

Acknowledgement

This emergency preparedness resource for seniors was created by Susan Gilbert in partial fulfillment of a Masters of Arts degree in Disaster and Emergency Management, Royal Roads University, under the auspices and support of York Region Emergency Management.

December 2008

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A. About this Tool Kit

Seniors to Go! is an all-inclusive resource kit for seniors and their community groups and support agencies. The purpose of this tool kit is to offer seniors¹ who live at home in the community, information and step-by-step action plans to help them prepare for emergencies and disasters. Content is based upon disaster research, best practices, and lessons learned from previous emergencies. The format is based upon best practices as outlined in Health Canada's *Communicating with Seniors*².

Seniors to Go! has been designed as a stand-alone resource, one that can be used by interested community groups without any assistance from an emergency management specialist. The intent of the tool kit is to enable seniors groups and their support agencies to access relevant emergency preparedness information so that they can work together to prepare for emergencies.

¹ For the purposes of this Tool Kit, “seniors” will refer to those individuals aged 65 and over

² Health Canada. (1999). *Communicating with Seniors: Advice, Techniques and Tips*. Available at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/seniors-aines>

Seniors to Go! Tool Kit Contents

i. Background Information – This section is intended for facilitators. It is recommended that facilitators read this section as a first step to using this tool kit. The Background Information section provides:

- a)** A summary of key research about seniors and emergencies;
- b)** An overview of disaster public education best practices;
- c)** Strategic messages for seniors about preparing for emergencies, and
- d)** A selection of web and print resources about seniors and emergencies.

ii. Emergency Preparedness Presentation – A CD PowerPoint presentation is located in the front pocket of this binder. Suggested speaking notes are provided as a separate attachment. The presentation will take approximately 30 minutes, but may take longer depending on the number of questions the audience asks.

iii. Seniors' Emergency Preparedness Checklists –

Two checklists have been developed for your use: *Prepare to Shelter in Place Checklist*, and *Prepare to Evacuate Checklist*. These companion checklists are designed for seniors to take home to use as reminders of the recommended supplies and to check off each item as they assemble their 72 hour shelter in place supplies and Go bags. These lists summarize the information provided in the PowerPoint presentation.

iv. Life Skills, Experiences & Challenges Inventory -

The purpose of this inventory is to provide seniors with an opportunity to reflect on their personal skills, experiences and challenges. With a life time of experiences and skill development, seniors can contribute a great deal to the community during times of disaster. The inventory also provides an opportunity for seniors to take stock of potential personal challenges they may face in an emergency so that they may develop strategies to lessen the impact of these challenges in an emergency. The inventory may be used as a springboard for small group discussion so that seniors can help each other form strategies to help themselves during emergencies.

v. Evaluations – Two evaluations are included in Guide:

- a) “How to Prepare for Emergencies: Important Information for Seniors” Evaluation – This evaluation form is included in the tool kit so that community groups/agencies/municipalities have a mechanism to receive feedback from seniors about the usefulness of the *Seniors to Go!* presentation and other tool kit components. This will help your agency/community group assess seniors’ reactions to the presentation and handouts.

- b) “Seniors to Go! Tool Kit” Evaluation – This evaluation form is included so that groups, municipalities, and agencies that use the tool kit have a mechanism to provide feedback to York Region Emergency Management regarding the usefulness of the tool kit. York Region Emergency Management would welcome your comments and suggestions about how we can improve our efforts to help York Region seniors prepare for emergencies.

Suggested Presentation Format & Timelines

Agenda Item	Suggested Timelines
Welcome and Introductions	3 min.
Overview of Today's Presentation	2 min.
"How to Prepare for Emergencies" presentation	30-40 min.
Skills, Experiences & Challenges Inventory (small group activity)	10 min.
Distribute Handouts (Checklists, Evaluations)	2 min.
Ask group to complete "How to Prepare for Emergencies" evaluation	5 min.
Meeting adjourned	TOTAL time required = approximately 1 hour

B. Background Information

We are Key Partners

Seniors have substantial strengths and resiliency to draw upon in times of emergencies and disaster. With decades of life experience, we have developed a capacity to “keep on keeping on”. Our cohort has lived through the Great Depression, two world wars, the threat of nuclear annihilation, as well as having endured a life time of natural, human-caused and technological disasters as well as personal emergencies and disruptions. We are survivors.

