

**Franklin County Emergency Management and Homeland Security
Somalia Forum Discussion
December 3rd, 2009
Time 2:00-3:45 pm**

Representatives participating in the discussion

Representatives from the Somali Community Organizations
Columbus Fire Department
Franklin County Red Cross
211 Call Center
First Link

Discussion Format

This modified forum was included as a part of the regularly scheduled meeting of the Franklin County Emergency Management and Homeland Security Somali Citizen Preparedness Subcommittee. The forum discussion was moderated by Dave Patton from the Kettering Foundation on behalf of the Mid Ohio Regional Planning Committee's Plan for Populations with Mobility Needs. All attendees were encouraged to participate with specific input requested from the representatives from the Somali community.

Discussion

The discussion was initiated by having the participants discuss their experiences that they encountered with the Hurricane Ike wind storm in 2008.

General Comments received:

- The neighborhood residents reached out more to their own Somali organizations than the individuals in their community;
- Many family members moved in with their relatives- two specific comments reinforced that they had 9 people in his house while another member stated that they had 27 people in a four bedroom house for most of the week that the power was out;
- They felt with the power being out that their community represented a 3rd world country;
- Somali culture reinforces that people are to take care of each other;
- Religion is an integral part of their culture;
- The identified leader of the Somali Community needs to be involved for the local community to actively participate;
- Main goal was to have their electricity restored;
- Do not like to use emergency shelters because they are more likely to rely on one another;
- Will only use shelter if house is not livable;

- Shelters have a stigma that they are used only by the lower class of stigma; and
- Will most likely stay around their own home and try to get emergency information;

Communication comments

- Main communication is to contact their community leader, and to have faith in that God will protect you;
- They do not currently listen to the radio;
- They would consider a hot line, most likely coordinated with the 211 line for information during a weather emergency;
- Constraint is that their culture emphasizes the be skeptical and that they have to see it for themselves before they think it is true; (with this comment they fully understand that makes it really difficult to evacuate in the event of an emergency because it might be too late);
- It is important that any form of communication that is to be established by the various governmental agencies be built upon the community resources that currently exist; and
- Emergency communications should also be delivered in Somali language on local radio and television;

Trust issues

- They responded that they trust another Somali first before going outside their community;
- There has to be a Cross cultural approach as the children growing up are more receptive to other forms of communication;
- They think of the Community Centers as local government, but that is only if they are actively partnered with Somali representatives; and
- Really need to examine the trust issues by working closely with the Somali leaders;

Registry- this is to receive notification of emergency situation

- Need to explain importance of registration for emergency contacts;
- This especially makes sense for disabled persons;
- Concerns raised about privacy; and
- There is some distrust of government to administer the Registry; some of this distrust is because of the governmental roles in the civil war in Somali;

Transportation

- Use of transportation resources is dependent on the severity of the emergency;

Summary

The discussion was very free flowing with the agency representatives also participating. The representatives from the Somali community were very open with their comments and

offered tremendous insight into their culture and how they would respond in the event of an emergency.

Based upon the comments received it is extremely important that any governmental agency better understand the importance of culture and religion in working with the Somali community. To emphasize this point consider the following comments:

- Somali culture reinforces that people are to take care of each other;
- Religion is an integral part of their culture;
- The identified leader of the Somali Community needs to be involved for the local community to actively participate;
- They responded that they trust another Somali first before going outside their community;
- There has to be a Cross cultural approach as the children growing up are more receptive to other forms of communication;
- They think of the Community Centers as local government, but that is only if they are actively partnered with Somali representatives; and
- Constraint is that their culture emphasizes the be skeptical and that they have to see it for themselves before they think it is true; (with this comment they fully understand that makes it really difficult to evacuate in the event of an emergency because it might be too late);
- It is important that any form of communication that is to be established by the various governmental agencies be built upon the community resources that currently exist;

This forum discussion was extremely enlightening and emphasized the importance of actively engaging the local Somali leadership to incorporate any emergency plans for mobility populations with their culture and religious views. Without the incorporation of such views from the Somali community the chances of successfully developing the various emergency response activities that are to be available to respond to a local emergency will be greatly reduced.

Listing of Comments

Emergency Wind Event Discussion Scenario

- Oral Society
- Don't seek information-want to see 1st hand
- Trust other Somalis
- Need preparedness education
- Look to community centers as government;
- Provide knowledge of basic emergency preparedness;
- Registry is also a possibility;
- Registry needs to be explained by the Somalia community;
 - Explain benefits vs. risk
- Population moves frequently;
- Use existing channels for help -COAAA;
- Would use rendezvous points;

- More likely to evacuate when disaster is there;
- Fell that the shelters are for the homeless or lower levels of society;
- Outreach through established agencies;
- Emergencies and concern about religious holidays;
- Not prepared –events helped teach preparedness;
- Did not think that agencies worked together and provided services;
- Wanted assistance from emergency organizations –post incident;
- Community came together;
- Need Somalia, community training in disaster preparedness;
- Info sources –TV, newspaper, hand held devices;
- Tell clients about upcoming events;
- Trust sources of information –specifically elderly;
- Somalia Hotline -# to call when radio goes off –expand 211;
- Did not use shelters – rely on each other;
- Don't get information on shelter-assume everywhere is impacted.