Mitigation and Education (MES) of the NTHMP discusses Diversity and Inclusion, COVID-19 and other Actions

Tuesday, Sept 29, 2020
4:00pm AST/4:00pm EDT/1:00pm PDT/12:00pm AKST/10:00am HST/6:00am GST
Co-Chairs: Tamra Biasco; Christa von Hillebrandt; and Kevin Miller

Participants:

Tamra Biasco, FEMA Region 10; Christa von Hillebrandt-Andrade, US NWS Caribbean Tsunami Warning Program; Summer Ohlendorf, National Tsunami Warning Center, Alaska; Elyssa Tappero and Maximillian Dixon, Washington Emergency Management; Althea Rizzo, Oregon Emergency Management; Nic Arcos, NCEI; Jeff Lorens, NWS Western Region HQ; Kevin Miller, Dominique Degrate-Word and Yvette LaDuke, Governor’s Office of Emergency Services, California; Todd Becker, California; Yvette LaDuke, California; Ian Sears, NWS Tsunami; Victor Huerfano, Puerto Rico Seismic Network, Wildaomaris, Puerto Rico Emergency Management; Robert White, British Columbia and Amanda Siok, FEMA Region 10

The Mitigation and Education Subcommittee (MES) of the NTHMP held a virtual meeting on September 29, 2020. The meeting included a keynote speaker on diversity and inclusion, Ana-Marie Jones. Her presentation was followed by a discussion on the impact of COVID 19 and other MES actions.

Ana-Marie Jones is the former Executive Director of the non-profit Collaborating Agencies Responding to Disasters, a Facilitator and Convener of Communities, a Shameless Purveyor of Positive Preparedness, and Author. She provided an engaging presentation about motivating preparedness and inclusiveness. She indicated the transition of the terms from special needs, at-risk, marginalized to ultimately morphing into disabilities and access and functional needs, which covers a wide range of groups. She highlighted a yearlong campaign including millions of dollars and in-kind donations to commemorate the 1906 earthquake, which returned survey results of 6% “prepared”. Based on her experience, she emphasized that to engage with vulnerable sectors it is very important to make preparedness conversations shamelessly positive and provide preparedness messaging to communities in an understandable and culturally sensitive format. She shared the Law of Diffusion of Innovation Curve that highlights the different place where people are with regards to innovations, from innovators and early and eager acceptors thru CAVE dwellers, who are Consistently, Against, Virtually, Everything. She also strongly recommended using Social Science research/findings for the development of brochures and/or outreach materials as they can help identify the value people may give to materials.

Christa von Hillebrandt-Andrade led a discussion on actions and readjustments that may be required in the light of COVID 19 pandemic. In her opening remarks, she raised the observation that health issues are not considered in the NTHMP Strategic Plan.

Laura Kong indicated that as COVID-19 expanded it was important to remind people that COVID-19 is a factor evacuation is still necessary if a tsunami arrives. This drove the UNESCO/IOC regional tsunami warning systems to develop guidance to be adapted at the national and local level. It recommends looking at plans and consider how to provide clear guidance to the populations. She highlighted that there have been no significant reports of degradation of Tsunami warning services due to COVID-19.

Wildaomaris Gonzalez of Puerto Rico indicated that the IOC document for the Caribbean was shared, updated and encouraged additional planning for shelters and even a COVID Quake M 8.5 exercise. Emergency managers have been tasked with detailing their plans and resource needs, including improvement to communication and equipment. Wildaomaris is currently working with 6 agencies to become TsunamiReady Supporters and was eager to implement Ana Marie’s recommendations as she
works with constituents directly. During COVID-19, Puerto Rico has experienced 11,000 earthquakes opposed to approximately 3,000 earthquakes last year, so they are stressing the importance of being ready.

Christa provided that during previous evacuations, Puerto Rico had an issue with over evacuation, so they are stressing the message about potential evacuees to consider the size of the evacuation zones during COVID-19.

