

ANSI-HSSP Workshop Spotlights Emergency Preparedness Needs for Persons with Disabilities

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For millions of disabled and special needs Americans, emergencies and natural disasters present a real challenge. Preparation, notification, response, and evacuation activities must take into account the particular needs of those individuals who are visually, hearing, or mobility impaired, as well as the elderly and people with medical or cognitive conditions.



On February 3-4, 2009, these individuals and disability advocacy groups had an opportunity to give direct input to a two-day workshop convened by the [American National Standards Institute \(ANSI\) Homeland Security Standards Panel \(HSSP\)](#). In total, over 100 stakeholders – including representatives from standards development organizations (SDOs) and government agencies – listened to and examined the needs of this community and explored standards-based solutions for more effective emergency preparedness.

“ANSI-HSSP is pleased to launch this workshop to provide guidance and leadership in this critical area, but I want to stress that we aren’t looking to simply develop a report,” said ANSI president and CEO S. Joe Bhatia. “This is a critical issue affecting the security of millions of Americans, and we intend to take a highly proactive approach to assuring their safety.”

In a series of panels, roundtable discussions, and public input sessions, participants discussed real-life examples of evacuation of people with disabilities from recent events, the strengths and weaknesses of existing standards, and priorities in creating standards for emergency preparedness.

Above all, attendees stressed the importance of outreach and education to build support and awareness for disabled and special needs individuals. SDOs, architects, engineers, building owners, and government representatives alike must have a comprehensive understanding of the needs of this community.

Two breakout sessions held on the second day of the workshop identified standards for the built environment, and standards for evacuation equipment and operations. Workshop co-chairs Hilary Styron, of the [National Organization on Disability Emergency Preparedness Initiative \(NOD/EPI\)](#),

and Allan B. Fraser, of the [National Fire Protection Association \(NFPA\)](#), served as moderators for the breakout sessions, as well as several other panels and discussions throughout the workshop.

“I believe that the ANSI-HSSP Workshop on Emergency Preparedness for Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs was extremely successful,” said Mr. Fraser. “It attracted almost three times as many participants as expected, indicating a tremendous need in this area, and the enthusiasm and contributions by all the participants was wonderful. The discussions were lively and passionate.

“A number of viable and concrete deliverables were developed at the event. These form the basis for additional work and ANSI-HSSP workshops in the near future,” continued Fraser.

As a result of the workshop, ANSI-HSSP will form a task group to identify and prioritize specific needs, including public education; enhanced federal policy; transportation needs; and other issues. The Panel will also develop input to code developing organizations, state, local, and government agencies for use in their policy development procedures.

“This meeting is just the beginning of the HSSP’s work in this arena,” said Frances Schrotter, ANSI senior vice president and COO. “The Panel is dedicated to proactively responding to the needs and rights of people with disabilities, as expressed by members and advocates of this community during the workshop proceedings. With their continued active engagement, suggestions, and feedback, the Panel will identify the standardization resources needed to assure a high level of emergency preparedness for all.”

The workshop was held at [Gallaudet University](#) in Washington, DC. A report on the workshop proceedings and presentations from the event will be made available in the coming weeks on www.ansi.org/hssp.
