By Connie Pehrson

This September 2009 marks the sixth annual National Preparedness Month – a month designed to encourage Americans to take simple steps to prepare for emergencies. Even though we don't know when or where disasters may strike, we do know that we can do more to be prepared for the unexpected.

The Division of Homeland Security, a division of the Utah Department of Public Safety, encourages all Utahns to take on the challenge this September to be “Be Ready.” They have outlined four simple steps for families to do to prepare for an emergency: 1) Make a Plan, 2) Get a Kit, 3) Be Informed, and 4) Get Involved. More in-depth information about these four steps is available on the Be Ready Utah page of the Utah.gov website.

People with disabilities are generally more vulnerable to emergencies than the general population. More than half (58%) of the people with disabilities surveyed by the National Organization on Disabilities just after the 2001 terrorist attacks did not know where to go in their community to learn about emergency planning. Sixty-one percent had not made plans to evacuate their homes quickly and safely. Effective emergency preparedness always begins with individuals and their families. It is crucial that people with disabilities and their caregivers/families know what to do when facing an emergency.

The CPD has adapted and combined existing emergency preparedness materials to better meet the needs of persons with disabilities in Utah. These materials were developed for the Centers for Independent Living to help the families of people with disabilities prepare for emergencies and address the special needs that they might have. These guides were disseminated throughout Utah as part of emergency training events for the past two years and are still available on the CPD site. Further resources on emergency preparedness can be found on the Independent Living Research Utilization Center website, which includes webcast presentations by CPD staff members on emergency preparedness. For more information, contact Jeff Sheen or Judith Holt.

In addition, a CPD project has provided Spanish translations of emergency preparedness materials for the Latino population. A Spanish version of the Emergency Preparedness for All Utahns: Preparing Your Family training manual, first developed by another project at the CPD, is now available. Also, a Spanish version of the Salt Lake Valley Health Department’s Family Emergency Preparedness Guide was prepared. These two Spanish guides comprise a train-the-trainer curriculum for a workshop that is presented by project staff to community leaders who work with Spanish speaking families. For more information about these trainings, contact Juan Carlos Vazquez. The time and effort that is invested in preparing for disastrous events and emergencies will help all individuals navigate through and recover quickly from what may come at the most unexpected
moment. The time to plan is now, before the next disaster strikes.