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Emergency Preparedness Among Salem's Hispanic Population: Proposal to Improve Emergency Preparedness and Engagement

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**Emergency Preparedness Among Salem's Hispanic Population:
Proposal to Improve Emergency Preparedness and Engagement**

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The emergency preparedness of the residents of the City of Salem is of great importance to the City and the resilience of the community. The City's emergency management mission states "to ensure that the City is prepared for a disaster by ensuring coordination of protection, prevention, mitigation, response, and recovery activities that increase the City's capabilities to minimize loss of life and reduce impacts from disasters" (City of Salem, 2014). Oregon and the City of Salem are susceptible to a variety of emergencies and disasters. These disasters are infrequent compared to other areas of the country that face a recurring threat of hurricanes, tornados, severe winter storms or other events and may lead to complacency. Due to the infrequency of disasters, it is even more important that emergency preparedness efforts engage the population and maintain preparedness efforts to ensure that the community is prepared for an eventual disaster.

The Hispanic population of Salem accounts for more than one fifth of the total population (US Census Bureau, 2017) and needs to be an integral part of emergency preparedness efforts. Hispanics require an emergency preparedness approach that addresses the diversity of this population group, barriers to emergency preparedness and communication challenges. Emergency preparedness education, outreach and communication with the Hispanic population have not been fully addressed.

Background

Salem is the State Capital of Oregon, nestled in the Willamette Valley between the coast range and the Cascade mountains. The Willamette river flows through the center of the city and divides Marion and Polk counties. Salem is vulnerable to a variety of natural, technological, and manmade disasters that range from hazardous materials release, terrorism, flooding, winter

storms, fires, droughts, and train derailment among others (City of Salem, 2014). There is also the high probability of a catastrophic Cascadia subduction zone earthquake impacting the area.

According to the US Census Bureau, Salem has a population of 169,798 with 21.7% Hispanic and 11.4% of the population is foreign born. It is estimated that 21.2% of the population speaks a language other than English at home (US Census Bureau, 2017). The Salem-Keizer public schools 2017 report indicates that 39% of the student body is Hispanic and 19% are English Language Learners, meaning that English is not their primary language. The Hispanic population has not been a focus of emergency preparedness efforts. Immigrant and limited English language proficient populations have historically suffered during times of disasters due to several causes that are discussed below.

The Hispanic community have a variety of barriers that limit their emergency preparedness. Nadia Siddiqui, Jonathan Purtle and Dennis Andrulis, authors of the article *Ethnicity and Minority Status Effects on Preparedness*, identify language and cultural barriers, socio-economic issues and distrust of government as barriers to emergency preparedness among the Hispanic community. Recent disasters have highlighted how these barriers affect emergency preparedness and limit access to services. On August 25th, 2017 Hurricane Harvey devastated the Gulf Coast of Texas. The Hispanic community was adversely affected by the disaster, as a result of these barriers this population suffered when it came to receiving disaster relief assistance. After the hurricane, 46% of immigrants “were worried that if they tried to get help in recovering from Hurricane Harvey, they would draw attention to their or a family member’s immigration status” (Wu, Hamel, Brodie, Sim, and Marks, 2018). Rumors of immigration raids at shelters and on roads leading to the shelters kept some immigrants from receiving food and shelter for fear of being a target of immigration raids and discrimination (Romero, and Jordan,

2017). Siddiqui, Purtle and Andrulis discuss how “in the aftermath of the wildfires in San Diego, California in 2007, immigrants were reluctant to obtain medical care, evacuate from dangerous conditions and ask for basic necessities such as food, shelter and clothing” (2011, p.3). If emergency management addresses the issues that disproportionately affect the Hispanic population in Salem, it can improve the resilience of this population and the City of Salem in an eventual emergency or disaster.

