



Disaster

RESOURCES

S-28

Is Your Agency Ready to Reach Out to the Hispanic Population?

Many agencies were completely unprepared for the devastation of Hurricane Floyd in 1999. Fortunately, some organizations were able to react quickly and provide services to Hispanics, many of whom did not qualify for government assistance.

El Pueblo, a local Latino organization, raised funds to help Latino communities in eastern North Carolina. By January 2000, they had collected more than \$86,000 from private individuals, established funds, and other Hispanic organizations in the state. These donations were sent to agencies that worked directly with families affected by the hurricane. The funds were then distributed by these agencies to the community to help cover expenses related to rent, utilities, lost wages, auto repairs, down payments on new housing, and travel for farmworkers who wanted to return home or needed to move on to their next work site.

The Office of the Governor, the NC Department of Health and Human Services, and El Pueblo organized town meetings in various places around North Carolina immediately following the disaster, bringing Spanish-speaking representatives from FEMA, the Red

Cross, and local offices of public health. They also brought truckloads of supplies to some of those meetings.

The Snow Hill Medical Center of Greene County turned a vacant office into a supply distribution center and distributed cleaning products, medical supplies, clothing, and food. Center staff also solicited donations and searched for farmworkers trapped in camps. Many other organizations throughout the state collected and distributed food, money, and hygiene products to storm victims.

What Can You Do?

Create an emergency plan for your agency:

- Keep an updated list of all employee phone numbers to keep them well informed.
- Decide who will record an answering machine message if the office will be closed.
- Designate a bilingual person (if one is available) who will serve as a contact person for the agency.
- Maintain a current list of disaster assistance services that details legal status requirements and eligibility.

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Offer cultural training sessions so your employees can be sensitive to the needs of ALL persons affected by a disaster.

Inform clients about the importance of learning their address, telephone number (if they have one), name of their supervisor, and name of the company for which they work.

Each county (and some cities) has its own Emergency Plan. Insufficient services for Hispanics in

the past, such as the lack of interpreters in shelters and public service announcements in Spanish, can be traced to the lack of services for Hispanics in the community's Plan. To have these services during a future disaster, *they have to be written in the Plan*. Find out who in your county or city is responsible for the Emergency Plan, and ask that these services be included.