We can be key partners in all phases of emergency management. With our firsthand experience surviving past disasters, seniors are a valuable resource to communities. Seniors can be counted on to volunteer when extra help is needed. According to the Government of Canada (2002), seniors contribute 44% more time to volunteer activities than volunteers aged 25 to 44. By being better prepared ourselves, we can help our community prepare for emergencies, and help those directly impacted by an emergency or disaster.

Psychological Resiliency

Research has shown that senior disaster survivors are more psychologically resilient than younger adults, specifically in the aftermath of earthquakes (Knight, Gatz, Heller &

Bengtson, 2000). The American Psychological Association's Task Force on Resilience in Response to Terrorism (Zeiss, Cook & Cantor, no date) states that contributing factors for seniors' resiliency include the ability to use good cognitive strategies to manage negative emotions, the ability to stay focused on positive things we can do, and the ability to actively compare current stressors to things we have experienced and coped with successfully in past.

Challenges Associated with Aging

Age brings resiliency, effective coping strategies, and a lifetime of experience. Age also brings increased likelihood of various physical challenges. The U.S. Administration on Aging (no date) has summarized special concerns of older adults. The following selected challenges, drawn from this report, have particular relevance to emergencies and disasters and have been put into a Canadian context when possible.

1. Disability

With age, a person's likelihood of becoming disabled increases. According to *Canada's Aging Population* report (Government of Canada, 2002) 21% of Canadian seniors aged 65 to 74 have a disability and 28% of seniors aged 75 to 85 have a disability. By age 85 and older, 45% of us are disabled.

2. Sensory Function

Sensory function declines with age (Nusbaum, 1999). A senior's diminished sense of smell, taste, touch, sight and/or hearing could compromise our safety in an emergency. For example, instructions given in a noisy, chaotic disaster environment may be difficult to hear.

3. Chronic Illness

Chronic illness is a reality for 4 out of 5 Canadian seniors living at home (Government of Canada, 2002).

Arthritis/rheumatism, high blood pressure, allergies, back problems, heart disease, cataracts, and diabetes are the most common forms of chronic illnesses reported. These conditions can impact a senior's ability to flee from a disaster and/or access relief and disaster services.

4. Vulnerability to Hyper/Hypothermia

Seniors are at greater risk of hyperthermia and hypothermia (U.S. Government, no date). The risk of hyper/hypothermia can create a life or death situation for seniors in an emergency situation that features extreme heat or extreme cold, especially one that includes extended power outages.

5. Mobility

More than 23% of Canadians aged 65 to 74 report having mobility problems, and the rate increases to over 42% of Canadians aged 75 and older (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Furthermore, senior females are more likely to have difficulty getting around than senior males.

Generally speaking, older adults with mobility challenges find it difficult to access centralized disaster relief and service delivery points because of poor mobility (HelpAge International, no date). Seniors with mobility challenges may also face significant difficulties in evacuations.

6. Cognitive Challenges

Four point three percent of Canadian seniors report being limited by memory problems or periods of confusion (Public Health Agency of Canada, no date). Alzheimer's disease, a form of dementia, affects one out of 20 Canadians over the age of 65 and the number increases to 1 in 4 over age 85 (Diamond, 2005). Seniors with cognitive impairment will require extra assistance in all phases of emergencies, including preparedness activities.

Disaster Public Education: Best Practices

What is Disaster Public Education?

Disaster public education is “communicating general information to the public independent of the occurrence of any one specific hazardous event” (Mileti, Nathe, Gori, Greene & Lemersal, 2004). Public education is ongoing, long-term and strategic, and includes public awareness, education, and outreach activities (Emergency Management Accreditation Program, 2005). Communities engage in disaster public education to increase resiliency of their residents and to prevent or reduce the negative impacts of emergencies and disasters.

Research and Best Practices

What are the best ways to communicate disaster preparedness strategies? Disaster public education best practices are summarized by disaster researcher, Denise Mileti (2004), as follows:

- Be clear – use non-technical terms; support simple language with great graphics
- Use a variety of credible sources – include authorities, experts and scientists.
- Be consistent and use repetition – same message, repeated using different media and varied networks.

