The Coalition on Inclusive Emergency Planning (CIEP) has partnered with the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) under the Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (ALTSA) of the Washington State Department of Health and Human Services (DSHS) to launch a new ASL Emergency Alert video service that brings emergency notifications to a significant portion of Washington’s population that previously had no access to lifesaving information during disasters.
A second demonstration of the ASL Emergency Alert Video was unveiled at the Deaf Nation Expo October 14, 2023, at the Portland Expo Center. Many deaf attendees gave us a “thumbs up”. Our colleagues in CIEP and emergency management continue to provide excellent feedback, which will lead to a better product in the future.

It is estimated that the Evergreen State is home to 262,481 people or four out of ten residents with some degree of hearing loss according to DSHS using data compiled by the 2008 American Community Survey for Washington State. However, due to scant language data, it is difficult to determine how many people rely on American Sign Language (ASL). Nevertheless, this new ASL video alerting project that began in August brought timely benefits to deaf people who were impacted by and are recovering from wildfires that occurred in the Spokane area during August of 2023.

“The response to the ASL emergency alert response demonstration has been positive from leaders,” said Earnest Covington, III, director of the Office of the Deaf and Hard of
Hearing (ODHH). “I recognize the work that has been done to get this vital service started. We are happy that ODHH can serve our communities in breaking down communication barriers.”

“The purpose of the ASL Emergency Alerts which includes ASL, captioning and video description for DeafBlind residents of Washington state is to ensure that emergency alerts are accessible in a language that the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and deafblind community members can understand important information and resources so that they can protect themselves, help others and be safe in the event of an emergency or disaster”, says Steve Peck, TRS Program Manager for ODHH.

“It is our mission to promote choice, independence, and safety through innovative services and partnerships to ensure that people with disabilities can have dignity and control over decisions that affect their lives,” said Adam Summers, senior communications specialist at ALTSA. “This project helps ODHH support the needs of the communities ODHH serves.”

“The Coalition on Inclusive Emergency Planning (CIEP) is pleased to partner with ODHH on this vital project.” says, Jim House, CIEP Disability Integration Manager. House adds, “CIEP is a statewide advisory group with the Washington State Independent Living Council (WASILC). Access to life-saving information is a key element in surviving a disaster, whether it is a wildfire, a flood, an earthquake, or even something like a boil water alert. The videos fill a long-standing gap in communications before, during, and
after disasters while mitigating adverse impacts on the whole community as everyone has access to emergency news in a language they can understand and respond to accordingly.”

Access to communications is one of the cornerstones of the CMIST Access and Functional Needs matrix. The other cornerstones are Maintaining Health, Independence, Support, Self-Determination and Safety, and Transportation. CIEP’s services are like a three-legged stool where we look at Effective Communication, Programmatic Access, and Physical Access in everything we do. When one leg is missing, the whole stool collapses.

Since emergency information in a language that they can understand is often scarce, disasters impose a disproportionate impact on people with various communication disabilities. During the extreme heat dome event in June 2021, it was reported that two deaf people in Eastern Washington perished. Case workers have attributed these deaths to not having timely access to life-saving information because ASL was not used in emergency warnings, which impedes their understanding of timely medical attention. Because ASL is not a written language, it must be disseminated using video clips, thus requiring additional broadband to view streaming videos either on their computers or wireless devices. Fixed broadband (in the home) is not always available because of high monthly fees and in some rural areas there are no connections available.
In August 2023, the Oregon Road Fire and the Gray Fire burning simultaneously in Eastern Washington near Spokane provided us with an opportunity to test drive the system in an actual disaster. While the video was well received by the community, CIEP and ODHH realize that standard operating procedures for this service needs to be streamlined further so more people can receive these timely warnings.

Other agencies such as the Washington State Department of Commerce is responding based on recent findings of inequitable access to the internet that came to light during the COVID-19 pandemic. CIEP has replied to comments, highlighting the ODHH ASL Emergency Alerts, in a proceeding at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to determine the feasibility of adding links to ASL videos that would make future Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) more accessible. In other proceedings, the FCC is also looking into making Emergency Alerting System warnings available on the internet in addition to televisions and
radios. Also, the Communications, Video, and Technology Accessibility Act of 2023 (CVTA) will soon be up for debate in both the Senate (S.2494) and the House of Representatives (H.R. 4858). If this bill passes both chambers as introduced and reaches the White House for the President's signature, the CVTA will mandate additional ASL access to emergency notifications among several other things.

