# Military OneSource Podcast — Accounting for Yourself After a Natural or Man-Made Disaster

**Episode transcript:**

**Intro voiceover:**

Welcome to the Military OneSource podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department, with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit militaryonesource.mil.

**Bruce Moody:**

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody.

Wherever you live, there are natural disasters. We live on the East Coast; we get mostly hurricanes. You may get hurricanes, as well, or typhoons, earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, wildfires or some combination that climate change is only making worse and increasingly unpredictable.

And then there are the man-made disasters, and it becomes understandable that occasionally your command needs to ask, are you OK? And how's your family? We call this personnel accountability, and we're going to talk about it during this episode with my guest, Lisa Valentine, who is the Defense Department's program manager for personnel accountability. Lisa, it's so great to have you on the podcast today.

**Lisa Valentine:**

Thank you, Bruce. It's very good to be here.

**Bruce:**

Let's talk about this because personnel accountability in the context of following up from a disaster is not merely checking in. It's not merely roll call. So, why would a command want their people to check in after a disaster?

**Lisa:**

Well, Bruce it's twofold. The first part is because it's mandatory. It's required by DOD policy and it's required because it's a commander's responsibility to know if their people are OK or not OK. And then you want to take those personnel resources that are OK to provide other resources to those in need.

And then, the second part is the assessment. You want to assess those people who have been negatively affected by that disaster, by determining what their needs are. And those needs could be from physical needs to spiritual needs, to just a myriad of things. It could be from medical help. Maybe they have lost their home. They need a place to stay. They have no food; they need to eat. They may need some money for transportation. I mean, just a myriad of things from clothing. Maybe they had a horrible tragedy where someone in the family has passed and they need help to have that person buried and so forth. It goes from one extreme to the other.

**Bruce:**

We're going to get into all of this and there's a system and this is pretty much what we're going to be talking about during this episode, called the personnel accountability and assessment system, where you basically communicate all of that. Tell us about this system and what it is, and we'll get into more about who can use it, and, but just give us a brief overview of what the personnel accountability and assessment system is.

**Lisa:**

So, the personnel accountability and assessment system is a way to connect using the internet. And what you're doing is, you're going in there and you account for yourself. There'll be an event that occurs and you should, from your service or your unit or your agency, you might get a text that says, "Hey, you need to account for yourself." And there'll be a link.

If you don't get something like that, you don't want to not account for yourself because it is also a personal responsibility. You can also access it through Military OneSource, but what you're going to do is you're going to go into the system and it's going to ask you questions. The first thing is you're accounting for yourself, telling them that where you are, and then you go through and you'll answer questions that will help your unit, or your service, your agency to determine what needs that you have. And then what they do is they put you in contact, they'll connect you with a coordinator that can help you to get those assets that you need to take care of your health and welfare and those of your family.

**Bruce:**

This system, the system that you're describing, we're going to put links in the program notes, people who can click into it. But I think in this conversation, we really kind of need to get into the bits and pieces of it. People kind of have an understanding of what will be in there when they need it. And for that, it seems like they really need to be getting into this beforehand. Do I understand this correctly? They probably need to get some information into the system before disaster strikes, so that the command can reach them. Do I have that correct?

**Lisa:**

It is. And one of the ways to do that is to make sure that the information in their DEERS is up to date and that of their families. And so that is located through the DEERS RAPID system. You want to make sure that your location of where you are is up to date, your phone numbers, your email addresses and so forth. And if you don't, then it makes it hard for the unit or your organization, or your agency to determine where exactly that you are and that you belong to them. So that's why it's always important. Every time you make a move, every so often, at least once a year, you should make sure that all of your contact information is up to date in the DEERS, which feeds into the PAAS system.

**Bruce:**

OK. So, a commander needs to know where the people on the installation have scattered to for safety. So that's going to be a lot of different people. There are the folks in uniform, of course, but there's also civilians, there's contractors. Are these also people who are going to be able to use this accountability and assessment system?

**Lisa:**

So, for DOD civilian employees. Whether you're an Army civilian, or a Navy or Coast Guard, etc., you would definitely use your PAAS system. Now, let's keep in mind that Marines use Marine Online. They're a little bit unique.

But for contractors, it's up to the contracting agency when they're located in the United States to account for their own people. It's not a DOD responsibility. However, if you're a contractor and you're overseas in support of the Defense Department, then you have a responsibility in order to account for yourself and use the PAAS system, if that's what your agency or service is using, or use whatever system that they are using to account for yourself and your family members, if they are also overseas with you.

**Bruce:**

OK. Let's go into a couple of maybe scenarios. So, a disaster has struck and a family has managed to leave the installation to a safer place. Maybe there was a tornado that came through or a hurricane, and they've left maybe across town, maybe to another time zone. So now they've left. What are the sorts of things that a family can ask for through this system? What do they want to let their commands know? And what can they ask for?

