

Office of Language Access Conference 8/26/10

Emergency Preparedness: Limited
English Speaker's Perspectives

Some Basic Data

- According to a report by the Migration Policy Institute, immigrants comprise 17.3 % of Hawaii's population (American Community Survey Data, U.S. Census 2007). The largest share of this immigrant population was born in Asia (77.8%), Oceania (8.8%), Europe (5.5%), Latin America (4.6%), and Other (3.3%). Based on a 2005 American Community Survey , English was spoken by 75.7% of people over 5 years of age & older

Basic Data Continued

while 24.3% spoke languages other than English. The top ten languages based on the same data source were: Tagalog (4.78%), Japanese (4.05%), Ilocano (3.85%), Spanish (1.98%), Korean (1.58%), Chinese (1.51%), Hawaiian (1.21%), Samoan (.98%), other Pacific Island languages (.79%), and Vietnamese (.58%). Census 2000 data, Ability to Speak English by Language Spoken at Home, indicate that approximately 27% of Hawaii's population speaks languages other than English. While about 19% of this group speaks English "not well" or "not at all". In comparison to the total Hawaii population of all persons 5 years and older, about 05% or about 56,420 persons spoke English "not well" or "not at all".

Purpose of this Presentation:

- As public and private organizations and entities plan for disasters we see that a significant segment of Hawaii's population speak languages other than English, and many speaking little or no English. Their input into the planning process is important if we are to effectively prepare this segment of the population to prepare, respond, and effectively utilize services during major disasters.

Purpose Continued

Therefore, the conference planning committee sought to obtain a consumer perspective regarding knowledge and responses that the LEP population have towards disasters.

Basic Method

The planning committee used a survey of five basic questions that would be presented either individually or in groups to elicit input from limited English or non-English speakers. Persons working or in contact with LEP speakers solicited input and documented the comments. All comments were summarized to provide an informal snapshot of LEP perspectives.

Survey Questions

- How would you know that a disaster (Hurricane, Tsunami, or Storm) is coming?
- Do you have a disaster plan if a hurricane, tsunami, or major storm hit Hawaii? Do you have an emergency supply of food and water?
- What would you do if a hurricane, tsunami, or large storm hit Hawaii?
- Who would you get help from after a hurricane, tsunami, or large storm hit Hawaii?
- What kind of information and assistance would be most useful to you before, during, and after a disaster?

General Findings

- There were a total of 18 individual responses and 5 group responses (49 LEP persons) with a total response of 67 Limited English speaking persons. Most of the respondents were Micronesian, Korean, or Chinese.

Findings Continued

- How would you know that a disaster is coming?
 - Respondents noted that media (Radio and T.V.) was relied upon for information about an impending disaster
 - Respondents relied on family members and friends to provide information
 - There was some knowledge among some that a special siren or alarm would be a warning sign

Findings Continued

- Do you have a disaster plan and do you have an emergency supply of food and water?
 - Of the 67 total responses to this question, 17 or 25% reported that they had some kind of disaster plan. However, for those with plans, it was not certain how detailed the plans were.

Findings Continued

- What would you do if a hurricane, tsunami, or large storm hit Hawaii?
 - Find a safe place, usually stay at home. In case of a tsunami go to higher ground.

Findings Continued

- Who would you get help from after a hurricane, tsunami, or large storm hit Hawaii?
 - Respondents generally indicated a mixture of I don't know, family members, and churches. It is interesting to note that the Red Cross was mentioned several times.

Findings Continued

- What kind of information & assistance would be most useful to you before, during, and after a disaster?
 - How to know when a disaster is coming, how to prepare for a disaster, and where to go before or after a disaster. Several respondents added to their informational needs, “In my own language”.

Conclusion

- As public and private organizations address plans for disaster response for persons with limited English proficiency, I just wanted to conclude with a statement made by one of the respondents, “Help from friends, but not from the government or organizations because cannot speak English”. Hopefully we can change this statement as our disaster response systems better meet the communication needs of LEP persons.