- Use diverse media – include TV, radio, and make sure to have written materials so that people can refer to the documents later.
- Be specific – tell people exactly what to do, before, during an after an emergency
- Be supportive in people’s search for more information – it is important to note that discussions with peers help people to believe information and act on it (Nathe, 2000)
- Position additional information – people will search out additional information to validate what has been said, so ensure further information is available and tell people where they can find it.

Other research by Mileti demonstrates that active participation is an essential part of successful disaster public education (Mileti & Sorensen, 1990). People generally are more inclined to adopt preparedness activities if they work out a solution together with others, with the help of information from specialists. This finding was noted by other researchers (Turner, Nigg & Paz, 1986) who determined that the active involvement of individuals in the discussion of disaster issues, through social ties in their communities, overcomes passivity. **These researchers concluded that individual and group interest, involvement and discussion increased the likelihood of people taking**

preparedness actions. *Seniors to Go!* is designed to do just that. The tool kit's purpose is to engage seniors in thinking about and discussing ways to reduce negative impacts that specifically face their age group in emergencies and disasters.

Key Emergency Preparedness Messages for Seniors – Best Practices

1. **Risks and hazards.** Understanding the particular risks for the area of residence is foundational to emergency preparedness information. Mileti & Peek (2002) state that “when clearly informed about risk, people can comprehend the basics and remember (what to do)...” Seniors living in York Region need to know the risks and hazards particular to York Region.

2. **Personal responsibility.** Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of repeated official statements regarding the need to be prepared for 72 hour self-sufficiency and this repeated message has resulted in increasing the public's sense of responsibility for their own protection (Lindell & Perry, 2004). If people believe that others (e.g., local government) will look after their safety, they are less likely to convert their intentions to preparedness actions (Ballentyne, Paton, Johnston, Kozuch & Daly, 2000). However, we know

from past emergencies, that emergency responders are not always able to immediately reach everyone who requires assistance during and after a disaster. Therefore, it is imperative that everyone, including seniors, be prepared to look after their own needs for at least 72 hours following an emergency, and this requires advance planning and preparations.

3. **Seniors are at increased risk** in emergencies because of age-related issues such as mobility challenges, chronic illnesses and sensory decline. This kit outlines steps that seniors can take to mitigate some of these issues.

4. **Social networks such as neighbours, friends, family, and community groups are vital to a senior's safety and well-being in emergencies.** Past emergencies and disasters have demonstrated that isolation can put seniors in great danger.

5. **Seniors need to keep an up-to-date list of their medications and keep medications on hand.** During emergencies, it may be difficult to get prescriptions renewed, and if medications essential to a

senior's health are not available, chronic conditions can deteriorate rapidly.

6. **Seniors with pets need to plan ahead.** Pets have special needs in emergencies and owners need to prepare by assembling a pet emergency kit. Because pets, other than service animals, are not allowed in public reception centres or in some hotels, seniors need to pre-arrange where their pets can stay during emergencies.

Helping Seniors Plan for Emergencies – Selected Web Resources

1. Older People in Disasters & Humanitarian Crisis: Guidelines for Best Practice (HelpAge International)
http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/HelpAge_olderpeople.pdf

2. Department of Elder Affairs, State of Florida, Disaster Preparedness
<http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us/english/disaster.html>

3. *We Can Do Better: Lessons Learned for Protecting Older Persons in Disasters* (American Association for Retired Persons)

http://add-em-conf.com/confdocs/AARP_full_report-doing_better-seniors_and_disasters_2006.pdf

4. *Older Adults and Disaster: Assets and Challenges*, L. Patton.

http://add-em-conf.com/confdocs/AARP_full_report-doing_better-seniors_and_disasters_2006.pdf

5. *Seniors During Emergencies and Disasters: Vulnerable yet Resilient* (Public Health Agency of Canada)

http://www.canadian-health-network.ca/servlet/ContentServer?cid=1148760159490&page_name=CHN-RCS/CHNResource/CHNResourcePageTemplate&c=CHNResource

6. *Disaster Preparedness for Seniors by Seniors* (American Red Cross)

<http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/beprepared/seniors.html>

Selected Print Resources

1. **York Region Emergency Preparedness Guide.**
Available at www.york.ca or by calling 1-877-464-9675.
2. **Your Emergency Preparedness Guide (Public Safety Canada).** Available at www.getprepared.ca or by calling
1-800-622-6232.
3. **Emergency Preparedness Guide for People with Disabilities/Special Needs (Emergency Management Ontario).** Available at
www.ontario.ca/emo or by calling
1-877-314-3723.

