



OREGON OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

When crises strike, like the wildfires of 2020, it can be a traumatic, stressful and confusing time for everybody. When your first language isn't English, or if you have limited English proficiency (LEP), the trauma of living through a crisis can be compounded by not understanding when, where or how to get assistance.

Knowing that, the Oregon Office of Emergency Management (OEM) is committed to ensuring Oregonians are getting the information they need, in the language that helps them best recover from their losses.

Many non-English speakers affected by last year's wildfires are essential workers for their communities and are a crucial part of Oregon's economy and fabric. It's important to ensure all wildfire survivors get the assistance they need in order for the state to make a full recovery.

By prioritizing aid and communication with LEP communities, OEM has engaged in translation and interpretation services with several vendors. One of them is the Oregon Certified Interpreters Network (OCIN), which is an Oregon-based and minority-owned company. OEM and OCIN staff work side-by-side to ensure everyone receives the information they need to build toward recovery for those affected Oregonians, and thus, the state.

"Not being able to speak English is very difficult for me, I see it as a barrier. Especially after the wildfires of last year when I was trying to apply for assistance at FEMA and at other places," said Alma Lorena Carrion, Southern Oregon single mother of three children. "I was able to get an application form translated to Spanish, and to apply for FEMA benefits. I am grateful to have had an interpreter to help out with the form. There were good people there to help me with the FEMA forms. I am now in an apartment with my children, thanks to the translated form."

"I'm proud that as an interpreter, I get to bridge the gap of communication and help disseminate crucial information to the community," said Carlos Nunez of OCIN. "As a company, our main goal is to bridge the gap between state services and community members. We know we're making a difference for these people and for the state."

OEM is translating outgoing information into Spanish, Russian and Vietnamese, with the ability to also translate specific requests into several other languages. OEM has also ensured that interpreters are on hand when community engagement takes place, including FEMA and local jurisdictional outreach.

"I interpreted for Governor Kate Brown & Director Phelps at the press conferences during the wildfires. I felt honored to be able to do my part in helping the community in a time of need," said Nunez. "Language can be a barrier, but it doesn't have to be. As Oregonians, we can all support each other and make sure everyone is getting the help they need."

If you need any information regarding wildfire recovery translated to your preferred language, or in an alternate format, feel free to contact David Cardona, OEM Language Access Manager at David.Cardona@state.or.us.