

May 2016, Updates to the Disaster Plan

Most of the original disaster plan remains accurate. DHR Central and the LDSS offices maintain COOP plans. The Office of Emergency Operations (OEO) remains the lead for the Department's emergency response efforts, including continuity planning (COOP), individual and mass repatriation, and twenty-four hour emergency response as required by the State Emergency Operations Plan. Emergency Preparedness and Shelter Operations trainings are still mandatory for all DHR employees and contractors. There is a high percentage of compliance, and most DHR workers have completed the trainings. OEO has increased training opportunities, and now have trainings in all of the following emergency response areas: Emergency Preparedness, Shelter Operations, Shelter Manager Training, Disaster Behavioral Mental Health, Community Emergency Relief Tracking System Training, Building an Emergency Financial First Aid Kit, Individuals & Households Program and Other Needs Assistance Training, Disaster Casework, Residential Damage Assessment, Continuity of Operations, Emergency Operations Center/Resource Request Response and Service Center Training. Some trainings are available to all DHR employees on the DHR Intranet. OEO continues to maintain The Community Emergency Relief Tracking System (CERTS) database, and regularly updates its capabilities.

DHR remains the State lead under the Maryland Emergency Preparedness Program (MEPP) for Emergency Support Function #6 – Mass Care and Emergency Assistance (ESF #6). MEMA recently formalized its Disaster Recovery Plan, and formally designated DHR as the lead for Disaster Social Services Recovery. DHR was already actively involved in the leadership for Disaster Social Services Recovery through its participation during FEMA Individual Assistance Declarations, Supplemental Social Services Block Grants, and its participation in Voluntary Agencies Active In Disaster (VOAD) groups. The formal designation as State lead for Disaster Social Services Recovery will not significantly change DHR's roles in disaster recovery operations.

DHR has significantly increased its capabilities for 'People Tracking' and evacuation reunification. OEO developed a user-friendly database using the 'HC Standard' vendor. The database is used in conjunction with a call center. The database assists with tracking and reuniting people during disasters and emergencies. When the call center is open, representatives from the American Red Cross, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the Maryland Department of Education are invited to send representation, or to support virtually.

Disasters or Emergency Response Activations Since the Last Reporting Period

There were two activations of the State Emergency Response Plan which were relevant to this report: The Pope's visit to the United States, and the January 2016 Blizzard.

Papal Visit, 2015

Pope Francis visited the United States in September of 2015. Although he did not stop in Maryland, he visited Washington, DC and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. If an emergency had occurred during his visit, Maryland would have been impacted due to its geography. Therefore, Maryland prepared certain mass care and people tracking capabilities to prepare for a potential evacuation. OEO workers deployed to Pennsylvania and seamlessly collaborated reunification capabilities with the state of Pennsylvania and The American Red Cross. DHR's HC Standard product was successfully used.

January 2016 Blizzard

The DHR Office of Emergency Operations (OEO), under the Division of Administrative Operations (DAO), activated disaster resources beginning January 21, 2016 through January 29, 2016 in response to blizzard conditions impacting Maryland. Under the MEOO as the state lead for Emergency Support Function #6 (ESF #6), OEO coordinated DAO resources in the following areas: shelter operations, the human services hotline, logistics/supply distribution, ESF #6 coordination through representation at the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC), as well as finance, administrative and DHR-internal coordination operations.

Two state shelters were opened in response to the blizzard. OEO's Operations Lead coordinated facilities, shelter staffing and staff transportation, feeding operations, appropriate supply provision and delivery, and casework services for shelter residents as necessary. Approximately 50 staff members, consisting of DHR Central and Baltimore City Local Department of Social Services (BCLDSS) employees, staffed the two shelter sites during the activation. Most of the shelter residents were stranded in place due to the snow, and there were a total of 41 overnight stays recorded between the two shelters. One of the shelters housed three unaccompanied teen-aged males who became stranded while trying to assist with shoveling snow. DHR immediately contacted their parents, and a care plan was prepared to keep the minors safely at the shelter until the roads were in appropriate condition to get the minors homes. Many of the shelter residents were part of the chronically homeless population, and staff provided appropriate casework services with support from the DHR Bureau of Homeless Services.

DHR and BCLDSS coordinated services with partner agencies to support the sheltering operations. The American Red Cross provided feeding and shelter supplies to shelter residents. The Maryland Department of Agriculture provided staff and supplies for pet sheltering, although no pets arrived at either shelter. The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) provided health and mental health services at each site. The Salvation Army and Baptist Convention of Maryland remained on standby for additional support, but ultimately their assistance was not necessary.

Several local jurisdictions also opened shelters during this event. Queen Anne's County LDSS opened a shelter from January 22nd to January 24th. Montgomery County LDSS supported the evacuation of condominiums from January 23rd to January 27th, housing approximately 70 people until residents could return to their units. Baltimore County opened "freezing weather" shelters to support homeless residents and others stranded by the storm. Baltimore City opened "code blue" shelters to support the local homeless population.

At the request of the DHR Secretary, Sam Malhotra, the OEO call center and hotline were opened the afternoon of January 22nd for inquiries related to DHR services, emergency sheltering information, and other human service needs during the storm. Public information for the hotline was led by the DHR Communications Director, who coordinated with MEMA's Public Information Officer to ensure consistent event-related messaging statewide. The call center was managed by OEO, and approximately 13 DHR Central employees were tasked as hotline operators. A total of 235 calls were received over the operational period. The callers were requesting a variety of assistance, including feeding resources and transportation to critical doctor appointments. Resources for the calls were coordinated by call center management with local jurisdictions, State partners and through the state EOC. The call center was also available to assist DHR licensed facilities with any assistance they needed to continue services for the vulnerable populations that they serve. The call center ceased operations on January 29th when the State of Emergency declaration was rescinded by Governor Hogan. Additional agencies that participated in supporting callers included local jurisdiction representatives (local EOCs and LDSS offices), the 211 system, the American Red Cross, and the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives.

OEO logistics staff successfully executed over 100 missions to move staff members to and from the two shelters and call center at DHR Central. Staff also transported DHMH support to and from the state shelters.