

April 2016

Jeff Campbell, Disaster Preparedness Coordinator

This article first appeared in the May 2013 newsletter. It is an important topic on accommodating special needs citizens and should be repeated. If you kept this article you may want to exchange it for this one. The links for Polk and Osceola Counties has changed since the first article was written.

As we head into storm season we are thinking about our emergency plans – where to go, who to contact, what to take, how long to expect to be gone. For many of us getting out of the way of a major storm is just a matter of packing our vehicle and leaving. There will be others who will wait too long, or who don't have the resources for an extended leave. These individuals can find refuge in a standard emergency shelter. There are still others who require an additional level of care to provide for medical or physical conditions; they basically have no way to escape the storm or will be able to survive on their own. If you know someone who may have a special need physically or medically, please consider reaching out to them or help them to register for a Special Needs Emergency Shelter in the county in which they reside. Each county has designated several shelters which are specifically staffed and equipped to helping individuals who would be at a disadvantage if they had to use a general emergency shelter. Registration is very important due to the county's need to adequately staff these shelters with qualified personnel and to have adequate resources available. **The major advantage to registering is that those individuals who have been identified by County Emergency Services will get a phone call in advance to see if they are coming to a shelter. These individuals will be guaranteed a spot in one of the designated special needs shelters. Those who don't register may have to be bused to another adjacent county if the special needs shelters are full.**

A special needs individual who would otherwise qualify for the county program but who does not get registered faces several problems. County resources aren't available to plan for more than they know to expect. As a result, equipment won't be available, there won't be enough medical personnel on site, limited space may require them to be sent to a hospital or assisted living facility or to a general shelter. In any case no one is turned away, although people may have to move or receive only limited assistance.

Each county's definition of Special Needs Individuals vary so listing them here would take several pages and could get quite confusing. I will be using info (shown in italics) mainly from Seminole County in this article as I live in Seminole County and have a close connection with Seminole County Emergency Management.

Special Needs Individuals are those with health or medical conditions who meet the program criteria or need transportation assistance during an evacuation. Those individuals meeting program criteria are provided sheltering and/or transportation assistance within the available resources of the respective county in which they live.

The Seminole County Special Needs Program is a voluntary program that should be considered by individuals who have NO alternative than a public shelter or need transportation to a shelter. The Office of Emergency Management recommends using this program only as a "last resort" and individuals with special needs should consider sheltering with relatives or friends prior to the use of a shelter.

An individual meets the medical criteria for assignment to the (Seminole County) Special Needs Emergency Shelter if:

- *They require assistance with ostomy and indwelling catheter management.*
- *Activities of daily living are so restricted by immobility.*
- *They have a respiratory condition requiring special equipment such as monitors or oxygen.*
- *There may be other conditions which would render an individual eligible for special needs emergency sheltering. These will be considered by the review of a submitted registration form (available online), by the Office of Emergency Management and the Health Department.*

The special needs shelter is for those individuals who are not in a care facility, such as a hospital, nursing home, or congregate living facility. The Special Needs Emergency Shelter Program is for disabled citizens who are not part of a group facility and have no other alternative but to seek assistance from the county.

If other alternatives are not available, individuals electing to use a Special Needs shelter, or any public shelter,

should bring cots, bedding, medicine and medical supplies and food supplies for each person to be self-sufficient for at least 72 hours.

If you know of someone who may qualify as a Special Needs Individual, please review the information at the county Emergency Management web site for your county listed below. The East Central District covers several counties, each with specific criteria for qualifying as a special needs individual. The following links will take you to the Special Needs Page of the respective County Emergency Management web site. From there links will guide you to more detailed and specific information for your specific county.

Brevard County: <http://web.brevardcounty.us/SpecialNeeds/Registration.aspx>

Orange County: <http://www.ocfl.net/EmergencySafety/EmergencyMedicalServices.aspx>

Osceola County: <http://www.osceola.org/agencies-departments/emergency-management/shelters/special-needs-program.stml>

Polk County: <http://www.polk-county.net/boccsite/County-Services/Special-Needs/>

Seminole County: http://prepareseminole.org/prepare/special_needs.asp

Volusia County: <http://www.volusia.org/services/public-protection/emergency-management/before-a-disaster/special-needs.stml>