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Fairfax County, Virginia, Citizen Corps Council's "Ready... Pack... Go" Campaign

SUMMARY

The Fairfax County, Virginia, Citizen Corps Council's "Ready... Pack... Go" campaign uses faith-based leaders to engage the community and to encourage emergency preparedness.

BACKGROUND

In January 2005, the American Red Cross (ARC) released a survey stating that only 40 percent of Americans had assembled the basic supplies necessary to care for themselves, their families, and their neighbors during an emergency. The survey indicated that only one in ten Americans had developed a personal preparedness kit or a personal or family preparedness plan. According to the ARC, 82 percent of those surveyed understood the importance of preparedness but were unsure how to prepare for emergencies or disasters and where to go to obtain the information.

Following the release of the ARC survey, the Fairfax County Citizen Corps Council recognized a need to address preparedness issues in its county. The Council sought to reach the county's large population through a sustained preparedness campaign. Pastor John Denninger, the Fairfax County Citizen Corps Council faith representative, suggested creating a campaign to encourage the members of the faith community to attain emergency preparedness kits.

"Education is key to preparing our faith communities for emergencies and disasters. Faith communities in Fairfax County have taken the leadership role to make this happen through the 'Ready... Pack... Go' campaign. Many more county residents will be prepared with an emergency supply kit as a result of this faith community training effort."
--Sandra Chisholm, Fairfax County's Community Interfaith Liaison Officer

GOAL

The "Ready... Pack... Go" campaign encourages faith communities to educate their members on the importance of preparing emergency supply kits.

DESCRIPTION

The "Ready... Pack... Go" campaign trains faith leaders to conduct preparedness education and awareness workshops in their own communities. The committee determined that the program should focus on three core messages: make a kit, make a plan, and be informed. The Citizen Corps Council's strategy for implementing the program focused on developing the necessary materials, reaching out to faith community leaders, and conducting training sessions.

The Fairfax County Citizen Corps Council faith representative, Pastor John Denninger, worked with a steering committee to develop the campaign materials and outreach efforts. The committee was comprised of the Citizen Corps Council chair, the Citizen Corps Council faith community representative, the director of the Community Interfaith Liaison Office, representatives of the Fairfax County Office of Emergency Management, and representatives of the Fairfax County Office of Family Services.

Campaign Materials

The steering committee began by creating a theme for the preparedness campaign that encourages personal preparedness and the importance of sharing preparedness information. The committee consulted existing preparedness campaigns, including the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) *Ready* and the ARC's *Together We Prepare*. The committee decided to use "Ready... Pack... Go" as the theme to deliver these messages.

DHS Ready Campaign

The *Ready* campaign is a national public service advertising campaign designed to educate and to empower Americans to prepare for and to respond to emergencies, including natural disasters and potential terrorist attacks. The goal of the campaign is to get Americans to get a kit, to make a plan, and to be informed.

Developing Campaign Materials

The Fairfax County Office of Public Affairs worked with the steering committee to develop a set of original campaign materials at no cost to the Citizen Corps Council. The materials include:

- A "Ready... Pack... Go" logo;
- A guide for community leaders with instructions on how to implement the campaign;
- Several posters and fliers advertising the campaign;
- Several educational posters describing the need for a kit and a list of suggested items in an emergency kit; and
- Text describing the campaign and its core messages that can be used for newsletters, bulletins, and emails.



The materials also recommended a series of next steps faith leaders could take to encourage preparedness. The suggestions included creating a communication plan, assessing the needs of neighbors who might be vulnerable, preparing a faith community emergency plan, identifying relevant emergency response skills among members of faith communities, and obtaining emergency training or becoming a volunteer by joining Citizen Corps.

Faith Community Outreach

In May 2005, the steering committee initiated community outreach. A member of the committee, Sandy Chisolm, serves in the Community Interfaith Liaison Office of the Fairfax County government and maintains relationships with a wide array of faith communities in the area. She also maintains contact information for faith community leaders and provided the list to the Council for campaign outreach purposes.

Ms. Chisolm sent a letter introducing the campaign along with a copy of all the campaign materials to representatives in approximately 1,000 faith communities. The introduction letter, signed by the Citizen Corps Council's faith community representative, urged the leaders of faith-based organizations to help their communities prepare for emergencies.

The letter described the “Ready... Pack... Go” campaign and recommended that faith leaders appoint a representative to attend the training session, distribute printed materials at their places of worship, and discuss the program in community meetings. The committee posted advertisements for the training sessions in all county government buildings, local stores and offices, local newspapers, and county government newsletters. To widen the distribution, the committee also posted the invitation and all campaign materials on the county government’s Web site and on the Fairfax County Citizen Corps Web site.

“Ready... Pack... Go” Training Sessions

The campaign steering committee held ten “Ready... Pack... Go” training sessions from June to August 2005. Various government facilities located throughout Fairfax County hosted the ten sessions. Each session lasted for 2 hours. The sessions provided faith community leaders with information needed to run their own workshops on emergency preparedness and provided them with a full set of campaign materials. During each course, an ARC representative provided a hands-on demonstration of a home emergency supply kit; the representative also supplied instructions on how to use each item and how to properly maintain the kit. Representatives from the Community Interfaith Liaison Office and the Citizen Corps Council then led discussions on effective ways to promote emergency preparedness among the constituents of faith-based organizations. They encouraged faith leaders to mold the campaign to fit their individual communities.

Pastor Denninger asked faith leaders to lead by example and to first develop their own home emergency kits and plans. Trainers also encouraged faith leaders to develop emergency plans for their respective communities, to identify particularly vulnerable populations within their communities, to prepare community shelter plans for their houses of worship, and to identify members of their congregations with emergency response skills (e.g. disaster training, first aid certification).

Seventy-two faith community representatives from varying faith communities and religions participated in the 2005 sessions.

Future Plans

Building on the success of the 2005 activities, the Fairfax County Citizen Corps Council is continuing its efforts to train faith community leaders. The Council is encouraging faith leaders to make a plan and providing guidance on the development of a household communication plan. The Council is also encouraging Council members, faith community leaders, and other members of the community to develop their own home disaster preparedness kits.

Members of the Fairfax County Citizen Corps Council are also interested in building upon the designation of September as National Preparedness Month. The Council hopes to link observance of the September 11, 2001, anniversary to personal and family preparedness by holding annual training sessions in September and using the yearly event to remind county households to stock their emergency kits.

REQUIREMENTS

Keys to Success

Pre-Existing Faith Networks. The program could not have succeeded without the active participation of the Community Interfaith Liaison Office. The office’s network of county faith-based organizations was central to the steering committee’s efforts to engage community members.

Partnerships. The success of the “Ready... Pack... Go” campaign was based on multiple partnerships among local government agencies and religious organizations.

Resources

The program drew exclusively on the pre-existing resources of participating individuals and organizations. Steering committee members participated as part of their professional responsibilities or their roles on the Citizen Corps Council. Employees from the Office of Public Affairs developed the educational materials during the course of their daily duties.

Links

Fairfax County Citizen Corps

<http://www.fairfaxcountycitizencorps.org/>

CITATIONS

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