

# HISPANIC OUTREACH –HURRICANE MATTHEW



**The South Carolina  
Commission For Minority Affairs**

## **HURRICANE MATTHEW: ESF 15 HISPANIC COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

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## State of South Carolina



## Commission for Minority Affairs

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November 15, 2016

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners and staff of the South Carolina Commission for Minority Affairs, I take this opportunity to commend our Governor, the Honorable Nikki F. Haley, Mr. Kim Stenson, Director, South Carolina Emergency Management Division, Mr. Joseph Farmer, EMD Chief of External Affairs and Mr. Derrec Becker, EMD Public Affairs Officer, for their superior leadership prior to and following the arrival of Hurricane Matthew. Their quick and definitive actions prior to the storm saved countless lives and significantly reduced the loss of property.

I also commend staff members and volunteers who assisted with the planning and execution of our state's plan of action in preparation for Hurricane Matthew. Extraordinary teamwork was experienced across support functions at the State EMD Operations Center and across the state. Many agencies, organizations and individuals worked long hours to ensure the well being of the citizens of our state during the storm.

While there is still much work to be done following the aftermath of the storm, including the assessment of damages, clean up and more, state government and private citizens continue to work diligently to address the needs of families and individuals impacted by Hurricane Matthew.

We, at the Commission for Minority Affairs, will continue supporting the mission and the work of the South Carolina Emergency Management Division in keeping with our mission to alleviate the causes and effects of poverty and deprivation among members of the state's minority populations. Therefore, please call upon us when we may be of assistance in reaching out to the communities we serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas J. Smith".

Thomas J. Smith  
Executive Director

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## ESF 15-SC Commission for Minority Affairs-Hispanic Outreach

On October 4, 2016, the South Carolina Emergency Management Division (SCEMD) personnel and volunteers began contacting agencies and individuals to determine their availability should the SEOC (State Emergency Operations Center) become activated due to Hurricane Matthew's approach towards our coast. At the time of the initial call, the SEOC was only partially activated and carefully monitored the path of Hurricane Matthew. Captain David Hare from the National Guard was tasked to call and begin scheduling the Emergency Support Function–Public Information (ESF) 15 team volunteers to see who would be available should the state warrant a full activation.

Captain David Hare contacted Ms. Lee Serralta McElveen, Hispanic Affairs Coordinator for the SC Commission for Minority Affairs, to determine her availability as well as the availability of her team of volunteers. Ms. McElveen reported her availability and committed to ensuring the availability of her volunteers to assist the SCEMD with ESF 15 duties, as well as efforts to reach the Hispanic community.

The SC Commission for Minority Affairs is tasked under the SCEMD Operations Plan-ESF 15 Public Information Division, to assist the South Carolina Emergency Management Division with reaching out to communities with language barriers, with a focus on the Hispanic community, to ensure they are informed in the event of a state of emergency. The SCEMD Operations plan indicates the following:

### **G. SC Commission for Minority Affairs**

**1. In coordination with SCEMD Public Information, the Commission will develop and disseminate written Spanish language disaster/preparedness Public Service Announcements (PSA), news releases and other disaster related public information to local/county emergency management offices, applicable broadcasts and print media outlets.**

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**2. During periods of activation and at other times, as requested, provide bilingual services during print/on-air broadcast media interviews, press conferences and other live media events. Annex 15 SCEOP Annex 15-7 15 April 2015.**

**3. Develop plans and procedures to ensure the widest distribution of disaster information via Spanish language print and broadcast media outlets.**

Upon her notification, Ms. McElveen alerted her Executive Director, Mr. Thomas J. Smith, about the possibility of state activation and the status of Hurricane Matthew. At that time, Ms. McElveen began taking the steps needed to staff the SEOC with volunteers and other key leaders in the coastal areas and prepare for an emergency, should an order of state activation occur.

Recruiting efforts and duties to be performed would include translating press and news releases, assisting callers requesting general information, helping produce news releases after the Governor's press conference and contacting the Hispanic media and the other social media outlets as necessary to disseminate information to the community.

