



Latest Spotlight: Emergency Evacuations and Transportation Mississippi County, Arkansas

Summary: Working on a new emergency response plan, officials in Mississippi County, Ark., were faced with the formidable task of providing for evacuation and emergency transportation needs in their rural county. Turning to members of their local community for help, they developed an innovative, cost-efficient and community-based solution.

Mississippi County is situated in the heart of the New Madrid seismic zone, a high hazard area for earthquakes. While county officials consider themselves prepared to respond to the typical hazards of an earthquake in a rural area, they knew rescue and recovery efforts could be hindered by the potential collapse of the hundreds of bridges that cross the many ditches that help keep the county, in the heart of the Mississippi delta, dry.

The county's Emergency Response Council tackled this problem with a novel approach. "We were looking for a way to utilize existing resources to help us reach people in a time of need," said David Lendennie, county director of emergency management. "Area farmers came to us and requested to be included in our county disaster network," he said. "They pointed out that farmers are dispersed throughout the county with heavy equipment that would be helpful in transportation and evacuation. A ditch could be easily navigated with their equipment." Council members, working with the local county extension office and Farm Bureau Federation, approached local farmers with a proposal to utilize them and their equipment for transportation and evacuation during an emergency. Eager to participate, the farmers developed a coordination structure and have undertaken a number of emergency responsibilities, including:

- Transportation of victims, supplies and responders to and from remote areas;
- Evacuation of individuals from disaster areas;
- Bridge building and logistical support.

Mississippi County's smart practice example highlights the importance of utilizing local resources in emergency preparedness operations. This cost-effective smart practice creates an opportunity for diverse groups in the community to become a part of an emergency preparedness framework.

Thinking Locally:

- What local resources in your community could be utilized in a disaster response?
- How can you bring local agencies on board?

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