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From the Los Angeles Times

No Funds to Print Disaster Pamphlet

L.A. County says it does not have \$30,000 to distribute a booklet to help people with special needs survive after an earthquake.

By Sharon Bernstein
Times Staff Writer

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Hurricane Katrina showed that the frail and elderly are particularly vulnerable in natural disasters. So Los Angeles County emergency preparedness officials spent much of the last year putting together tips and a detailed checklist to help residents with special needs survive an earthquake or other catastrophe.

But now, officials said they can't afford to complete printing the pamphlets and distributing them.

The Office of Emergency Management has only enough money — \$2,788 to be exact — to print 5,000 copies of its report, a fraction of the amount needed to reach the tens of thousands of people with disabilities in the county, said Joyce Harris, who spearheaded the project.

There is no money to print the pamphlet in Braille or in large print, or to purchase television airtime for a 30-second public service announcement the county has produced on the topic. To pay for Harris' modest vision of a 20,000 print run — plus the Braille and large-print copies — would cost less than \$30,000.

"It's just like everything else we do in the public service arena — there's a limited budget," said Michael Brooks, acting director of emergency management for the county.

The situation has angered some organizations that serve disabled people, who say the county has a responsibility to help those in need prepare for an earthquake.

"The need is magnified for a special-needs individual," said Carole Jouroyan, executive director of the Glendale Assn. for the Retarded. "The elderly and the disabled always have to take a back seat to any type of funding needs."

County officials respond that the Emergency Management Department has struggled to keep up with the needs. Its annual budget of about \$4 million is not expected to increase next year, despite a significant improvement in county revenue and creeping inflation, Brooks said.

With nearly all of its budget going to pay salaries and run the county's state-of-the-art emergency operations center, there is little left to help people with disabilities in several Southern California counties that participate in the region's Emergency Survival Program.

Instead, Harris resorted to applying for grants and seeking corporate donations to fund the program. Brooks said that's not unusual in his department, where just 2% of the budget is available for safety outreach programs.

"We quite often have donations from corporations. One of the vehicles we have is a van that was donated to us by Toyota," he said.

Brooks and other county officials say it's common for government agencies to fund projects through donations and grants.

David Janssen, chief administrative officer for the county, said that developing audio and Braille versions of the pamphlet would be expensive and probably require grant money.

But after The Times asked why there was not enough money to print more of the ordinary brochures, he said that if there were a demand for the information from people with disabilities or their caregivers, the county would probably find the money to print more copies.

Still, advocates for people with disabilities say it's just one more sign that the people they represent — who have little political clout and less visibility in a society that revels in images of wealth and fitness — are low on the priority list.

Jouroyan said she has been seeking information on how special-needs populations should prepare for quakes for months — ever since wading through an inch-thick Federal Emergency Management Agency report on preparedness, only to find no references to the disabled.

(The federal agency has a pamphlet on emergency preparedness for people with special needs, but it is less-detailed than the county's booklet.)

The information in the pamphlet is particularly important for disabled people who live independently, such as those supported by Jouroyan's program, because they lack the same level of support as people who live in institutional settings, she said.

"If you're in some type of a board-and-care or residential facility, chances are the administration has a plan in place, and staff will supervise the resident should a disaster occur," she said. "But for the independent, preparedness is a must. The need is magnified for a special-needs individual."

Moreover, to really reach that population, the county would need to do more than simply print copies of a pamphlet, she said. For example, many people with special needs have

difficulty reading, and would need someone to read and explain the pamphlet to them. Even better, the county should consider making a video that disabled residents could watch, she said.

The county has made a public service announcement about the importance of emergency preparation for people with disabilities. The 30-second spot directs viewers to a website where they can download the booklet.

But because the spot is a public service announcement and not a paid commercial, it will run only at odd times — late at night or during periods of the day when viewership is low. Research has shown that such announcements are much more effective when they are run during prime time, but the county would have to purchase the airtime.

A meaningful purchase of enough time to have an effect, Harris said, could cost as much as \$500,000 — money the county is also lacking.

The booklet — which contains several preparedness checklists and other emergency information for people with disabilities, can be downloaded at <http://www.espfocus.org>, the website of the Emergency Survival Program, a consortium of emergency preparedness officials and departments in several counties.

But advocates for the disabled say that many of their clients don't have access to computers. And the pamphlet is difficult to find on the website. It is not posted on the home page, and seekers must first click on a link that says "click here to see special bulletins and publications from prior years' campaigns," and then scroll down past a different pamphlet for people with disabilities to find the right link, labeled "Emergency Preparedness: Taking Responsibility For Your Safety."

The 20-page booklet is very detailed, moving beyond FEMA's special-needs publications to lay out specific details on how to map an escape route from your home if confined to a wheelchair. It also covers how to provide for assistive technology and therapeutic animals, such as guide dogs. Other tips include the suggestion that people with special needs designate at least two helpers in the community who will come to their aid in a crisis.

Sally Jameson, vice president of programs and services for the Braille Institute of America, said advocates for the blind are very concerned that people with vision problems will not be prepared for a disaster.

While some material has been produced in Braille or audio formats, "it's kind of a mixed bag," Jameson said. "It feels to me like it has largely been overlooked by everybody."

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