Georgia Tech to investigate communications for people with disabilities at the time of emergencies

Researchers at the Center for Advanced Communications Policy (CACP) at the Georgia Institute of Technology have been awarded a grant from the National Council on Disability to conduct a study on effective communication for people with disabilities before, during, and after emergencies.

The legitimate concerns of people with disabilities and other special needs populations in emergency situations are frequently overlooked or minimized, notwithstanding that great urgency surrounds the need for responding to these people’s concerns in all planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation activities. The Georgia Tech research project will document successful practices as well as identify facilitators and barriers to providing effective emergency-related communication; examine the current state of affairs concerning the accessibility of emergency-related communication; review the enforcement of current disability laws and regulations as they pertain to effective communication before, during, and after emergencies; and collect information on the experiences and perceptions of people with disabilities as it relates to emergency-related communication.

In a previous report to the President the NCD commented that the number of federal projects being funded (to research the integration of people with disabilities in emergency situations) and the number of participating agencies remain at unacceptable low levels, despite the urgency of the problem. The new research will help close that gap.

“Examples of the communications challenges facing people with disabilities in emergency situations abound,” stated James D. White, Director of Communications Studies in the CACP and PI on the research project. “People with disabilities can face challenges in physical mobility and receipt of critical, lifesaving information. We will be building on the work of the CACP, which is actively involved with industry and government in an effort to create a policy framework for emergency communications systems, with a special focus on accessibility issues.”

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