

A Community Action Plan for Disaster Response

from the Spanish-speaking and immigrant communities of Sonoma County

The firestorms that devastated Sonoma County did not distinguish between citizens and non-citizens, nor between renters and owners. All of us who live in the county were affected by these fires, but we had unequal access to fire relief. The Immigrant Defense Taskforce of North Bay Organizing Project, Undocufund, and the Sonoma County Rapid Response Network, along with other organizations, interviewed thousands of Spanish-speaking and immigrant people during and after the fires. We are working to ensure that in future disasters, County and State government will aid and assist ALL residents, without regard for citizenship or national origin. Because of our collective advocacy, the Sonoma County recovery plan now guarantees equal treatment for people speaking Spanish and other languages through competent translation and interpretation services. These recommendations for action should be adopted throughout California.

Recommendations during the Disaster:

Alert Systems:

- 1) All disaster alerts will be multi-lingual, with information provided in both English and Spanish. Certified translation of alerts into other prominent languages spoken in Sonoma County (Chinese, Tagalog, indigenous languages) will be available. All official communications from the County will be made in both Spanish and English, including all press conferences and alerts.
- 2) All cellphones and landlines will be included in the alert system.
- 3) When possible, Spanish-speaking police officers will be assigned for personal alerts in Spanish-speaking neighborhoods.
- 4) The County's information website and Facebook page will be translated into Spanish.

Evacuation Shelters and Local Assistance Centers:

- 1) Eligibility for aid will be determined by county and state residency, without regard to immigration status. No one will ask about immigration status.
- 2) Trained interpreters will be present at all shelters and local assistance centers, wearing distinctive clothing and a clear sign of what languages they speak. Signs will be in English and Spanish; "private area" signs will be posted to protect immigrants from potential contact with ICE.
- 3) A greeter will welcome people and inform them of their rights: that the County is not collaborating with ICE, that information provided while registering for assistance will not be shared with ICE, that police officers and military personnel are only present to provide assistance. Signs will be posted stating that no one will ask about country of birth, in compliance with the California Values Act.
- 4) Spanish-speaking medical personnel and medical interpreters will be assigned to all shelters and assistance centers.

- 5) Volunteer coordinators will encourage Spanish-speaking volunteers, ensuring that particular skills, training, and licensing are recognized and valued.
- 6) Food native to Spanish-speaking communities will be included in meals provided at the centers, possibly by utilizing volunteer cooks.

Recommendations during the Recovery:

Price-Gouging: The County will aggressively enforce laws regulating price increases and solicit and investigate price-gouging complaints from renters and for all consumer services.

Post-Fire Information Meetings: Translation into Spanish will be legally required for all meetings conducted by the County and companies or professional services.

Post-Fire Trainings: Translation into Spanish will be legally required for any skills or safety trainings conducted by any company contracting or receiving permits from the County.

Debris Cleanup Safety:

- 1) Full-face eyes, nose, and throat protection must be provided by all companies providing post-fire debris cleanup or construction services, or receiving permits from the County. Worksites will be inspected for compliance by county workplace safety enforcement, or state OSHA inspectors.
- 2) Safety training will be available to all workers in Spanish.

Equal Access to Aid and Fire Relief:

- 1) Aid and assistance will be provided to all county residents, regardless of citizenship status or country of origin. This eligibility standard will be clearly translated and widely publicized in multiple languages, so immigrants and non-English speakers know they can receive assistance, including FEMA assistance available to them through U.S. citizen children.
- 2) Guidelines for aid eligibility will be simplified and translated into all languages spoken in the county. Insurance companies will be legally required to provide translation and language-appropriate services to clarify insurance benefits. Immigrant families will be informed about potential FEMA eligibility based on the citizenship status of their children.

Community Action Plan for Future Emergency Preparedness

- 1) The County should immediately begin to compile a data base of qualified and certified translators and interpreters, and to make sure that there is a cadre of trained and qualified interpreters to call on in case of future disasters.
- 2) Outreach should begin immediately to schedule disaster preparedness trainings for community organizations: churches, service providers, schools, and other community organizations. At emergency trainings and other venues, volunteers should be recruited to participate in shelter volunteer trainings – in order to have people trained in advance of a disaster.
- 3) The County will organize a comprehensive network of local media outlets (radio, community television, newspapers) to ensure that media messages are coordinated, accurate, and available in multiple languages.