Kevin Miller indicated that California has provided examples of alternatives to congregate shelters such as closed universities providing dorm rooms as evacuation points to families. In addition, California set up evacuation points and then placed people into hotels; California fairgrounds are open if people prefer to camp/shelter outside; and it is important to perform temperature checks, separate cohorts, provide deep cleaning of facilities, serve individual instead buffet style meals, and have enhanced medical staffing/nursing available during evacuation orders.

Brad Baker, Santa Rosa County, Florida Emergency Manager shared his experience with hurricane Sally and related evacuations considering COVID-19. They pooled people to a rally point and then moved people to hotels; provided non-congregate shelters for families and congregate shelters for special needs populations. Instead of 50 square feet per person they increased to 100 square feet per person, provided masks, hand sanitizer, and per day snack pack boxes for families. They expanded the cleaning regimen during evacuations and performed extensive deep cleaning upon completion. There were no increase to COVID-19 positivity. Persons in the congregate shelters were tested before they left the shelter – all persons tested negative. There was specific messaging related to the storm surge for persons concerned with evacuating: **“the storm surge kills, so if you are concerned about COVID, the surge can kill as well; evacuation takes precedence over COVID-19 concerns”**.

The MES will be following up on both of these new topics for MES: Inclusion and Health considerations.

The rest of the meeting was focused on three major MES projects: TsunamiZone.org, Social Science Report, and the Maritime Guidance Website.

TsunamiZone.Org is the centralized source for tsunami preparedness information. It provides regionalized information, is in English, Spanish, and French languages and provides capability to register for large exercises, such as Tsunami Preparedness week, as well as a calendar of events. All stakeholders are encouraged to look at the website and provide feedback for further enhancement. Kevin mentioned USVI was interested in having its own page and Victor indicated Puerto Rico also looked forward to its own page. As PR and USVI were part of the Caribbean page, care would be needed that the sites reflect consistent regional information.

Elyssa Tappero and Maximillian Dixon of Washington Emergency Management highlighted the following lessons and deliverables from the Social Science Project which was recently completed.

1. Stress the message: **“Don’t wait for the siren, ground shaking is your warning”**. They have also designed posters and pull-up banners to emphasize the aforementioned message and local vs distant tsunamis.
2. Advertise/push the NOAA radio and consider disseminating the NOAA radios at presentations as raffle items. The 2-Weeks Ready App is coming soon to include tsunami info, local vs distant tsunamis definitions, web page about the various alerts and alert definitions, and a tracking page of site views, considering the many views received for the wildfires.
3. Myths still persists. Some of the the post survey results shared were: less than ½ of survey participants have go to bags; almost all participants learned that it will take more time to prepare than it would for the tsunami to arrive; less than ½ of the participants walked their evacuation routes; of the participants that had kits, less than ½ of the kits had all of the essential items such as water, warm clothing.
4. Details related to the Social Science Project was featured in a two-part series in TsuInfo Alert

Kevin discussed MES’ next steps and thoughts to keep in mind for the next meeting are approach for another Social Science with a different product such as mapping and/or notification after a recent tsunami.

Maximillian added that pre-planning will be critical component because Social Science projects can be expensive. It is important to make sure the partners are prepped in advance on what they need to provide and when to the consultant.

Kevin Miller and Todd Becker noted that they received feedback from the west coast, Alaska, and Caribbean partners and incorporated the feedback into Tsunami Maritime Guidance Website. The website is designed by audience, has information for the boating community, incorporates outreach materials from NTHMP members, and has information geared towards Emergency Managers, Harbor Managers, and Port Masters. Steps through mitigation planning in the context of meeting TsunamiReady® criteria, and listing projects to individual harbors are also included. The site has feedback form to provide critique, links, or any materials or documents to be included on the site. Discussions are underway on the final hosting of the website.

Kevin adjourned the meeting at 6:00 PM AST/EDT, 3:00 PM PDT.