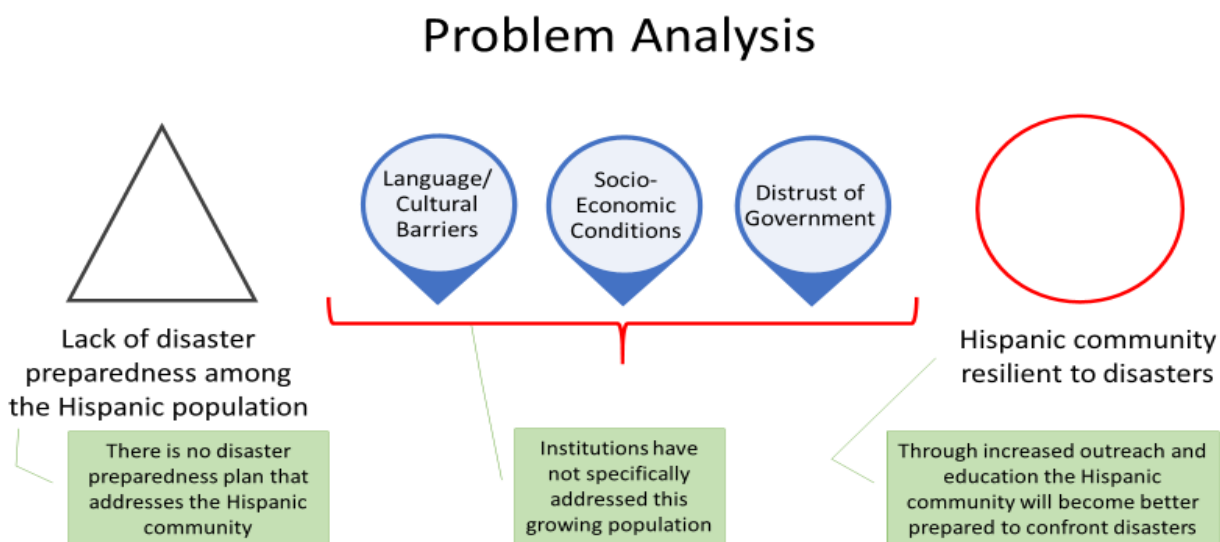
Problem Definition

The lack of emergency preparedness of the Hispanic community in Salem, Oregon affects the ability of approximately one fifth of the population to confront an eventual emergency or disaster. The 2018 cyanotoxin water advisory highlighted the lack of a multilingual approach to emergency management (Mano a Mano, 2018). The deficiencies in emergency preparedness of the Hispanic community is amplified by lack of communication and engagement.

Lessons learned from disasters illustrate the deficiencies in preparedness among the population and how the Hispanic community is not adequately addressed during emergencies (Mano a Mano, 2018). Jeffry Bethel, Sloane Burke and Amber Britt analyzed data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) 2006-2010 survey in the article *Disparity in Disaster Preparedness Between Racial/Ethnic Groups* where they identified gaps in disaster preparedness among minorities, particularly Hispanics: “Of the racial and ethnic groups, the presence of all four household preparedness items, an emergency evacuation plan, and a medication supply was lowest among Spanish-speaking Hispanics” (p.113). According to the BRFSS survey, 66.2% of Spanish-speaking Hispanics had a three-day supply of food compared to 84.3% of the overall population. Only 50% of the Spanish-speaking Hispanic population had a 3-day supply of medication compared to 89% of the overall population (Bethel, Burke, & Britt,

2013. p.112). This lack of preparation which is influenced by language and cultural barriers, socioeconomic conditions and the distrust of the community towards government agencies (Siddiqui, Purtle, & Andrulis, 2011), emphasizes the need to improve disaster preparedness among the Hispanic population. These barriers to emergency preparedness are illustrated in the Problem Analysis Diagram (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Problem Analysis Diagram



Analyzing Solutions

The emergency preparedness of the Hispanic community can be addressed through three potential options.

Option One: The status quo. The city of Salem can continue to translate documents and important information as needed and distribute it through existing platforms and mainstream media outlets. This option utilizes existing staff and does not require additional costs or hiring staff. The disadvantage is that it does not ensure that the information reaches the intended population and does not improve their emergency preparedness.

Option Two: Distribute cultural and language appropriate information. The City could Develop material that is language and culturally appropriate and distribute it through platforms utilized by the Hispanic community to ensure that the Hispanic population is informed of important issues. This option requires staff that can develop this material and are aware of the various media platforms utilized by the Hispanic community. This option improves the communication with the Hispanic community but does not actively engage them or improve disaster preparedness among this population.

Option Three: Dynamic Engagement. Develop and implement a multifaceted proactive approach to community engagement and emergency preparedness utilizing a wide variety of community partners. This option engages the Hispanic community improving communication and education prior to an emergency and maintains communication during emergencies ensuring that this population is prepared and educated about what to do during emergencies. This approach requires allocation of resources including bilingual staff that can focus on education and outreach with Salem’s Hispanic community.

