

Newspaper Column January 8, 2014

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There comes a time in our lives when we need help. We all do. If you haven't already, you will. That's just a fact of life. Sometimes we are quite young when we experience an injury that takes us off the basketball court, out of the starting lineup for football, or delays our drivers' education class. We may be a little older when a pregnancy takes a turn and we are forced to have a C-section delivery and are unable to drive ourselves as we may have been accustomed to. Or maybe we are still a little older and an illness knocks us back – possibly so severe that we don't retain the cognitive ability needed to drive ourselves again. For whatever reason – physical or economical – we may find ourselves without access to our own transportation.

Many of us take our vehicles for granted. On cold days, like we have been experiencing, we hit our "auto-start" and "seat warmers" while we're still sipping coffee in the kitchen. We expect that hunk of metal – or fiberglass – to transport us whenever and wherever we wish; but, this is something that we should be grateful for and not take for granted.

Transportation is something that emergency managers must plan for each day. We must consider transportation for responders, ourselves, government officials, and the entire public on a day-to-day basis and in times of emergencies of all sorts. One resource that is available to the public is the STEAR. That is short for State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry, and is a collection system for individuals to register for assistance during times of disaster. Please note that registering does not guarantee that you will receive a specific service during an emergency; but registering allows local emergency management officials knowledge of your needs and helps us to prioritize/customize responses as needed. We can't help, if we don't know what is needed.

So, who should register? People with disabilities or access and functional needs, such as people who have limited mobility, people who have communication barriers, people who require additional medical assistance during an emergency event, people who require personal care assistance, and people who require transportation assistance. Even if you or a loved one resides in a nursing home or an assisted living facility, STEAR has a registration site for the facility to register. You can check with personnel at your facility and urge them to register, too.

As of the end of 2012, we had 69 residents signed up on the old Texas Assistance Registry, which is no longer in use. Only three people have registered on the new STEAR system thus far. We know we've not reached our target audience. We will begin to call those 69 people who were registered in the old system so that we can get them registered in the new system.

How do you register – whether you were registered before, or not? Call 2-1-1 to contact 211 who will assist with your registration; complete a printed form at our local emergency management office; or simply go online and complete the form. <http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/stear/indivRegForm.pdf>. Registration is voluntary and completely confidential! You can call our office at 936-348-3810 and we will assist you in getting registered! Help us to help you and Be Safe Out There!!

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