

# Avoiding disaster by meeting the needs of seniors and PRM

**Lawrence J. Rolon**

Coordinator for Disability Services  
Los Angeles World Airports  
Los Angeles California (U. S. A.)

# Management & Operations: Crisis & Disaster

## **Avoiding Disaster by being prepared to meet the needs of Persons with Reduced Mobility(PRM), and Senior Citizens.**

Aging and Disabled passengers face challenges that are not considered when preparing emergency plans or live disaster drills. Senior Citizens and persons with disabilities must be included in preparing, reviewing and participating in these matters. The presentation looks at the impact major incidents have on senior citizens and PRM. The speaker will discuss events at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), including an active shooter in November 2013. Technology can play a crucial role in the airport's ability to provide assistance and timely information to these vulnerable populations.

# We will be addressing

→ Why older travelers and PRM need to be included in disaster planning.

Impact on older travelers and PRM from assuming we know their needs.

Issues faced by older travelers and PRM during actual events.

The value of after event debriefs with airport community members.

Planning for the next emergency with older travelers and PRM in mind.

# We will be addressing:

- Why older travelers and PRM need to be included in disaster planning.
- Impact on older travelers and PRM from assuming we know their needs.

Issues faced by older travelers and PRM during actual events.

The value of after event debriefs with airport community members.

Planning for the next emergency with older travelers and PRM in mind.

# We will be addressing:

- Why older travelers and PRM need to be included in disaster planning.
- Impact on older travelers and PRM from assuming we know their needs.
- Issues faced by older travelers and PRM during actual events.

The value of after event debriefs with airport community members.

Planning for the next emergency with older travelers and PRM in mind.

# We will be addressing:

- Why older travelers and PRM need to be included in disaster planning.
  - Impact on older travelers and PRM from assuming we know their needs.
  - Issues faced by older travelers and PRM during actual events.
  - The value of after event debriefs with airport community members.
- Planning for the next emergency with older travelers and PRM in mind.

# We will be addressing:

- Why older travelers and PRM need to be included in disaster planning.
  - Impact on older travelers and PRM from assuming we know their needs.
  - Issues faced by older travelers and PRM during actual events.
  - The value of after event debriefs with airport community members.
- Planning for the next emergency with older travelers and PRM in mind.

Airports do a pretty good job in emergency planning for people that are not disabled or have special needs such as older travelers.

Airports Need to include persons with disabilities and older travelers in the development of our emergency plans.

No one can tell you they know the best way to address the evacuation of persons with disability or older travelers, except the individuals with the specific disability or mobility issue.

Fire fighters are great at fighting fires but time and again have demonstrated a lack of knowledge when it comes to assisting people with disabilities. To address this, training on disability issues is paramount for fire fighters when assisting disabled passengers in an emergency or evacuation at an airport.



# Common problems:

(Note: These examples are not during a life and death phase of a response)

Assuming all disabilities are the same.

Not knowing how to communicate with someone who is deaf or hard of hearing.

Lack of knowledge on how to assist someone who is blind and traveling with a service animal.

Separating a disabled individual from their assistive device.

Assuming they know what is wrong with a person who cannot communicate because of disability.

Failure to differentiate between disability and injury.

Failure to realize that a person may have more than one disability.

Similar issues faced by person with hearing loss, inability to communicate and persons who do not speak the local language and are disabled.

No two disabilities have the same needs, and no two people with the same disability have the same needs.

As an airport leader, you need to be as inclusive as possible when developing emergency plans under various scenarios. No plan is complete or functional if the disability community and older travelers are not included in the development of the plans.

By having a diverse group of individuals with disabilities to interact with, you will realize that:

If portable restrooms have to be brought in, some of them have to accommodate a wheelchair, where the wheelchair can easily be positioned so that the individual can transfer from his wheelchair to the toilet. You need a turning radius of 5' x 5'. To allow for a wheelchair to toilet transfer you need 17-19".

Hand washing stations generally use a pump to push water up. However if the person does not have use of their feet, the washing station would not work.

Some people cannot drink directly from a cup or bottle. These people would need straws to aid them.

Are these portable toilet units accessible to someone who is deaf?

Are these portable toilet units accessible to someone who requires a wheelchair and cannot walk on their own?



You need to include a representative group of persons with disabilities to help in the preparation of the plans and or include them in the review process so they can point out problems they may face if they had to the plan. The same holds true for older travelers.

To be meaningful, persons with different disabilities and older travelers need to be included in live exercises and drills.

It is vital that these participants provide input during a hot wash or debriefing. Lessons learned can then be incorporated into updates of plans being exercised.

You may want to setup a disability committee that is a sounding board for disability related matters at the airport, and run the plans past them for input.

**NOTE:** In your planning keep in mind that in an emergency the environment may look very different than it does on a day to day basis. This may create issues that you have not planned for in your plans.



**NOT all Airport emergencies are life and death.**

However, failure to plan for an unexpected incident may cause injury or even death to an older traveler or person with a disability.



