Integrating Faith-Based Leaders into Hazardous Weather Communications For Highly Vulnerable Neighborhoods in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas

Barry S. Goldsmith, M.M Torres, L. Wasserman, and W. Donner
NOAA/National Weather Service Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley, TX

Needs Assessment

- RGV Population: 1.35 million
- July: Smaller Faith Study Following Hurricane Katrina: 91% Hispanic
- Weather Enterprise educates high level Faith Leaders as Force Multipliers to Help Vulnerable
- 85% Speak Spanish at Home
- September
- NWS/Weather Enterprise predicts damaging wind/hail episode 6+ hours in advance
- Private/public partnership to Leaders train pastors, priests, down the line
- NWS Overview State Government Officials University of Texas

Efforts in 2016

- First Faith-Based Integrated Weather Team (IWT) Meeting Organized and Conducted (Spring). Held at the Rio Grande Bible Institute. Audience of 60 Included:
  - Two dozen bi-national church leaders
  - County/City Emergency Management from Hidalgo and Cameron County
  - State Government Officials
  - Local Media
  - University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley

- Meeting Topics Included:
  - NWS Overview
  - Substandard Housing in Colonias and Risk Assessment from Wind and Flood
  - Faith Leaders as Force Multipliers to Help Vulnerable Communities Build Resilience and Weather-Readiness
  - Discussion on How Partnerships - Government, Non-Profits, Churches, Other – Can Build Capacity for Hazardous Weather Resilience

- Summer/Autumn Promotional Efforts
  - July: Smaller Faith-Based IWT for Additional Pastors (Pharr, TX)
  - August: Conferencia de Emergencias Para Colonias del Valle (Alamo, TX)
  - Congregations informed on building infrastructure and family resiliency
  - September-December: Rotary International - District 5930 Activities
  - September: Bi-National District Meeting Poster and Oral Presentation for Potential Local or International Grant for NOAA Weather Radios (McAllen)
  - December: Follow-Up Presentation at North Brownsville Club for Local Grant Option

Plans and Goals: Ready, Responsive, Resilient

- “Shelters of Faith”
- Process:
  - Weather Enterprise educates high level faith-based leaders on weather hazards, NWS warnings, NOAA Weather Radio (NWR)
  - Church leaders train pastors, priests, down the line with assistance from Weather Enterprise
  - All levels educate congregations and faith-based communities, especially the most vulnerable
  - NWR receivers provided to all participating churches and community centers and residents per funding plan

- Action:
  - NWS/Weather Enterprise predicts damaging thunderstorm wind/hail episode 6+ hours in advance
  - Participating churches spring into action, notifying congregations of opening during threat period
  - Warning issued; residents hearing NWR (Spanish) evacuate to safe trusted shelter
  - Outcome: Substandard homes destroyed, but families are safe and unharmed

References
U.S. Census Department, 2015: QuickFacts Demographic Update by Texas Counties/Website: http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/48489,48427,48061,48215,48

Corresponding Author Address: 20 S. Vermillion Road, Brownsville, TX 78521
National Weather Service Miami/South Florida
Hidalgo County (TX) Health Department, Edinburg, TX
University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley Graduate College, Edinburg, TX