

## Commission issues report on children in disasters

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WASHINGTON (AP) - A national commission focused on children's needs is calling for first responders to carry medical equipment and supplies suited for kids.

The panel also wants federal dollars to pay for restoring childcare facilities destroyed during disasters.

The recommendations came in the first of two reports from the congressionally mandated National Commission on Children and Disasters, created in 2007. The Obama administration has already accepted some of the recommendations: to redesign disaster housing shelters to meet the needs of children and parents, and to force states to adopt a minimum standard for disaster planning at childcare centers.

The Red Cross has accepted the commission's call to stock shelters with diapers, baby wipes and cribs, said its chairman, Mark Shriver said. And some shelters around the country are being redesigned so that, for example, young children are not sleeping in the same areas as single men, Shriver said.

The Child Care bureau at the Department of Health and Human Services has also signed on to the commission's recommendation that childcare facilities must meet minimum standards for disaster planning in order to receive federal grant dollars.

And the Federal Emergency Management Agency has also established a working group to ensure that children are considered in future disaster planning.

The Bush administration rewrote its national disaster plan after Hurricane Katrina. The new 82-page plan, issued in January 2008, does not include the word "children," but it does mention pets.

That plan, however, is supplemented by more than 200 pages of annexes, which do address children's needs, though not in depth.

"People say children are our biggest asset and priority and then they don't put their money where their mouth is," Shriver said. "It's outrageous."

Shriver said that first responders currently don't have the right medical equipment for children, as the equipment is geared mostly toward adults. And he said federal law does not allow for childcare facilities to qualify to be reimbursed if they are harmed during a disaster. That law must be changed, he said, so that families can go back to work.

The commission expects to release its final report a year from now. Those recommendations will address long-term housing needs and specific medical requirements for children if they are exposed to radiation, Shriver said.

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On the Net:

<http://www.childrenanddisasters.acf.hhs.gov/>