

DHS strengthens its emergency responses

Every day, news stories cover a myriad of emergencies and disasters happening around the world. While these instances often seem as though they are unlikely to happen close to home, each event stands as a reminder of the importance of preparedness.

To create safer, better prepared environments for staff and visitors, the Department of Human Services hired Shannon Evans in February to serve as DHS's emergency/risk coordinator. In her short time with the Department, Shannon has made efforts to standardize emergency response across DHS buildings, including the purchase of automated external defibrillators (AEDs) and new first aid kits for all DHS buildings, with signage to direct to each item. Shannon has also worked with the Standard Emergency Response Plan (SERP) team members to conduct fire drills and analyze their outcomes to find opportunities for improvement. Additional drills focused on active shooters and severe weather will be conducted later in the year.

“The SERP team will play a critical role in any emergency event, whether it is assisting with evacuations or checking restrooms and cubicles to ensure that everyone has left the building and is safe” said Shannon. “We are working to familiarize staff members at each office with their team members, and we have purchased orange vests to make sure that SERP team members are easily identifiable.”

In addition to improving processes at each DHS office, Shannon is working to make the Everbridge notification system more relevant to staff needs. While staff may be familiar with the traditional alerts on areas of violence, alerts will now also be distributed for dangerous weather conditions such as flash flooding or extreme heat. In the future, staff will be divided into subgroups to ensure alerts are applicable to each staff members' job position and current location. For example, alerts may occur 24/7 for staff in the field, whereas employees with more regular work hours may only receive alerts during their Monday through Friday shift.

Staff members who are interested in the topic of safety and emergency planning will be invited to attend a series of lunch and learns on topics that include Be Red Cross Ready, home fire safety, coping in today's world and critical incident reporting. Trainings for CPR will also be available.

“The goal of this emergency response work is not to instill fear,” Shannon continued. “We can't plan for everything, but we can at least have a foundation to build on as needs arise. Ultimately, we want to make sure that everyone is more aware and more comfortable in this ever-changing world.”

To learn more about DHS emergency response, please visit the Emergency Response section of the DHS intranet or contact Shannon at Shannon.Evans2@AlleghenyCounty.US.