

Disaster Plans

a) Identify, locate and continue availability of services for children under state care or supervision who are displaced or adversely affected by a disaster.

The CD is working with field staff in the area of emergency management to develop comprehensive plans. While the foundations of the plan are likely to be the same, we believe it is important to allow for each office, county and/or area to tailor the plan to their specific needs and resources.

When putting together an emergency plan, staff have been instructed to identify what the possible hazards might be, to identify resources available and to work to fill any gaps between the potential hazard and the resources. Potential emergencies and resources will both vary greatly from one area of the state to another. Areas are beginning to submit their plans to Central Office.

In addition, the CD is actively working with the State Emergency Management Agency on emergency management issues. One staff person from the division has been selected to represent the Department of Social Services on the State Emergency Operations Center floor when an emergency occurs.

In addition, this staff person serves as a trainer for SEMA in the areas of emergency preparedness for special needs populations (which includes children and, in particular, foster children and children displaced from their parents in an emergency). The division is encouraging employees from all areas of the state to participate in this training. The training is an excellent source of information about services and resources available for displaced families and children.

b) Respond to new child welfare cases in areas adversely affected by a disaster and provide services to those cases.

The Department of Social Services is responsible for mass care efforts under Missouri's state plan. The responsibility falls on the employees of the department's FSD, with support from the other divisions, including the CD. The FSD staff members are part of their local emergency management teams which coordinate a community's emergency management efforts. These teams are responsible for all local response and assistance to the families of their communities, including foster families and other families involved with the CD.

In addition to these efforts, in recent disasters, CD workers have assured the needs of their families are met by contacting each family individually following a disaster, often by phone but sometimes in person when phone service is not available. Foster families have also been given an emergency number they can call if they need assistance.

c) Remain in communication with caseworkers and other essential child welfare personnel displaced because a disaster.

In an emergency, the division maintains its regular on-call procedures (already established for night and weekend work) to assure there is no interruption in services to families in need. These on-call workers would also respond, with law enforcement or other responders, to incidents where children are displaced from parents by the disaster.

Communication is critical in an emergency. Whenever possible, staff will use cellular phones to stay in communication. If that avenue is unavailable, staff will “pony express” messages, carrying them from person to person until an operable communication method is found. Local emergency management staff will use ham radio operators to communicate, when necessary, and this would be available to CD workers in emergency situations.

d) Preserve essential program records, coordinate services, share information with other states.

Electronic program records are located in the central data system which is housed in Jefferson City and backed up by the state’s Information Technology Services Division in other locations around the state for accessibility in emergency situations.