

# An Achilles Heel in Emergency Communications: The Deplorable Policies and Practices Pertaining to Non-English Speaking Populations

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# Two Guiding Research Questions:

1. What are the emergency communication policies and actual practices related primarily to Spanish-speaking Latinos, but also to other non-English-speaking populations in:
  - Texas (Austin, San Antonio)
  - Illinois (Springfield, Chicago)?

## Two Guiding Research Questions:

2. What can be done to contribute to the development of more comprehensive and efficient emergency communication practices and policies pertaining to non-English-speaking populations?

# Two Fundamental Assumptions

- The safety of a community is contingent on well informed citizens, regardless of what language they speak or understand.

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- The safety of a community is contingent on well informed citizens, regardless of what language they speak or understand.
- Any individual's safety is potentially at risk if others around him/her are not properly informed on what is happening and what to do during crisis situations.

# Three Areas of Inquiry

- Demographic / language dynamics
- Government emergency communication policies & practices
- Spanish-language broadcast media emergency communication policies & practices

# Spanish-language speakers

- Central Texas: > 628,000
- State of Texas: > 2,141,599

# Government's policies...

- Internet searches
- Interviews (when granted)



# Government's policies...

Important, crucial, but limited in multilingual Internet-based information, and immediate delivery, especially during height of any major crisis.

# Government's policies...

During height of emergencies,  
information for media is delivered  
*primarily* in English.

Information in Spanish or other  
languages is not always possible.

Limited funding for staff, other options.

# SL media practices...

- Internet searches
- Interviews (when granted)
- Public files

# Interviews: Radio

- **Emergency weather alerts aired most of the time (but not always by all stations).**
- **Many in English, especially if no staff available to translate.**
- **Lack of news staff to cover and provide more information if not provided by government.**
- **Little or no follow-up after storms for guidance on shelter, assistance.**

# Interviews: TV

- **Limited or no access to top management of Univision TV stations (info from NY hq)**
- **Personal visit to Azteca América Austin.**
- **Personal visit to Telemundo–San Antonio.**
- **Phone conversation with Telemundo-Austin.**

# Interviews: TV

- **Severe weather alerts broadcast**
- **Not always in Spanish: Scrolls in English**
- **News coverage from Telemundo: breaking news, interrupted syndicated programs**
- **TV Azteca: no interruptions for emergencies—programming can't be changes without 28-hour notice**
- **Case of hurricane Rita...**

# Other interviews

- Civic leaders
- Ms. Ann Arnold, President of Texas Association of Broadcasters
- Mr. David Honig & others in DC working on FCC policies
- Details in report

## Recommendations: Government

- Multi-lingual staff, especially at peak times, who can deal with SL media
- More knowledge of and involvement with SL media
- Internet-based information, resources
- Collaborative grants



## Recommendations: Government

- Require ethnic language transmissions for ethnic language broadcast media.
- Require this even for low-power outlets such as Azteca
- Require emergency set-up for 24/7

## Recommendations: Radio-TV

- Set-up for alerting 24/7, not just 9-5
- Use new technology for remote alerts when stations are on automatic
- Automatic info of more than just alerts, e.g., contact phones and/or Internet sites

## Recommendations: Radio-TV

- Pool resources and transmissions when needed and possible
- Train and have extra support staff
- Set up internal chain of command protocols for all the above

# Recommendations: Academic units

- Education and training for
  - Students
  - Media professionals
  - Community leaders
  - Collaboration among them

## Recommendations: Academic units

- Become conduits for
  - Support staff
  - Alternative, grassroots gatherers and disseminators of reliable information
  - Use of new technologies, social media that need not depend on govt., media

# Recommendations: Community Leaders & Business

- Take advocacy roles to pressure
  - Government
  - Media
  - Academic units

# Many pending questions

- Are there educational, training programs/options already in place elsewhere that should be considered here?
- What new technologies, social media exist that can make the broadcast media less crucial during emergencies?
- How would the most vulnerable populations—such as Spanish-speaking farm workers in the fields—be better informed?
- What doable policies can be offered at the federal level, especially with the FCC, to make positive inroads?

- [For a full report, executive summary, and op-ed piece, go to:](#)
- <http://www.masscomm.txstate.edu/csImm/research.html>
- For the USDHHS's Guidance for Integrating Culturally Diverse Communities into Planning and Responding to Emergencies: A Toolkit, go to:
- [http://www.diversitypreparedness.org/Topic/Subtopic/Record-Detail/18/resourceId\\_\\_19680/](http://www.diversitypreparedness.org/Topic/Subtopic/Record-Detail/18/resourceId__19680/)



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