

The Virgin Islands Consortium

FEMA and AARP Release New Resources to Help Local Communities Protect Older Adults Before, During and After Natural Disasters

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A home destroyed by Hurricane Irma in 2017 on Bordeaux Mountain, St. John USVI. By. ERNICE GILBERT, VI CONSORTIUM

As the United States enters peak hurricane season, FEMA and AARP have released new resources to help local officials and emergency managers protect older adults in their communities before, during and after natural disasters and support communities in mitigating the effects of extreme weather events, FEMA made known Thursday.

The “Guide to Expanding Mitigation: Making the Connection to Older Adults,” released by FEMA and AARP, highlights how natural hazards uniquely affect older adults and provides recommendations for how emergency managers, planners, local officials and community members can include older adults in community efforts to lower their risks, according to the release. The AARP Disaster Resilience Tool Kit features strategies to help local, state and community leaders and advocates reduce the risk and impacts of disasters on older adults.

“Adults aged 65 and older are a growing demographic who are often disproportionately impacted by severe weather. These disparities can be compounded by other factors, such as low income or chronic illness, producing inequitable results for this vulnerable population when it comes to disaster preparedness,” said FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell. “Effective mitigation planning requires that we consider the needs of all populations, and FEMA’s partnership with AARP on these guides will help community planners ensure our older communities are more resilient in the face of hurricanes and other natural disasters.”

“By 2034, adults ages 65 and over will outnumber those under 18 in the United States for the first time. This has profound implications during natural disasters and extreme weather events,” said Nancy LeaMond, Executive Vice President and Chief Advocacy & Engagement Officer at AARP. “State and local leaders and emergency officials must be better equipped and prepared to ensure that older adults are kept safe and their needs are met when a disaster strikes.”

According to the release, a growing body of evidence shows that older adults are disproportionately impacted by the types of weather-related emergencies and natural disasters that are becoming increasingly frequent and severe. Individuals who have chronic illnesses, functional limitations or disabilities are especially vulnerable, as evidenced by the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on older adults. Not only are older people at a higher risk of death from infectious diseases and disasters, but the long-term effects on those who survive often undermine their physical and mental health, economic security and overall wellbeing.

Although many communities support older adults in preparation for disasters, expanded mitigation planning can help reduce the loss of life and property by minimizing the impact of disasters before they happen. Mitigation actions and strategies that make cities, towns and neighborhoods safer for older adults can benefit all residents and increase community resilience overall, the release stated.

The guide and tool kit are the result of a multi-year collaboration between AARP and FEMA to identify and provide resources, spark ideas and encourage organizations to better engage older Americans in disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery operations. This long-term, strategic alliance aims to advance accessible, safe and livable communities for people of all ages.

To view and download the “Guide to Expanding Mitigation: Making the Connection to Older Adults,” visit [FEMA.gov](https://www.fema.gov). To view, download or request a print copy of the AARP Disaster Resilience Tool Kit, visit [AARP.org/DisasterResilience](https://www.aarp.org/DisasterResilience).