# Unusual incidents can quickly turn into major incidents.

One Example is Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson Airport, ranked the busiest airport in the world.

On Sunday, 17 December 2017, as peak holiday travel was underway, the main power system to the airport, and back-up generation failed at the same time. It took nearly 11 hours before power was restored.

## On the Airfield –

Some planes sat on the tarmac for more than six hours, before they began deplaning on to the tarmac. The Washington Post reported.

A 90 year old lady who had been waiting on the tarmac for more than five hours was assisted off the plane by four men who carried her in her wheelchair .



## In the Terminals –



Some passengers complained of a lack of emergency response during the outage, which was especially problematic for those who used a wheelchair to get around. One person stated she was shocked by the lack of police officers or firefighters. So fellow passengers literally carried “old people down the escalators and up

escalators and carrying wheelchairs, and my heart was like racing because I’m scared for these people’s lives,...”



Rutia Curry, a stranded passenger said, “They had these elderly people and handicapped people lined up in wheelchairs,” some 20 of them, who couldn’t do anything “because they couldn’t get down the escalator.”

“People are helpless,” Curry said. “It’s a nightmare.”



TSA\* workers lugged more than 100 people up the non-working escalators. They worked in shifts to stay fresh.

At the escalators, which were halted without power, there were people in wheelchairs stuck, trying to figure out what to do. One

woman tried to walk it, but made it only halfway down before she had to stop, causing a line to form behind her.

\*Transportation Security Administration – federal screening folks in the U. S.

**REMEMBER: You cannot plan for emergencies at the airport alone.** It involve the entire airport community and the traveling public that will be impacted by your assumptions, staff development/training, and actions.

Airport emergency planners need to understand airline/tenant policies for assisting passengers with disabilities under different scenarios. Where this is lacking, the airport needs to work with these partners to develop a plan that complements the airports plan in addressing disabled and older travelers.

Do airlines/tenants exercise emergency plans with their employees, and do employees at the lowest levels know what to do in an emergency?

How often are these plans exercised and revised?

Are contractors hired by airlines/tenants familiar with the emergency plans and what to do in an event of an emergency?

There are many kinds of disabilities. They can be visible, hidden, permanent or occur only at certain times.

Types of Disabilities you need to plan for include but are not limited to:

- deaf-blind
- hearing
- intellectual
- developmental
- learning
- mental health
- physical
- speech or language
- vision

Each disability has different needs and levels of assistance needed



## Disability Related Lessons from the 1 November 2013 shooting at Los Angeles International Airport

**Facts:** On or about 0930 on Friday, 1 November 2013, a 23 year old male was dropped off in front of Terminal Three by his roommate. He was carrying a bag filled with a semi-automatic rifle, five 30-round magazines, and additional ammunition.

One person was killed and seven wounded. Suspect was down within 3 minutes of the first report of an active shooter.

The airport was put on lockdown until approximately 1630.

No one could enter the airport. People who had been screened were sheltered in place in their terminals. Unscreened passengers either left airport grounds or waited for the airport to reopen.

Among the problems encountered in meeting the needs of persons with disabilities and older travelers in the terminals included:

#### Communications –

- Some people were unaware of an active shooter situation

- Update Information was not reaching passengers

- Difficulty in communicating with passengers having hearing or cognition issues

#### Identification –

- Unless a person had an obvious disability or was using a wheelchair, or had self identified with the airline, there was no way to address their needs since they could not be identified.

#### Personnel –

- The incident occurred during shift changes. Many night shift employees had left and daytime employees were beginning to arrive. When shooting was broadcast all access to the airport was closed and no one was allowed in.

Vehicles used to assist people to off airport locations could not reenter the airport.

# Observations

Inability to identify people with disabilities who had not self-identified.

People panicked and ran into the airfield.

Some individuals had put prescriptions in their luggage and as the closure went on, these people needed to take their medicines.

Individuals with diabetes were in need of sweets.

Needed to address needs of service animals.

Lack of understanding in how best to address the needs of individuals with different disabilities.



Lack of timely information

People were stuck in remote parking lots waiting to be taken to the terminals.

People waited hours before being deplaned remotely.

# AMONG REMEDIES IMPLEMENTED TO ADDRESS DISABILITY RELATED PROBLEMS OBSERVED

## Creation of Airport Response Teams (ART)

Disability related training for the airport community is paramount.

Placement of PODs in strategic areas around the airport. Pods are equipped with supplies that can be immediately distributed to areas where food, equipment or hygiene items are needed during emergencies.

Informing travelers and people in the immediate area around the airport of emergencies occurring at the airport and updates via cell phones and monitors.

Dissemination of status reports via social media during emergencies; assuring that messaging includes captioning.

Educating the media of the airports expectation that any broadcast from the airport shall include the sign language interpreter along with the speaker.

Educating disabled and older travelers on what to do in the event of an emergency at the airport.

Ensure tenants know what to do in an emergency

Identify who the key contact person is for the terminal in advance.