Ms. McElveen was responsible for coordinating and recruiting individuals to assist with ESF 15 functions as it pertained to language barriers specific to the Hispanic/Latino community in our state.

The following volunteers also committed to help and provided their expertise in various capacities on and off site:

- Ms. Jo Dell Pickens, Midlands area business owner and Hispanic Advisory Committee member
- Ms. Nilsy Rapalo, Counselor, SC Department of Mental Health Dorchester-Charleston County, business owner and Hispanic Advisory Committee member
- Ms. Cecilia Rodriguez, Hispanic Advisory Committee Member, HMIS Manager, Lowcountry Homeless Coalition
- Ms. Tanya Rodriguez Hodges, Director of Latino CDC
- Ms. Sonia Gutierrez, reporter, WLTX television station, Midlands area

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In addition, the following individuals listed below were instrumental in relaying information to their communities and respective counties. Private citizens and other state agency officials assisted ESF 15 by providing bilingual personnel who were able to translate news releases and shared resources with the Hispanic community:

- Ms. Nadia Paez, Community leader, Mujeres Latinas
- Ms. Lydia Cotton, Hispanic Community Liaison for North Charleston
- Ms. Lazara Avila, Hilton Head Island community leader
- Ms. Diana Saillant, Hispanic Advisory Committee member and business owner
- Mr. Eric Esquivel, CEO, La Isla Magazine
- Mr. Pedro de Armas, El Informador Newspaper
- Ms Marcel Rabens, El Universal
- Ms. Sasha Vargas Fimiani-, 9-1-1 Emergency Dispatch, North Charleston
- Ms. Alix Pedraza, SC Department of Natural Resources
- Other community leaders from other counties

While this report may not be all inclusive of all those who contributed to the safety of our communities, we want to recognize the contributions of everyone, who in one way or another, assisted during our State of Emergency to help keep our communities safe.

We thank all of our community leaders for taking the initiative in their counties to ensure the safety of the Hispanic communities and those with language barriers.

## **MEDIA**

In compliance with the SCEMD Operations Plan, information was disseminated to Hispanic community leaders and media outlets in the coastal areas.

All press/news releases were sent to the following traditional media outlets in the Low Country area:

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- El Sol Radio Station, Low Country area
- El Informador Newspaper-13,500 reached within 4 hours. Facebook only-Twitter accounts more than doubled the numbers-of persons reached on that day
- El Universal Newspaper in the Tri-County area
- La Isla Magazine, Eric Esquivel, CEO, Hilton Head, SC

In addition, information pertaining to Hurricane Matthew was shared on social media outlets:

- The South Carolina Hurricane Guide was posted in English and Spanish by a community Leader on her Facebook page with 1,919 friends/followers.
- Another community leader shared information on her Facebook page titled Mujeres Latinas, which has 6,664 friends/followers.
- A community leader for the City of North Charleston shared information on Facebook with 2,000 friends/followers.
- A community leader in Hilton Head Island shared on her fan page and Facebook page, Y Sabes, which has 160 followers.

## **SERVICES PROVIDED**

In addition to complying with the State Emergency Operations Plan and assisting at the State Emergency Operating Center (SEOC), the following additional services were provided:

- Phone calls were received at different times of the day and night regarding an array of concerns or questions regarding what to do or where to go.
- Information on shelters was provided to citizens.
- Helped community members in providing them with options about the evacuation and knowing their zones.
- Assisted with confirmation of the evacuation shelters in their zone area.