**Lisa:**

They want to make sure, number one, most importantly, how we said, make sure the information is up to date. If you have your family members and you need certain benefits and assistance, first off, they must be in there listed as your dependents, if you are the sponsor. So that sponsor would be the military service member, or it would be the DOD civilian, or it would be the overseas contractor who has their family members in that overseas location. What they would do is when they report themselves, they're going to say where they are located and then what they need. So maybe what they need is money for a hotel. Maybe they need food. Maybe they need clothing because they just have the shirt on their back because they have to leave right away. Whatever they need, or maybe they don't have medicines because they had to leave in such a rush, especially like if you got hit with a tornado, you may not have that anymore, but emergent needs, whatever those are to include, maybe you need a wheelchair or anything like that.

**Bruce:**

OK. Since this is a disaster that we're talking about and we're responding to it, what would be the alternative to a service member and a family to check in with their command, if they don't have access to the internet?

**Lisa:**

One of the ways, Bruce, that they could do, so let's say they don't even have a cellphone, is that they can go to the nearest first responder and have them to contact their unit or even Military OneSource. And one of the things I would recommend for every member of our audience today is to take down this number, which is for Military OneSource, because they're always there 24/7. You'll always have a person at the other end, but that number is 800-342-9647. And if everybody in our audience were to put that phone number for Military OneSource in their cellphone, even if they don't have connectivity, maybe they can access their contacts and then have someone to make that call for them. Or perhaps they can borrow someone's phone and

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call that number. And again, it's 800-342-9647 for Military OneSource. And Military OneSource is there for all your needs. So, I highly, highly recommend again, 800-342-9647.

**Bruce:**

OK. If a family has special needs, is there anything that they can do before disaster to identify their needs, to make sure that in the event of the need to evacuate that they have support ready for them or available to them?

**Lisa:**

Absolutely. There is a DOD Emergency Preparedness Guide that one could access that tries to help you and give you guidelines of what to do in preparation. And what's very neat about this is again, if you just go onto Military OneSource, if you go to the bottom of any page on Military OneSource, there is underneath quick access, there's a link that says emergency contacts for disasters and evacuations. And when you click on that, it will automatically take you to the emergency contacts for disasters and evacuations page. And then in a red font, it says Defense Department Emergency Preparedness Guide.

There are also other articles that you can find on Military OneSource that are available that take you through different scenarios of things to consider, in case there's a fire and what would you do in case of that or how to prepare for flood, or what do you do in the event of a flood? Do you have a rally point? This way your family members know what to do once they leave the place where the disaster is located to go to a safe haven or to a safe location, and they know where to go.

**Bruce:**

Through this personnel accountability and assessment system, will a service member, will the family be told when it's safe, when it's appropriate for them to return?

**Lisa:**

Yes. And the key of it is, too, is that all of the DOD components are required to have a phone number where one can reach and call in so that they can figure out, well, what is the status? And to also receive further instructions of what to do.

**Bruce:**

So, one thing I'm hearing, and I probably should've noted this kind of earlier on, but this is not some automated, I mean, it is a system, but there's real people on the other end, people who are really checking in. There's a real touch point here where someone has the ability to communicate with somebody at their home installation. Can you talk a little bit about that? They're not merely filling out a form.

**Lisa:**

That is true, because there's someone who's monitoring as the information is coming in, and that can reach out to you. So, for each of the services and they have the family readiness centers, and so, and they have coordinators. These are real humans who are on the other side who can provide that warm touch to help. And then not only that, if you are in a position where maybe you are an overseas contractor, or maybe you're a DOD civilian employee, you can always reach out to Military OneSource where you can have a human who's on the other side that can connect you to other resources in your area to help you in the event of an emergency.

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**Bruce:**

Very interesting. Do you have any final words on this Lisa?

**Lisa:**

My final words are to make sure that you keep your information up to date with DEERS and anytime that you move, or you have a change, you make sure that your family members are all in there. If you have a new addition to your family, you get married or you have a new child and so forth, that you have them in the system and that you know what to do in the event that there is a natural or man-made disaster. And I would highly recommend for our audience to check out our eLearning course or eTutorial. Those are located on MilLife Learning. It's about personnel accountability, and it provides additional information.

**Bruce:**

This is really important information. It's also a lot of information, but, really, we're going to put a bunch of links in the program notes. And from there, people can be off and running, but it's a really important issue. We've all either been through some sort of a disaster or a storm or something, or we've seen accounts of it. We know it can upend your life. And we know that being prepared and having somebody on the other end who can check in and see how you're doing, can make all of the difference. So, thank you, Lisa so much for joining us today.

**Lisa:**

You're welcome, Bruce. And that's one of the advantages of being part of our great military family.

**Bruce:**

I agree. I agree. Lisa Valentine is the program manager for the Defense Department's personnel accountability program.

Hey, I want to let you know before we wrap up that Military OneSource is an official part of the Defense Department. For real, our boss works in the Pentagon. We're a website, a call center, and now we're a podcast. So, of course, we want you to subscribe, but really, it's a good idea, because we get into a whole range of topics designed to help military families navigate military life.

Thanks very much for listening. I'm Bruce Moody. Goodbye.