- 4) The County will publicize the already-existing process allowing pre-approval for organizations and businesses to provide assistance during a disaster. This would include affirmative outreach to community service providers as well as outreach to local restaurants and food trucks. Memoranda of Understanding should be in place prior to future disasters.
- 5) County staff will proactively develop a network of agencies where people can access services in Spanish, particularly emphasizing services available to undocumented families. Updated and current information about each agency will be available, including languages spoken, eligibility guidelines, and services provided. Churches and religious organizations provided tremendous assistance to Spanish-speaking and undocumented people during the fires; they should be more effectively integrated into this county-wide relief network.
- 6) People who speak Spanish and other languages used in the County, and representatives of our immigrant communities should be meaningfully included in all future planning for disaster response.

Community Action Plan for Housing

- 1) The County should support rent stabilization and just cause eviction policies, and encourage local governments to enact policies that protect renters.
- 2) The County should set up and affirmatively publicize a hotline for complaints about rental price-gouging experienced since the fires. The website and publicity should be in both English and Spanish.
- 3) The County should vigorously prosecute landlords and businessowners who violate laws prohibiting price-gouging and extreme rent increases.
- 4) Information about expediting approval and permit processes, changes in laws regarding accessory dwelling units, and opportunities for development funding should be publicized in Spanish as well as English.
- 5) The County should create a home-sharing network that could connect displaced people with homeowners willing to temporarily share an extra room in their home.
- 6) The County should sponsor an innovative group insurance program for renters, which would allow families to purchase renters' insurance at an affordable price.
- 7) The County should continue and expand the Safe Parking program, to allow residents to live in their vehicles with some basic services provided by the County.

Community Action Plan for the Economy

- 1) In collaboration with the Graton Day Labor Center and other community organizations, the County should create a county-wide bulletin board so employers can connect with potential domestic workers and day laborers. This bulletin board should ensure fair wages and workers' protections.
- 2) The County should ensure that all county-sponsored employment and skills trainings are publicized in Spanish and accessible to Spanish-speaking people.

- 3) The County should ensure that information and assistance for small businesses are publicized in Spanish and accessible to Spanish-speaking business-owners.
- 4) All resource information distributed by the county should be translated by a certified translator into Spanish and other languages spoken in the county (disaster unemployment benefits, temporary financial assistance, food and health service programs, housing assistance).

Community Action Plan for Safety Net Services

- 1) Volunteer trainings will be offered in advance for volunteers at evacuation and local assistance centers. Bilingual students at high schools, SRJC, and Sonoma State will be prioritized to participate in these trainings, to expand the number of Spanish-speaking volunteers. Volunteer coordinators will encourage Spanish-speaking volunteers.
- 2) The County should develop protocols and standards for emergency shelters that reflect cultural competency for all population groups in the County. Any organization that operates a shelter, including the Red Cross, will be required to comply with these standards.
- 3) Local emergency preparedness trainings should begin immediately, conducted in languages spoken in neighborhoods. Trainings should include neighbor-to-neighbor notification plans and evacuation routes. Outreach should begin to community organizations and churches, in appropriate languages, asking them to organize emergency preparedness trainings for their members.
- 4) Bilingual high school students should be encouraged to train to be volunteers in local assistance centers and evacuation shelters. Trainings should be conducted at local high schools and Roseland University Prep.
- 5) Any company contracting to provide post-fire debris cleanup or construction services, or receiving permits from the County, must provide skills and safety trainings in Spanish.
- 6) All companies contracting to provide post-fire debris cleanup or construction services, or receiving permits from the County, must provide full-face eyes, nose, and mouth protection for all workers. Worksites will be inspected for compliance by county workplace safety enforcement, or state OSHA inspectors.

Endorsed by:

Immigrant Defense Taskforce	Legal Aid of Sonoma County
North Bay Organizing Project	Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Comité VIDA	Unitarian Universalist Church
MEChA of Santa Rosa Junior College	Corazón Healdsburg
Graton Day Labor Center	La Luz Center
Movimiento Cultural de la Unión Indígena	Undocufund
North Bay Rapid Response Network	
H-PEACE (Health Professionals for Equality and Community Empowerment)	

For more information: Susan Shaw, North Bay Organizing Project: sshaw@northbayop.org