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- Assisted a couple who needed to determine if the highways were open in order for them to return home.
- Assisted a Mexican worker in North Charleston who decided to stay. Information was provided to him about an evacuation shelter located at Stall High School.
- Assisted SCEMD who received a call but could not communicate with caller in Spanish.
- Helped a Hispanic woman who needed emergency assistance. She was lost and was in labor. Emergency services through 9-1-1 could not locate her at the time. However, our volunteer was eventually informed that the pregnant woman was safe and in a hospital.
- Provided information on shelters and published the information on various Facebook pages.
- Shared with leaders in other counties, important information on evacuation routes, shelters and more.
- Volunteered at PIPS (Public Information System). A volunteer's personal number was provided to PIPS and all Spanish calls were transferred to her 24/7 which was handled remotely from the volunteer's home.
- Followed up on every person that called to assure their safety and return.
- Current information was posted by Hispanic business owners and as it came through, it was shared in a timely manner.
- North Charleston did a great job by having a Spanish speaking person available to provide a summary in Spanish of what was discussed at each press conference. A 9-1-1 bilingual staff member also provided this support to the community.
- \*A Hispanic community leader assisted us with all dissemination of information to media and other outlets. An individual and her family were evacuated. She was later identified and marked herself safe after the hurricane. She reported that she had evacuated to serve as a positive role model for the community.

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*\* This is an important point since many Hispanics are afraid to move and evacuate for fear that they may be asked for documents. They don't know the language and don't know what to ask for, and/or feel safer at home with their family, or have been turned away in the past from shelters.*



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## **TRANSLATIONS**

### **NEWS RELEASES/PRESS RELEASES**

- Over 25 news releases were translated into Spanish.
- All news releases were translated into Spanish. This was a collaborative effort by many of the volunteers and other government agencies in the ESF 15 function.
- Press releases were disseminated in English and Spanish to Hispanic media and leaders.
- Assisted ESF 15 with the Twitter feeds. Over 100 tweets were translated.
- Facebook - Over 10,743 received press and news releases and updates on Hurricane Matthew.

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

While the SC Commission for Minority Affairs is tasked to assist in the event of a State of Emergency at the SEOC, it is also equally vital that our communities have a system in place that works cohesively with the SCEMD to release information to the masses. It is important that information is understood in their language of origin to help minimize loss of life and be proactive rather than reactive.

During the Hurricane Matthew operations, we were extremely proud of the efforts made by so many to reach out to communities along the coast. Press releases and information was relayed in many counties and disseminated utilizing several different methods of communication.

Our Hispanic community leaders were actively involved and were proactive in all aspects of preparedness and recovery. Our Hispanic Advisory Committee members rolled down their sleeves and stepped in to help in any way possible in the various counties affected by Hurricane Matthew.

However, there are still some lessons to be learned. While all ESF functions were working collaboratively, there seemed to be duplication of efforts in translating press releases. We also experienced a shortage of bilingual volunteers to assist for the duration of the activation period and post event.

In addition to the concerns above, we also found that although we had contacts for some of the Hispanic media outlets, we did not have readily available, a comprehensive list of Hispanic media outlets that was up to date for our state. This is not unusual since some media outlets may change ownership or may no longer be open for business in our state. We heavily relied on our county/community leaders to provide us with updated information.

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Another important factor is that information being relayed and disseminated should come from a centralized place known to the community providing the same message directed by the SCEMD.

Additionally, research is required to determine what primary media outlets do SC Hispanic communities tune into or view for weather information? In addition, what proactive steps should we take should another natural disaster occur in our state?

Below are some recommendations from some of the points mentioned in lessons learned:

## **1. Duplication of translations of press releases**

Recommendation: Most of Hispanic media sources speak English and are able to relay in quick fashion information received. Perhaps translating press/news releases should first be evaluated and focus more on disseminating information to Hispanic media outlets in English and let those outlets share the information with the public in a culturally accurate manner.

## **2. Review of State Emergency Operations Plan**

Recommendation: Each county has their own operations plan with details on what to do in the event of an emergency. In order to ensure our population receives all information during press and news releases, an evaluation or review of state plans would be recommended to ensure our community is represented and provided for.

## **3. Research on Apps and Best Communication Methods**

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Hispanic Advisory Committee, along with key players, research the best ways our communities receive information in the event of an emergency. While we understand that resources vary according to region and counties, we must find an effective way to communicate with our communities across the state by

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informing them where to tune in or listen in order to get information in Spanish, English or language of choice.

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