



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Councilmembers Seek Renewed Commitment to Ensure Immigrant Communities Adequately Prepare for Major Emergencies

LOS ANGELES (Sept. 29, 2008) – As Emergency Preparedness Month comes to an end, Councilmembers José Huizar and Wendy Greuel today called on a renewed commitment from the City of Los Angeles to ensure that immigrant communities are adequately prepared to deal with major emergencies.

Recent disaster response crises nationwide illustrate how language barriers and isolation from public agencies combine to increase the vulnerability of many residents. And a 2008 Tomás Rivera Policy Institute study suggests that Latino and Asian immigrant communities are less prepared and have more difficulty receiving emergency information than others.

“Natural disasters and other tragedies strike without concern for language abilities,” said Councilmember José Huizar, who introduced City legislation to look closer at the issue following the release of the Rivera study. “They affect rich and poor, native and foreign born. An inability to communicate with limited-English speaking residents during a major catastrophe can severely impact public safety for all Angelenos.”

The news conference today draws on the expertise and resources of City agencies and community organizations to help limited-English speaking residents and immigrant communities receive emergency preparedness instructions, as well as teaching them about available resources once disaster strikes.

“The July earthquake put our City to the test,” said Councilwoman Wendy Greuel. “It’s only a matter of time before the next natural disaster strikes the Southland, and we want to ensure our residents, especially the non-English speaking communities, are prepared in case of an emergency. ”

(more)

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Immigrant families are especially vulnerable when disaster strikes due to isolation, limited English skills, and inadequate knowledge about information and resources available during emergencies. A failure to communicate during an emergency not only can hinder a swift and effective response but can needlessly separate families and delay essential support and services.

"Since Los Angeles is a point of entry for immigrants throughout the world, disaster preparedness emphasizes that language is one of the central factors in adequately reaching these communities," said Dr. Harry Pachón, from the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, which along with the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, conducted the disaster preparedness study on urban immigrant communities. "It is essential for our service personnel and government officials to provide immigrants with educational materials and emergency information that can be clearly understood."

The Councilmembers called on Los Angeles, with its substantial immigrant population, to prioritize activities to reach out to these residents and to work with the City's emergency agencies to provide translators and increased funding, if need be, to ensure that more of the City's emergency preparedness materials are printed in foreign languages spoken by City residents.

The City of Los Angeles' Emergency Management Department and the Los Angeles Fire Department's Community Emergency Response Team offers some alternative language instructions to groups and organizations in emergency preparedness. EMD can be reached at (213) 978-2222. LAFD CERT can be reached at (818) 756-9674.

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