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Transit Safety Officials to Discuss Evacuation of Disabled Persons

By REINA V. SLUTSKE

(Nov. 18, 2005) Some 30 transit safety officials will meet at Metro Headquarters, Monday, to discuss emergency preparedness and disaster evacuation procedures for persons with disabilities.

Metro staff, along with representative from the California Highway Patrol, the California Association of Coordinated Transportation (CalACT), the California Department of Rehabilitation and a number of Southern California transportation agencies, will discuss plans to move disabled persons out of areas hit by natural disaster or terrorist attacks.

The meeting is scheduled from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. in the Gateway Conference Room.

"We determine if paratransit is a part of local evacuation plans," says Richard Devlyder, deputy director of the state Independent Living and External Affairs Council. "I don't believe that (some of the) evacuation planners have ever been in the same room."

Monday's program is a response to the fires of 2003 in San Bernardino and San Diego counties, according to Pete Spaulding, executive director of CalACT.

Tried to move people

"During those fires, paratransit operators were trying to get people out," he says. But, when it was all over, they couldn't collect money from FEMA.

Department of Rehabilitation and CalACT officials have held meetings around the state – including in the Bay Area and Sacramento – to learn about local evacuation plans for disabled persons.

"The discussion in Sacramento is different from the discussion in Oakland," says Devlyder. "In Sacramento, it's about floods and in Oakland, it's about earthquakes."

Chip Hazen, Metro's ADA compliance administrator and a member of the CalACT board, says Monday's meeting is important.

"People with disabilities aren't included" in many emergency evacuation plans, he says. "In Louisiana, they weren't included."

After the meeting, says Devlyder, the Department of Rehabilitation will make recommendations to the state and help outline a plan of action.

