Civil Legal Issues of Natural Disasters: Libraries Can Help

Kathy Grunewald
Disaster Coordinator Attorney
Legal Services of North Florida, Inc.

Sara Pic
Head of Public Services
Law Library of Louisiana
Chat activity

What natural disasters has your community faced or are you preparing for?
Agenda

- Trauma-informed care
- Library preparation is critical
- Immediate needs and legal issues
- Ways to get assistance
- Most common patron legal questions in a disaster
- Cultivate disaster response network
- Help patrons prepare
- Where to start
September is National Preparedness Month

https://www.ready.gov/september
Trauma-Informed Care

- Patrons may need to talk first before getting to their need
- No choice in much of process
  - Offer choices if you can
- Slow down, listen empathetically, break things down into simple steps
- You might need to take breaks and process hearing traumatic stories over and over

https://www.pacesconnection.com/blog/3-realms-of-aces-updated
Library preparation is critical

- Want to reopen quickly
- Continuity of operations plan
- Can even assist if not open
Immediate needs and legal issues

- Food, shelter, water
- Power, wifi
Immediate needs and legal issues

Landlord / tenant issues surface fast

Finding information, e.g. deed to my house
Ways to get assistance

- **FEMA** – safe and habitable standard
- **Insurance** – if patron has, must use it first
- **SBA** – Small Business Administration
  - Homeowners and renters can get low-interest, long-term loans for losses not fully covered by insurance

Dependencies between these 3 are complex and important
Ways to get assistance

• Encourage patrons to document everything
• Appeals are possible
• Many resources to help library staff and patrons
Most common patron legal questions in a disaster:

- Landlord-tenant issues
- FEMA applications
- Insurance queries
Legal issues timeline – the first 6 weeks

**Housing**
- Lease termination
- Utility shutoffs
- Security deposits
- Repair issues
- FEMA applications
- Insurance claims
- FEMA Appeals

**Document Replacement**
- Birth certificates
- Driver’s licenses
- Social security cards
- Deeds

**Income Protection**
- Wage theft issues
- Unemployment application/appeals
- Public benefits application/appeals
- U.S. Small Business Administration disaster loan applications
Legal partners

Partners: find your local legal aid – lawhelp.org

Disaster Legal Assistance – disasterassistance.gov

ABA’s Free Legal Answers – freelegalanswers.org
Cultivate disaster response network

- Start in blue sky times
- Local emergency management
- COADs (Community Organizations Active in Disaster) and VOADs (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster)
- Local bar association – volunteer lawyers specializing in disasters
Help patrons prepare

Disaster preparation events with partners

Ready.gov

LADRC.org
Legal Aid Disaster Resource Center

Being prepared can prevent legal headaches later
Where to start

1. Reach out to key players
2. Build a disaster resource collection
3. Plan a disaster preparation event
WebJunction’s free 3 course series

- Course 1: Disaster Response Network launched!
- Course 2: Trauma Response and Disaster Assistance launched!
- Course 3: Ongoing Issues and Mitigation, coming soon!
- If civil legal reference is new to you – try our foundational 4 course series, Creating Pathways to Civil Legal Justice

oc.lc/legal-justice-project
Improving Access to Civil Legal Justice through Libraries

Through OCLC’s partnership with Legal Services Corporation (LSC) and consultation from law librarians, WebJunction continues to design and deliver national training for U.S. public library staff to strengthen their ability to identify and manage legal issues in their communities.

Since the premiere of the Learning Pathways series, Creating Pathways to Civil Legal Justice, WebJunction has received feedback from librarians about how these learning opportunities enabled them to help community members with legal issues. A new course, Navigating Civil Legal Issues of Natural Disasters, has been developed to help libraries meet these needs.

Learning Opportunities

- **Creating Pathways to Civil Legal Justice**: Series of four on-demand courses for library staff. Learn more about the courses, including a short video introduction.

- **Navigating Civil Legal Issues of Natural Disasters**: Series of three on-demand courses focused on the civil legal issues that community members encounter as a result of a natural disaster.

- September 22 webinar, Civil Legal Issues of Natural Disasters: Libraries Can Help, to learn more about the newest course series.

- Learning Groups for Creating Pathways for Civil Legal Justice Courses: How to lead a group of colleagues taking the courses together.
Navigating Civil Legal Issues of Natural Disasters

- Getting Started
- Introduction to Natural Disasters, Civil Legal Issues, and Library Roles
- Building the Library Disaster Response Network
- Help Patrons Be Prepared for Natural Disasters
- Course Evaluation
- Final Activity and Course Completion
These are blue-sky days

This is the best time to plan.
- Identify legal providers
- Assemble resources
- Connect with partners

Disaster is sudden and disruptive

Everybody feels the impact in some way
Questions?

**Brooke Doyle**, Senior Project Coordinator  
WebJunction  
doyleb@oclc.org

**Kathy Grunewald**, Disaster Coordinator Attorney  
Legal Services of North Florida, Inc.  
kgrunewald@lsnf.org

**Sara V. Pic**, Head of Public Services  
Law Library of Louisiana  
svpic@lasc.org
Thank you!

This project is made possible by a partnership with the Legal Services Corporation and OCLC’s ongoing support of the WebJunction program.