C. About the Emergency Preparedness Presentation

The “How to Prepare for Emergencies: Important Information for Seniors” PowerPoint presentation on CD is located in the front pocket of this Facilitator’s Guide. Speaking Notes are also provided (attached separately).

D. About the Seniors' Emergency Preparedness Checklists

The two checklists provided in this Tool Kit (attached separately) are designed as handouts for seniors to take home so that they can create a Go Bag and prepare to shelter in place.

E. About the Life Skills, Experiences and Challenges Inventory

Activity Idea

After the “How to Prepare for Emergencies” presentation, divide participants into discussion groups of 4 or 5 and ask participants to complete the Inventory (attached separately) and then discuss their ideas and strategies.

Allow 10 - 12 minutes for groups to discuss individual inventories and talk about their skills, experiences and challenges. Then ask each group to share the skills and experiences discussed in their group, and offer ideas on how to deal with challenges in emergencies.

F. Evaluations

1. **How to Prepare for Emergencies: Important Information for Seniors Evaluation** (this evaluation is designed for seniors who have participated in the presentation; feedback is for the facilitator and the seniors group to assess the success of the presentation with their membership)

2. **Seniors to Go! Tool Kit Evaluation** (for community groups to complete after they have used the Tool Kit with their senior members/clients; please send your completed evaluation to York Region Emergency Management – see Evaluation for contact information)

How to Prepare for Emergencies: Important Information for Seniors

EVALUATION

We would appreciate your suggestions and comments. Please take a moment to answer the following questions. Any additional comments and/or suggestions are very welcome – please use the back of this form if needed.

A. Presentation

1. Did you find the presentation helpful? Why or why not?

2. Was the content clearly presented?

3. Was the presentation easy to follow?

4. Was the presentation well-tailored to the interests, needs and concerns of seniors?

5. Was the presentation too long? Too short?

6. What did you like best about today's presentation?

7. How can we improve this presentation?

B. Seniors' Emergency Preparedness Checklists

(handout)

1. Is this handout useful? Why or why not?

2. Do you plan on using these checklists to prepare for emergencies?

3. What do you like best about these checklists?

4. How can we improve on the Seniors' Checklists handout?

C. Life Skills, Experiences and Challenges Inventory

(handout)

1. Is this handout useful? Why or why not?

2. Did this Inventory help you to identify skills and experiences that you could use to help your community prepare for or recover from emergencies?

3. Did this Inventory help you to identify some of the specific challenges you could encounter in an emergency?

4. What do you like best about the Inventory?

5. How can we improve the Inventory?

Thank you very much!



Emergency Management

Seniors to Go! Tool Kit

EVALUATION

York Region Emergency Management would appreciate your agency's suggestions and comments about this resource. Please take a moment to answer the following questions. Any additional comments and/or suggestions are welcome.

NAME of YOUR Agency/Group/Municipality

ADDRESS: _____

YOUR NAME: _____

PHONE NUMBER: _____

EMAIL: _____

DATE(S) KIT WAS USED: _____

A. “How to Prepare for Emergencies: Important Information for Seniors” Presentation

1. How many times did you use the presentation?

2. How many seniors viewed this presentation?

3. Was the content well-tailored to the needs, interests and concerns of seniors?

4. Was the presentation too long or too short?

5. What other feedback did you receive about the presentation?

6. Were the facilitator notes easy to follow?

7. How can we improve the presentation?

B. Seniors’ Emergency Preparedness Checklists (handout)

1. What feedback did you receive from seniors about these Checklists?

2. In your opinion, will these Checklists assist seniors in their emergency preparedness efforts?

3. How can we improve the Checklists?

**C. Life Skills, Experiences and Challenges Inventory
(handout)**

1. What feedback did you receive from seniors about this Inventory?

2. In your opinion, will this Inventory help seniors better understand their capacities and personal challenges in emergencies and formulate a plan to address these challenges?

3. How can we improve the Inventory?

Do you have any other comments?

Thank you!

Please send your completed evaluation to
York Region Emergency Management:

BY FAX: 905-895-4602

BY EMAIL: emergency.management@york.ca

BY MAIL: York Region Emergency Management
17250 Yonge Street, 4th Floor
Newmarket, ON
L3Y 6Z1

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