The evaluation of options to improve the emergency preparedness of the Hispanic community can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure. 2 Evaluations of Options Matrix

Evaluation of Options

Options	Pros	Cons
Status Quo: Maintain the current practice of translating information as needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost effective • Utilizes current bilingual employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates increased workload for bilingual personnel • Does not effectively reach the intended population
Distribute cultural and language sensitive material: Develop culturally and language appropriate material released through platforms that are utilized by the Hispanic community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves communication with Hispanic community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May need to hire personnel or contract out the development of this material • Does not actively engage the Hispanic community
Dynamic Engagement: Develop and implement a multifaceted proactive approach to community engagement and emergency preparedness utilizing a wide variety of community partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fosters interactive communication between the Hispanic community and community partners • Utilizes community resources more effectively to engage the Hispanic population. • Improves emergency preparedness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires allocation of resources to support engagement • Dedicated personnel are required to facilitate and maintain engagement

Recommendations

To improve the emergency preparedness and engagement of the Hispanic population in Salem, it is necessary to do more than just translate and distribute preparedness information. An active program to engage and maintain that engagement is required to create a resilient community that is prepared for emergencies. The **Dynamic Engagement** option is the preferred method to improve the emergency preparedness of this community and foster engagement. This will improve communications for everyday activities and ensure that the Hispanic population is informed during emergencies. This option includes compiling a list of community partners and developing a plan that includes objectives to improve the emergency preparedness and engagement of the Hispanic population in Salem.

Objectives

1. Ensure that the Hispanic population in Salem receives emergency preparedness training.
 - a. Create a three (3) minute video about emergency preparedness and education options in Spanish to distribute on social media.
 - b. Develop a two-hour presentation on family and community emergency preparedness in Spanish.
 - c. Distribute emergency preparedness information in Spanish among the Hispanic community.
 - d. Offer additional training including CERT classes in Spanish at locations that cater to the Hispanic population where the participants feel safe.
2. Develop ongoing two-way communication between emergency management and the Hispanic population.
 - a. Implement a telephone line with information updates in multiple languages

- b. Develop language and culturally appropriate messages regarding emergency preparedness.
 - c. Distribute emergency preparedness messages on platforms utilized by the Hispanic community (radio, newsletters, magazines, CCTV, social media, etc.).
 - d. Actively involve community groups to encourage communication of emergency preparedness issues to build trust and support during emergencies.
3. Involve community partners in emergency preparedness.
 - a. Utilize community partners to distribute emergency preparedness information.
 - b. Recruit educational institutions and social service agencies to assist in signing people up for the Salem Emergency Alerts.
 - c. Identify private businesses that can collaborate with emergency preparedness efforts.
 - d. Collaborate with faith-based organizations that offer services in Spanish.
 4. Engage the Hispanic community in emergency preparedness.
 - a. Staff emergency preparedness information booths at the fair, Latino festivals, Spanish music concerts (see figure 3) and other events.
 - b. Post informational flyers on bulletin boards at Latino businesses, community organizations, non-governmental organizations and government agencies that serve the Hispanic population.
 - c. Sponsor events that cater to the Hispanic community. See figure 4 for an example of the Festival Latino sponsored by the City of Albany.

Figure 3. Example of events in Salem



Figure 4. Albany Festival Latino



Conclusion

Improving the emergency preparedness of the Hispanic community requires that Emergency Management and the City play an active role in engaging the Hispanic population and maintaining that engagement. Community partners can change over time and

need to be constantly included in activities and discussions to ensure that everyone is involved and maintains interest in emergency preparedness activities. In 2011, the University of Oregon Sustainable Cities Initiative published “Engaging the Latino Community in Salem”. The report has many good suggestions that lay a framework for improving engagement of the Hispanic community, many of these suggestions have not been implemented. As with any project, the implementation and ongoing follow up are essential for it to have long lasting effects. The emergency preparedness of Salem’s Hispanic community poses challenges, but also opportunities to work towards a more resilient community. Through creative and innovative approaches to education and outreach, the City can improve the disaster preparedness of the Hispanic community. Once implemented, it will be possible to modify the approach to reach out to the other minority populations with limited English language proficiency.

Moving Forward

To ensure that the Hispanic population in Salem is prepared for emergencies, I suggest that the City of Salem Emergency Management, City Manager, City Council and all City employees make a commitment to improve the emergency preparedness of the Hispanic community in Salem. Increasing hiring of bilingual and bicultural staff will improve the ability

of the City to improve the engagement of the Hispanic community. The next step should include compiling a list of community partners active in the Hispanic community and increasing City participation in Hispanic activities and meetings.

Hiring a full time emergency preparedness education and outreach coordinator that is bilingual will help ensure that the Hispanic community is prepared and informed regarding emergencies and that there is momentum moving forward to improve the emergency preparedness of Salem residents and the Hispanic community. Engaging the Hispanic community in emergency preparedness efforts will have long lasting effects and improve the resiliency of the community when disaster strikes.

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