

SECTION: ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

SUBJECT: Local Agency Requirements

ITEM: Emergency and Disaster Planning, and Coordination Requirements

Purpose

To ensure the provision of WIC services to participants during an emergency or disaster situation.

Policy

The local agency (LA) is required to develop an emergency and disaster plan and follow the procedure and coordination requirements as described in this policy.

Authority

Western Region Office (WRO) Policy Memo 800-H, March 2, 1995,
All States Memorandum (ASM) #05-39 email only

Definition

Emergency and/or Disaster Situation for purposes of this section, an emergency and/or disaster situation is an event that threatens to or has already interrupted the provision of WIC services to participants for more than 24 hours. Examples of these types of events include:

1. natural disasters or catastrophes such as floods, wildfires, or earthquakes,
2. criminally-induced emergencies such as shootings, bombings, bomb threats or arson, and
3. systemic emergencies such as electrical power failures, noxious gas leaks, and toxic waste leaks.

Background Information of the Food Assistance Programs' Role in Natural Disasters

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) food assistance programs, the Food Stamp Program, and the commodity programs are by federal law the primary food assistance resources to be used to meet the immediate needs of disaster victims. When a request is received by a State or an Indian Tribal Authority, the USDA's immediate food assistance will likely be to distribute food commodities, including infant formula, and to coordinate feeding sites provided by voluntary relief organizations (such as the Red Cross), or to households. If commercial food channels are still operable or have been restored, the Disaster Food Stamp Program may be put into operation by the USDA.

The WIC program is a supplemental food and nutrition program that serves specific categorically eligible persons with special nutritional needs. The WIC program was not designed or funded to meet the basic nutritional needs of disaster victims who would not otherwise be eligible for the program. Unlike the distribution of commodities or the emergency issuance of food stamps, there is no legislatively mandated role for the WIC program in direct disaster relief, nor is there legislative authority for using WIC funds for purposes other than providing allowable food benefits to categorically eligible participants. Finally, no additional WIC funds are designated by law for WIC disaster relief, and local agencies must operate in disaster situations within current program framework and funding.

Required Procedures

The LA agency plan shall include the following items.

- I. Contacting the State agency (SA) regional advisor during an emergency and/or disaster situation and providing the operational status in following areas:
 - A. The WIC services delivery that are disrupted;
 - B. damaged/destroyed program records;
 - C. damaged/destroyed WIC sites; and report;
 - D. the extent of time the local agency will be out of operation; and
 - E. plans to come back into operation.

- II. Plans to protect program records, to the extent possible:

- A. from possible damage or destruction from water, toxic waste, and fire; and
 - B. by backing them up manually or in a computer system in order to access program records and process contacts manually when on line certification system is down.
- III. Process in which applicants/ participants who are victims of an emergency or disaster shall be served ahead of other receiving WIC benefits and receive expedited certification processing.
- A. The LA shall make every effort to certify these individuals immediately or within 10 day of their request for WIC benefits
 - B. If an emergency/disaster victim moves in with another household, s/he and her/his family will be considered homeless and treated as a separate economic unit. The income documentation requirement may be self-declared with a written statement for a homeless woman or child for whom the income documentation requirement would present an unreasonable barrier to participation.
 - C. Each emergency/disaster victim shall be provided Verification of Certification (VOC) information to assure continuation of benefits should the individual relocate to another state. Please refer to WPM 250-10 for VOC issuance procedures.
 - D. Emergency/disaster victims are at nutritional risk since they are considered homeless. Therefore, the blood test for anemia may be deferred for up to 90 days. Measurement for height, length and weight shall be taken onsite at the initial visit. At the discretion of the WIC local agency director, and on a case-by-case basis, the 90-day timeframe for the anemia blood test and anthropometric measurement may be extended but the reason(s) for the extension must be documented in ISIS Family Comments.
 - E. Every effort shall be made to provide full needs assessment at the time the emergency and disaster victim seeks WIC benefits to ensure that they are referred to health and social services.

IV. Standard food packages

- A. A local agency shall offer the “homeless” package in the event of an emergency or disaster.
- B. A local agency shall continue to adhere to the food instrument (FI)

distribution requirements as outlined in WIC Program Manual Section 320-40.

- C. Any deviation from this requirement requires State Agency approval. In order to secure such approval, the local agency must make a case that the fulfillment of this requirement shall cause an extreme hardship on the part of the local agency and WIC participants/applicants.

V. Food delivery

- A. If commercial food channels are operational or partially operational under the emergency or disaster situation, the local agency shall continue to issue FIs to participants.
- B. The LA is encouraged to develop and update a list of open authorized food outlets.
- C. If commercial food channels are closed, the LA shall refer participants to alternative emergency food sources.

Coordination

A LA shall, to the extent necessary, coordinate its services with the Red Cross, other voluntary associations, and local government authorities. The coordination effort shall include but need not be limited to the sharing of information regarding each other's services, referrals between agencies, joint service delivery efforts, and sharing of service sites.