![Cal OES — Governor's Office of Emergency Services logo]

The Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Minute

May 20, 2024

Message from the Chief

L. Vance Taylor being interviewed during a shelter visit

All,

As we enter fire season, we must do everything possible to ensure the health, safety, security, and independence of the community. In many instances, that will mean being proactive about ensuring the physical and programmatic accessibility of emergency shelters.

Evacuating to an emergency shelter can be daunting for anyone. This is particularly true for individuals with access and functional considerations who may worry that, unlike their homes, emergency shelters may not be established in a manner that meets their accessibility needs.

To build trust and confidence among the whole community, it is essential to communicate that California's emergency shelters are designed with inclusivity in mind and established to address the diverse access and functional needs of everyone.

The sections below outline some of the methods and processes being utilized to maintain inclusive sheltering operations that uphold the trust, independence, and dignity of all survivors.

Thank you for the work you do in this area and for promoting this information broadly.

-Vance

L. Vance Taylor
Chief, Office of Access and Functional Needs
California Governor's Office of Emergency Services

Shelter Assessments

L. Vance Taylor at a shelter with American Red Cross volunteers

As part of the shelter selection process, potential locations are assessed for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). While many locations are modern and built to meet or exceed ADA compliance, some buildings are older and present accessibility challenges.

When gaps are identified during the ADA assessment process, modifications and resources are made or brought in to bring the location within compliance and to address accessibility needs.

As a best practice, community-based organizations and partners are integrated throughout the assessment process. This approach is reflective of California's commitment to inclusive emergency management and to providing equitable and accessible sheltering operations for all survivors.

For more information on ADA compliance at emergency shelters, please see the ADA Checklist for Emergency Shelters.

Utilizing Accessible Resources

Portable accessible showers at a shelter

It is not enough for individuals to merely be able to physically access emergency shelters. Shelters must also operate in a form and fashion that creates a programmatically accessible environment. Achieving that level of integration often requires locations to bring in additional accessible resources.
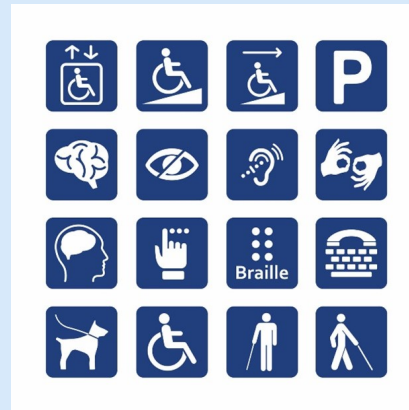
Some of the most utilized accessible resources at general population shelters in California are:

- Portable accessible showers
- Accessible portable bathrooms
- Accessible handwashing stations
- Durable medical supplies (e.g. canes, walkers, wheelchairs)
- Accessible and bariatric cots
- Support with reading, feeding, and toileting
- Accessible transportation services

The implementation of these resources creates a welcoming and inclusive environment that upholds the principles of dignity, respect, and equity for all.

The OAFN AFN Web Map is a valuable tool for helping emergency managers locate accessible sheltering resources.

Accessible Communication in Shelters

Pictogram of 16 signs that indicate different types of accessibility

Accessible communication is critical for ensuring the safety of all individuals. Without accessible communication, entire swaths of the community are left without the life-saving information needed to plan, prepare, respond, and recover from disasters.

Emergency messaging is a vital part of inclusive sheltering operations. To empower the whole community to access shelter resources and remain aware of disaster-related happenings, shelters should integrate a variety of communication aids, such as:

- In-person or virtual ASL interpreting services
- In-person or telephonic language translation services
- Signage in multiple languages and formats
- Large print materials

These communication aids make messaging accessible and useful for everyone, regardless of their sensory or language needs.

Highlighting shelter accessibility through various communication channels, such as press conferences, news broadcasts, and press releases, is important. This approach helps individuals with diverse needs understand their communication considerations will be met at emergency shelters.

The "Show Me for Emergencies" communication board is a free tool designed to help share information during emergencies.

The Functional Assessment Service Team (FAST)

A blue vest that says Functional Assessment Service Team

Functional Assessment Service Teams (FAST) play an important role in the support of individuals with access and functional needs at general population shelters. Deployed upon the request of an impacted jurisdiction, FAST members work as part of a collaborative team that includes government employees, community-based organizations, and non-governmental organizations.

FAST teams assist to enhance the accessibility and functionality of shelter environments. The program, which is run through the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), is available statewide.

For more detailed information visit the CDSS FAST webpage.

Check out the FEMA Guidance on Planning for Personal Assistance Services for local, state, and tribal governments. This resource has information on providing personal assistance to children and adults in emergency shelters.

Guidance on Planning for Personal Assistance Services in General Population Shelters

FEMA