



Ombudsman Role in Disaster Situations

BACKGROUND

Ombudsmen are required to play an active role in their command's crisis or disaster plan. It is important that they be included in the command's disaster preparedness exercises in addition to being knowledgeable about the plan the command has put into place.

KEY MESSAGES

- The ombudsmen's role in disaster or crisis response situations will differ depending on the nature of the crisis, the involvement of their command, and their identified, assigned role in the command's crisis response plan.
- The ombudsman should receive explicit guidance on the commanding officer's policies and expectations in the event of a crisis or natural disaster.
- The ombudsman should be immediately informed and kept updated in the case of a command crisis or emergency. The ombudsman is often the first person affected members of the command turn to following an emergency.
- In the event of a national disaster or emergency, a centralized Ombudsman Resource Center may be set up to augment official Navy response efforts. The Center, if stood up, will be staffed by volunteers for the purpose of communicating with local ombudsmen and family members to assist in providing services.
- Ombudsmen should assist others as much as possible, but should not put themselves or their families at risk. If a command crisis personally involves the ombudsman, assistance should be sought from other ombudsmen via the FFSC ombudsman coordinator or the Ombudsman Assembly chair.

STATEMENT

The responsibilities given to ombudsmen should directly relate to the knowledge and skills they have developed as a part of the Ombudsman Program. Their responsibilities, before, during and after a crisis, may include the following:

- Serving as POC for affected family members. The ombudsman is often the first person families turn to following an emergency. Families may be instructed to contact the ombudsman once they have arrived at a safe location. Instruct the ombudsman to record contact information. This allows a command to keep track of where command families are temporarily located. It is important that the ombudsman encourage families to update their contact information with the Navy Family Accountability and Assessment System (NFAAS) if they have needs.
- Educating Sailors and families on being prepared for potential disasters.
- Identifying affected families during a crisis. With a current command roster, the ombudsman should be able to search for affected families by zip code.
- Providing accurate information and updates between the command and the command families.
- Ensuring that Navy families have reliable sources of information and referral.
- Answering information or crisis phone lines.
- Staffing Emergency Family Assistance Center and/or Family Information Center (FIC).
- Supporting Sailors and families during the recovery phase including coordinating food and clothing drives.

ACTION

The commanding officer should ensure that the ombudsman is familiar with Operation Prepare. Information and materials from Operation Prepare may be incorporated and distributed at workshops, events, etc. so that families will be prepared for a disaster. An emergency plan should include the ombudsman's role in the event of a command crisis or natural disaster. This should include POC, duties, etc.

RESOURCES

- Operation Prepare - a public awareness program on emergency preparedness, initiated by Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC). Go to CNIC FFSC Ombudsmen Web site – www.ffsp.navy.mil and click on Operation Prepare.
- The local Fleet and Family Support Center.
- NFAAS: www.navyfamily.navy.mil.

CHECKLIST

- Ensure the ombudsman knows who to contact at the command to determine her/his duties, in the event of a command crisis or natural disaster.
- Make a list of ombudsman duties and responsibilities so that both the command and ombudsman knows expectations during a disaster.