

NCR Strategic Communicators Efforts

The “Be Ready. Make a Plan.” campaign revealed that the region’s residents want more information—about how both they and their governments can prepare for disaster.



In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, there is an ever greater need for this information. Public confidence in local governments' ability to respond to a disaster has dropped.



In the NCR, the news media has reflected the public's concern. It is clear that many members of the public and the media remain unaware of the NCR's disaster preparations.

Glance at Disaster Response Failures
By The Associated Press
Saturday, April 29, 2006; 1:12 PM

-- Highlights of the White House and congressional investigations of disaster planning and response failures exposed by Hurricane Katrina:

- A special House committee criticized local, state and federal officials, saying they lacked urgency in preparing for disasters. It found that all levels of government moved too slowly to help victims once Katrina hit. The report did not make any recommendations for change.

Long term: a UASI-funded, regional strategic communications plan to inform the public and the media about the NCR's ongoing homeland security preparations and promote the message of personal preparedness – this plan will be developed by a vendor by the end of the summer.



Risk communications messages, developed by another vendor, will be used:

- To deliver public information which is clear, concise, and unified
- To ensure that a network of expert spokespersons will be reassuring and supportive during emergencies as they serve as resources for the media.
- To save time, they will be pre-written to address various situations and different scenarios

However, something needs to be done now

- The public must be credibly educated now about threats to their safety and property
- They must learn more now about their neighborhood, school, workplace and community emergency plans
- The media should be informed now about regional/local emergency management efforts, so they will cover the topic in the future from a basis of knowledge

A new Strategic Communications Group (SCG) will work with the Senior Policy Group and others to deal with these short-term needs.

The SCG will:

- Be comprised of public information officers from D.C., Maryland, Virginia and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Communicate National Capital Region (NCR) homeland security accomplishments on a regular, consistent basis to the media, the region's legislative bodies and members of Congress

The SCG will:

- Serve as a rapid response team to address erroneous information in the media or elsewhere
 - Create a quarterly NCR newsletter so all stakeholders have the same information
- Compile answers to the common questions, such as “who’s in charge?”

The SCG will:

- Be the "go-to" team for area media and others concerning region-wide preparedness and homeland security accomplishments

The SCG will:

- Leverage opportunities to showcase the NCR's leadership and build credibility and confidence that will position the NCR to lead more effectively during emergencies

The SCG will:

- Draft short message points, supported by facts that are clear and easy for the public to understand concerning region-wide preparedness and homeland security accomplishments.

The SCG will:

- Do proactive media promotion of NCR accomplishments and preparedness.
- Bi-monthly “Ask the Homeland Security Official” program on WTWP/WTOP
- Meet with the electronic media bureau chiefs to explain what the National Capital Region does, highlight key accomplishments and develop relationships.
- Meet with the Washington Post and Washington Times editorial boards
- Contact all the homeland security publications and supply NCR information

This centralized communications effort for the NCR is not intended in any way to silence other local and regional voices -

but rather to supplement and to make everyone aware of a common message for our many voices