Ensure airlines and tenants have appropriate emergency plans that comply with airport emergency standards.

Test the plans by frequent drills, and ensure disabled and older travelers are included.

Set an ongoing schedule to review, test, and update plans to ensure they remain current.

Test employees working in the terminals on their knowledge of where shelter in place locations are, including emergency exits, and elevators that are not normally used by the general public.

Identify who has responsibility for assisting travelers who may experience difficulty, especially older travelers and persons with disabilities.

Identify who the key contact person is for the terminal in advance.

Ensure airlines and tenants have appropriate emergency plans that comply with airport emergency standards.

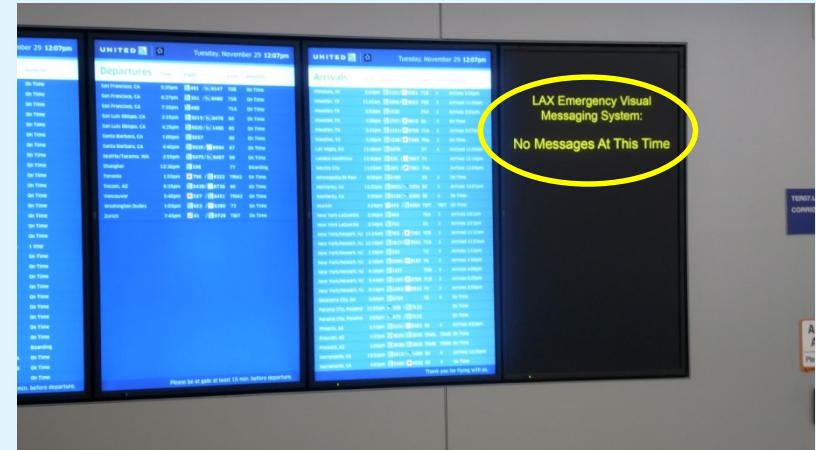
Test the plans by frequent drills, and ensure disabled and older travelers are included.

Set an ongoing schedule to review, test, and update plans to ensure they remain current.

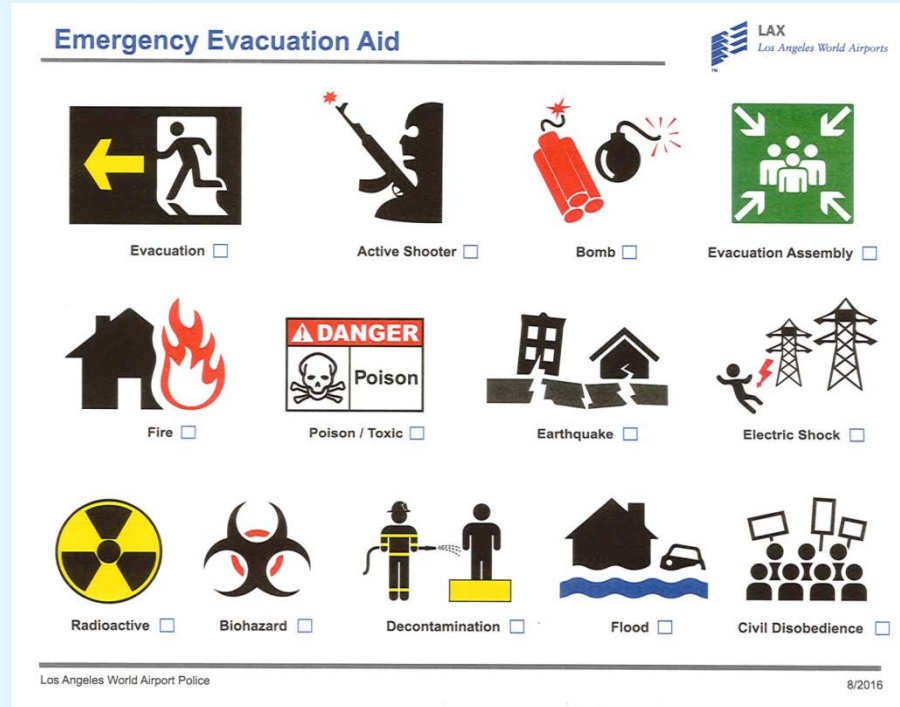
Test employees working in the terminals on their knowledge of where shelter in place locations are, including emergency exits, and elevators that are not normally used by the general public.

Identify who has responsibility for assisting travelers who may experience difficulty, especially older travelers and persons with disabilities.

# Installation of Emergency Broadcast Monitors at pre-screening locations in the terminals and inside the terminals.




# Creation of Emergency Communication Sheets



Front side

# Creation of Emergency Communication Sheets


## Emergency Evacuation Aid



Write a message to a community member below:

You need to <b>EVACUATE</b> now.	You should leave with me.	Leave the area now.
Do you have any <b>Service/Animals</b> ?	Do you have <b>MEDICATION</b> ?	Are you here alone?
Do you have a <b>mobility Issue</b> ?	Are you traveling alone?	Follow that person.

Los Angeles World Airport Police



Reverse side