

"I'm Ready" Campaign Prepares Citizens for Various Disasters: A Community Resilience Lesson from Shelby County, Tennessee

Presented by Ted Fox, Director of Public Works, Shelby County Division of Public Works

Lessons Learned: A successful readiness campaign to prepare citizens for an emergency must involve all facets of the community – from government to chambers of commerce, to private sector businesses, to non-profits – with one organization or person keeping the initiative moving forward. It is important to design an emergency response system from the bottom up that includes everyone from children to adults and that employs seasonal, targeted messaging to help people take action and avoid anxiety and fear. Reaching the community in a variety of ways, using clear and simple messages, is the key to an effective campaign.

In 2006, a study by the American Disaster Preparedness Foundation (ADPF) evaluated the preparedness of the top 30 metro areas in the United States, and Memphis ranked 29th out of 30 markets. The Memphis/Shelby County urban area likely could experience an earthquake with a magnitude of 6.0 or greater in the next 50 years and has already experienced upwards of 200 tremors yearly. Based on the ADPF study, it was clear that the area needed a readiness campaign to help its citizens prepare for a potential disaster.



With the help of Assisi Foundation of Memphis playing a convening role, the process began with eight mayors from the Memphis urban area coming together to devise a plan of action that would educate the residents of Shelby County and better prepare them for emergencies and disaster situations. The mayors reached consensus and clearly recognized that the readiness campaign had to be a community-wide effort, spanning multiple jurisdictions. In the spring of 2007, the Mayors' Collaborative on Preparedness was formed.

Mayor Wharton, a member of this collaborative, suggested that the group take a "retail approach" by asking residents what materials and information they thought would be most useful to them and effective in a disaster. The Assisi Foundation volunteered to fund local research to determine the most effective means of communication with residents.

The research was conducted to determine the following.

- What knowledge did residents possess about preparedness?
- What information did residents need to become better prepared?
- What mode of communication did the residents prefer for receiving preparedness information?

"Sometimes the government has a habit of telling people what they need, and that is not what we wanted to do in our community," said Ted Fox, Director of Public Works for Shelby County. "We wanted the community to tell us how they wanted to be communicated with and the type of message that would help them get onboard and become prepared to handle a disaster."

■ *"I'm Ready" Campaign:
A Lesson in Community Resilience*

Research indicated that across socioeconomic lines the community had little, if any, preparedness. None of the respondents said they felt adequately prepared. The majority of respondents were uncertain about the tools, supplies, precautions, or financial assets they would need to recover from a disaster. The research also revealed that Memphis felt most prepared to endure the following emergencies and/or disasters (in priority order): winter storms, major power outages, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, pandemics, terrorist-related attacks and chemical/radiation/biological attacks.



From the survey, it was evident that area residents wanted to learn about preparedness, and they wanted to get this information via several different mechanisms – mass media, Internet, and printed materials. It was also determined that a strong, coordinated program was needed to go hand-in-hand with the readiness materials; hence, a calendar, DVD, and television show were developed.

Feedback from the community indicated that messaging should be localized and informative, avoiding tones of fear or a strong focus on past disasters. Instead, residents wanted topical information structured around themes such as preparing one's family, home, pets, and automobile, and going a step further, to consider work and school environments.

It was determined that the messages should be given a consistent look and feel across the county and that they should address seasonal threats that could be further broken down into monthly topic areas. For instance, the winter campaign would focus on winter storm preparedness and consider such subjects as cold temperatures, ice and sleet, etc. The summer campaign would focus on extreme heat and water preparedness. The communications would be designed to convey positive messages in an effort to avoid "disaster fatigue," which leads to inaction, and to take into consideration the diverse educational levels within the community. Next, it was determined that families with children, single people living alone, two-person households, single women with children, and immigrant households should be the key targeted demographics for the campaign.

Upon completion of the research, a project team was formed consisting of representatives assigned by each of the mayors to develop a cohesive, coordinated message based on research-generated needs and preferences as well as to implement a dissemination plan for the messages within a certain time line.

Each jurisdiction committed funds to cost share the campaign, with the Assisi Foundation acting as the fiscal agent as well as providing oversight for the project team. Red Deluxe Brand



Development, a local Memphis ad agency, was selected by the team to develop the emergency preparedness campaign. A major component of the campaign was developing the rallying cry "I'm Ready" for the purpose of engagement at the individual level.

Beginning the educational process from the bottom up, the campaign was officially launched in the fall of 2008 with Sesame Street promotional

materials that were designed to reach out to children and families with children. Other outreach and informational materials that were developed include a website (www.readyshelby.org), public service announcements aired by area television stations, a calendar showcasing monthly preparedness activities, and a preparedness kit that includes a CD and booklet.

Following the preparedness launch, a marketing firm, Hemline Creative Marketing, was brought onboard to further refine the "I'm Ready" web site and continue the developing the campaign objectives with the project team. A follow-up survey will be undertaken later in the year to measure the campaign's effectiveness.

"In Shelby County we believe resiliency starts with awareness," said Fox. "With this campaign, we are educating our citizens on how to be prepared, and we hope that this will help our community become more resilient to disaster when it strikes."