

EMERGENCY SHELTERS

In 2011, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) unveiled their “Whole Community” philosophical approach to emergency management. This philosophy stressed the importance of involving all sectors of government, non-profits, individual residents, faith-based organizations, and many others, in our planning processes. The other piece of this philosophy is the notion that we have a shared responsibility in planning to meet the needs of all populations we serve within Alachua County. For Alachua County Emergency Management (ACEM) and the Alachua County Emergency Operations Team (EOT), this planning has always included individuals who have access and/or functional needs.

One of the most visible operations the County runs before, during, and after a hurricane is sheltering our most vulnerable residents. General population shelters are coordinated by Alachua County Community Support Services, and the shelters are staffed by County employees from a variety of different departments. These shelters are designed to keep individuals safe from hurricane-force winds. Within the shelters, County staff takes the time to account for access and functional needs by making sure walkways and shelter spaces are accessible, and by communicating vital information to the shelter population through various means.

The Florida Department of Health (DOH) in Alachua County is responsible for the staffing and coordination of the County's Special Needs Shelters (SpNS). Special Needs Shelters are for individuals who have a medical need that exceeds the capabilities of a general population shelter. One of the primary reasons individuals seek refuge in SpNS is because of a dependence on electricity or oxygen. Power outages are common in hurricanes, which is why each of our Special Needs Shelters has a generator to provide power to vital medical equipment through any outages. The DOH also keeps a cache of medical supplies and bottled oxygen to maintain continuity of operations throughout the sheltering event.

Post-disaster, the County may facilitate the establishment of Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs), where the public can go to receive information on how to seek help and apply for assistance. The services offered at DRCs are designed to meet the needs of our whole community. Staff is available to aid residents in applying for FEMA Individual Assistance, and to link up survivors with mental health and other supportive services. Post disaster goals are to assist both the citizen and the community in restoring them to pre disaster wholeness.