**CIEP Network Fills AFN Requests During 2023 Spokane Fires**

In Eastern Washington during late August 2023, two fires roared through Spokane, killing two, burning 95,000 acres and destroying 185 structures. Combined, the Oregon Road Fire and the Gray Fire near Medical Lake led to numerous evacuations and
the activation of substantial resources in the Emergency Management Division (EMD).

CIEP developed a list of *Washington State Disaster Recovery Resources* to aid in the recovery for current and future survivors of the Spokane fires as well as upcoming disasters. The statewide list includes resources for state offices that serves people with disabilities, centers for independent living, regional deaf centers, ASL interpreters, CART vendors, durable medical equipment, and accessible Medicaid transportation providers.

EMD activated its Emergency Support Function #6 (ESF6) and was able to provide community meetings with ASL interpreters for deaf residents in the area. ESF6 and the American Red Cross were also able to fulfill 20 requests for replacing durable medical equipment that were lost in the fires due to rapid evacuation efforts.

While one deaf couple was away from their home, their son escaped injury as the family home burned to the ground. In a matter of weeks their insurance company was able to replace the mobile home.

Kudos to Taylor Dietz and Tracey Singh-Poole from EMD, Deb Veltry from the local American Red Cross, and area community partners for their great AFN response in this case, making sure that everyone’s AFN needs were met. This successful AFN response was partly attributed to the AFN Road Trip earlier this year that created relationships and led to a robust response for
people with disabilities and other Access and Functional Needs. Also, thanks to Todd Holloway for taking the time to evaluate the accessibility of emergency shelters in the Spokane area.

CIEP Meets with FEMA ODIC Director

On Friday, December 8, several CIEP Stakeholders went to the FEMA Region 10 offices in Lynnwood to meet with Sherman Gillums, Director of FEMA’s Office of Disability Integration and Coordination (ODIC) in Washington, DC, to share some of CIEP’s accomplishments over the past few years.

CIEP meets with Sherman Gillums, Jr., Director of the Office of Disability Integration and Coordination (ODIC) at FEMA Region 10 offices in Lynnwood. From L-R: Deborah Witmer, Lisa Kraft, Jim House, Jesse Gilpatrick, Sherman Gillums, Jr., Danielle Bailey, and Todd Holloway.
We talked about our collaboration with various groups such as the Partners in Emergency Preparedness Conference (PIEPC) that takes place each year in April, the AFN Road Trip in March 2023, that helped forge connections with the disability and deaf/hard of hearing networks in Central and Eastern Washington, the CIEP Cascadia Subduction Zone Tabletop Exercise that we hosted in June 2022, the training on disability preparedness in Marysville in November 2023, building inclusive skills for responders in Redmond and Pierce County in 2018, the new ODHH Emergency ASL Video project, and the Accessible CERT training for Washington State Employees with disabilities in 2019.

We were also able to point out some of the funding and policy obstacles we have faced in Washington State, noting that these barriers are common across the country. CIEP looks forward to continuing the dialogue with Mr. Gillums.

**COMING EVENTS:** (All events in Pacific Time Zone)

**CIEP Monthly Stakeholder Calls (AFN Response to Disasters)**

**WHEN:** First Wednesday from 10:00am to 11:00am

**WHERE:** **NEW** Zoom link for upcoming monthly calls in 2024. Email Jim.House@dshs.wa.gov for details and agenda.
WASILC Quarterly Meetings

WHEN: Thur. Jan. 18 at 9am–4pm / Fri. Jan. 19 at 9am–12pm
WHERE: Hybrid/Zoom — Meeting at Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Headquarters, 4565 7th Ave. SE, Lacey, WA 98503. Email WASILC@dshs.wa.gov for details and Zoom link.

All CIEP Stakeholder Calls and WASILC Quarterly Meetings are open to everyone. ASL interpreters and CART will be provided. For other reasonable accommodation requests, please email us as early as possible.

ABOUT CIEP: CIEP is a statewide advisory group that brings expertise into disaster planning based on access and functional needs (AFN) faced by people with disabilities and other marginalized populations in three areas:

1) Effective Communications
2) Programmatic Access
3) Physical Access.

We also welcome suggestions from you for future issues of the quarterly CIEP ALERT newsletter.

Jim House, Disability Integration Manager
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Facebook: [CIEP - Coalition on Inclusive Emergency Planning](https://www.facebook.com/CIEPCoalition)

Online AFN Resources: [Additional WASILC Resources](https://www.fedhealthcare.gov/patient/families/afn)

**NEW** [Washington State Disaster Recovery Resources](https://disasterrecovery.wa.gov/)

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