

NCLIS News Release

**U. S. National Commission on
Libraries and Information Science**

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For Immediate Release

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NCLIS Links Libraries and Emergency Preparedness Recommends Libraries as a Trusted Information Network

Washington, DC USA, August 23, 2004 – The U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) announced today that its program for promoting libraries as information providers for emergency preparedness is moving forward.

“NCLIS is working with libraries to encourage participation in emergency preparedness at the community level,” said Commission Chair Beth Fitzsimmons, of Ann Arbor, MI. “Making this connection between libraries and the distribution of emergency preparedness information is part of the work that NCLIS has taken upon itself. The Commissioners have chosen three strategic goals, and this work grows directly out of our efforts to achieve these goals. We are going to appraise and assess America’s libraries, we will strengthen the relevance of libraries and information services in the minds of American citizens, and we will promote research and development for improving library and information science. Encouraging the use of libraries as centers for emergency preparedness information fits right in, especially with our efforts to make libraries more relevant in American society.”

NCLIS is taking a number of specific steps to meet its goals with respect to emergency preparedness information, according to today’s announcement. On the immediate action list, NCLIS is partnering with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in the department’s Ready Campaign, designed to help people prepare for the possibility of a terrorist attack or other emergency. On September 9, Homeland Security is launching National Preparedness Month at the United States Capitol, co-chaired by Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) and Representatives Christopher Cox (R-CA) and Jane Harman (D-CA). In addition, all 56 states and territorial governors have pledged to mark National Preparedness Month with local events.

“National Preparedness Month brings together an amazing coalition of partners to make citizen preparedness a priority for every city, every neighborhood, and every home across America,” said Homeland Secretary Tom Ridge, in announcing National Preparedness Month. “Homeland security is a shared responsibility and I am pleased that so many organizations and so many national leaders are working together to help get this information out into communities across the nation.”

NCLIS Chair Fitzsimmons agrees, and looks to libraries as ideal distributors for emergency preparedness information.

“As trusted sources of information,” she said, “libraries can be used in times of crisis. America’s 16,000 public libraries are an already established network, trusted by the citizens. Libraries can be encouraged to adjust service offerings so that the library becomes the community’s ‘knowledge nexus’ for information relating to emergency preparedness. They are already providing citizens with many different types of citizen information (consumer health information, for example, or employment/career-planning information, or community services information, etc.). Adding information that helps citizens prepare for critical emergencies is a natural next step for libraries.”

NCLIS began this work in 2002, with the production of “Trust and Terror: A Proposal to Expand the Role of U.S. Libraries in Crisis Information Dissemination and Management.” Narrated by Walter Cronkite, the CD described for library managers, public agencies, and community authorities the critical role that libraries can play in this effort (the CD is available, while supplies last, through the NCLIS office – contact info@nclis.gov)

In her announcement today, Dr. Fitzsimmons listed the steps NCLIS is taking to link libraries and emergency preparedness:

- bringing together representatives of various stakeholders in the emergency response/homeland security communities and encouraging them to recognize that libraries can play an important role in emergency preparedness
- encouraging leaders in the library and information services community to identify the distribution of emergency preparedness information as a critical and natural role for libraries, just as libraries do with the dissemination of other types of information that people need
- with the public at large, promoting the idea that libraries can be the place to go to find the trusted, authoritative information they need for critical emergencies

“It’s a big job, ensuring that the public is prepared,” Dr. Fitzsimmons said, “but working in this area is probably one of the most important jobs NCLIS can do. We are continuing to work with a variety of strategic colleagues and organizations to share in the effort of bringing libraries into the emergency preparedness picture. We believe – and all of the Commissioners join me in this – that together NCLIS and libraries can play a very important role as America tries to come to grips with terrorism and secure the homeland.”

About NCLIS

The U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) is a permanent, independent agency of the Federal government charged by Public Law 91-345 to advise the President and Congress on national and international library and information policies, to appraise and assess the adequacies and deficiencies of library and information resources and services, and to develop overall plans for meeting national library and information needs.

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