Situations

The people ICON supports in Employment Services and the Safetynet Program work in more than a hundred different community businesses, each of which will have different plans for employee safety in the event of an emergency. As a result, each supported employee should have an individual plan for reacting to any emergency situations which happen during the workday. In addition, a fail-safe communication plan will be essential to ensure that no consumer served by ICON is at a loss as to what to do in the event of such an emergency.

Preparation

In order to plan for an emergency, it is essential to work with supported employees to help them understand the potential for emergency situations which may occur while they are at work, without causing undue worry about these possibilities. This awareness is of course applicable to the whole workforce, not just employees with disabilities, and many employers will have already conducted workplace training to familiarize employees with emergency procedures.

Individual Plans

A form has been developed, "Emergency Plan for Consumers of Employment Services", which can be used with the consumer to develop individual disaster preparedness plans. Copies of individual plans should be provided to the consumer, members of the consumer's personal support network, if any, the staff person serving the consumer, and the Director of Employment Services. Plans should also be made available electronically through the ICON staff website.

In addition, a wallet card containing emergency information and contact numbers will be provided to each consumer for reference in case of emergency.

Community Living Services

The type of support received by consumers of ICON's Community Living services varies widely from one individual to the next. Some of these individuals are living with family or friends who will be able to assist them in an emergency situation. Others do not have such a support system close to home, and will need substantial support in preparing for and reacting to major emergencies.

Vulnerabilities

All of us are vulnerable to potential disruptions in public services as a result of severe weather, terrorist activity, or other emergencies, and all of us should make some general preparations – lay in enough food and water for several days, and enough cash to get along for several days if we can't get to the bank. We should also know where to go in the event that we are required to evacuate our homes or places of employment, and have an agreed-upon contact person who is located in an area outside metropolitan Washington through whom we and our significant others can make contact in the event of a region-wide emergency situation.

Some of the people we serve may be vulnerable in additional ways:

- Individuals who are dependent upon regular medical procedures such as dialysis must have a contingency plan in the event that their medical services provider or other necessary services such as transportation are prevented from providing essential services.
- Those who are dependent upon medications should always have at least two weeks supply on hand, and more if possible.
- We must be sure that our consumers are aware of the nature of emergencies that may occur and that they understand how to respond in an emergency, to reduce the tendency to panic. We must also be aware of those of our consumers who are more likely to be emotionally affected by an emergency situation and have a plan for reassuring these individuals in a timely manner should such an event occur.

Individual Planning

A form (“Emergency Plan for Consumers of Community Living Services”) has been developed to help analyze each individual's specific vulnerabilities and prepare a written contingency plan to be followed in an emergency situation. The American Red Cross information booklets, particularly Disaster Preparedness for People With Disabilities, should also be reviewed in the process of preparing the plan. Copies of individual plans should be provided to the consumer, core members of the consumer's personal support network, if any, the staff person(s) serving the consumer, and the Director of Community Living Services. Plans should also be made available electronically through the ICON staff website.

In addition, a wallet card containing emergency information and contact numbers will be provided to each consumer for reference in case of emergency.

Staff Preparedness and Training

The effectiveness of ICON's response to an emergency is entirely dependent on its direct service staff. To ensure that staff is aware of emergency preparedness and is prepared to act as part of the team in the event of emergency, staff training will be conducted on an annual basis and at other times if conditions warrant. This policy as well as published emergency guides and the forms and checklists developed by ICON will be available at all times through the staff website. Finally, knowledge of emergency preparedness issues and the completeness of individual emergency plans will be incorporated as a criteria of staff performance review.

Post-Emergency Counseling

Our area has learned that living with the threat of terrorist activity can have an emotional effect that ranges from general unease to life-changing fear. It is essential in the aftermath of terrorist attack or natural disaster that we make sure that both consumers and ICON staff have access to an appropriate support system to mitigate the emotional effect of these threats. This may take the form of company-wide supports offered by an employer, individual counseling offered through an employer's EAP, or counseling available through public agencies such as the Red Cross or county government.

References

Northern Virginia Guide to Emergency Preparedness

<http://www.novaregion.org/pdf/emergencyprep03.pdf>

FEMA Emergency Management Guide for Business & Industry

<http://www.fema.gov/library/pdf/bizindust.pdf>

Red Cross Guides:

Disaster Preparedness for People With Disabilities

<http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/beprepared/disability.pdf>

Preparing Your Business for the Unthinkable

http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/beprepared/busi_industry.pdf

Terrorism: Preparing for the Unexpected

<http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/keepsafe/unexpected.pdf>

Why Do I Feel Like This?

<http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/keepsafe/1355en.pdf>

Homeland Security Advisory Recommendations

<http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/beprepared/hsas/business.pdf>

<http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/beprepared/hsas/individual.pdf>

Many of the Red Cross Guides are available in other languages. A listing of the general preparedness materials is online at <http://www.redcross.org/pubs/dspubs/genprep.html>. Terrorism-related materials are at <http://www.redcross.org/pubs/dspubs/terrormat.html>.

National Office on Disability Guide for Emergency Planners and Responders

<http://www.nod.org/pdffiles/epi2002.pdf>

Job Accommodations Network Workplace Evacuation Guide

<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/media/emergency.html>

Attachments

Emergency Preparedness Kit Checklist

Emergency Plan for Consumers of Employment Services

Emergency Plan for Consumers of Community Living Services

Sample Emergency Wallet Cards