NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH BEST PRACTICE

SAFE AND SECURE PROGRAM-TULSA, OKLAHOMA

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OVERVIEW

This presentation will cover the following topics:

- Describe the relationship between Tulsa's Citizens Crime Commission and the Mayor's Citizen Corps Program;
- Describe how our local Alert Neighbors (Neighborhood Watch) program was incorporated into the development of the Safe and Secure process;
- Review what prior models were used in creating the Safe and Secure process;
- Discuss how the seven-step process was developed and implemented;
- Provide some examples how this process has been used; and
- Discuss future plans for the further refinement of Safe and Secure.

BACKGROUND

A key component of creating a successful Citizen Corps program is having partnerships from the entities needed to create the volunteer initiatives. In Tulsa, the presence of the Tulsa Project Impact program allowed for the immediate creation of a Citizen Corps Council with representation from a variety of sectors. Created in 1998, the Tulsa Project Impact program emphasized public-private partnerships and public education to promote disaster preparedness and disaster mitigation. Its steering committee included representatives from emergency management, police, fire, public health, and community-based and faith-based organizations. In March 2002, this steering committee was designated as the local Citizen Corps Council, which oversees the Mayor's Citizen Corps program under the auspices of Mayor Bill LaFortune.

One group not previously a part of the Project Impact program was the Citizens Crime Commission. Created in 1971, this non-profit organization oversees the Alert Neighbors program, which is the local equivalent of Neighborhood Watch. The Commission has a similar public-private partnership model, working closely with and involving public sector entities such as the police department and sheriff's office, and private sector interests such as the media to promote citizen involvement in crime prevention. Given this background in public-private partnerships and service, it came as no surprise that the Citizens Crime Commission joined the Citizen Corps Council to promote coordinating our initiatives. Its current executive director, Brooke Gwartney, became an active participant in the development of our Citizen Corps initiatives, especially the Safe and Secure Program. Soon after, an article appeared on the ***USA On Watch*** web site highlighting our joint initiatives.

SAFE AND SECURE DEVELOPMENT: MODELS/ANTECEDENTS

The Safe & Secure program was designed to engage neighborhoods, businesses and non-profit organizations in a seven-step process of becoming prepared as a community for a natural or manmade disaster through assessment, education and preparedness projects. Funded through a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service, planners used the following models to guide the creation of this program:

- **Tulsa Project Impact --** Tulsa Project Impact worked with entities ranging from apartment complexes to neighborhoods to perform natural hazard assessments and emergency planning using trained professionals such as architects, engineers, and emergency managers. Businesses and non-profit agencies were assisted with "Open For Business," a continuity curriculum developed by the Institute for Business and Home Safety and offered through Tulsa Project Impact and the Association of Contingency Planners. This natural hazard

assessment and planning work through Tulsa Project Impact provided the groundwork for Safe and Secure.

- **City of Tulsa Critical Facility Assessment --** In November 2001, the City of Tulsa began an internal program that used a technical advisory group of nationally-recognized experts arranged by Tulsa Project Impact to train city employees in assessing critical city facilities. This internal city program, also using the name "Safe and Secure," provided the template for a comprehensive assessment and planning process that reviewed both the potential hazards of manmade disasters such as terrorism and crime with natural disasters such as tornadoes and floods. Often, the same measures that were recommended to minimize a man-made hazard such as an explosive blast would also apply to a natural hazard such as tornadic winds.
- **Community-Based/Faith-Based Organization Study** -- A study commissioned by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 2001 proposed to identify model communities that have involved community-based organizations and faith-based organizations in emergency preparedness and disaster mitigation. Demonstration communities were then chosen to initiate such partnerships, identify hazards in each community, and then respond with a mitigation project of some kind. Developing community partnerships for mitigation projects based on an assessment process became a key component of Safe and Secure.
- **Disaster Resistant Neighborhoods** -- This program by the American Red Cross in Tallahassee, Florida provided valuable information on assisting neighborhoods in assessing their risks and preparing for natural disasters as well as response to man-made hazardous materials. (www.tallytown.com/redcross/drn.html) It also led to a national pilot done recently in the Tulsa area by the American Red Cross and State Farm Insurance called the **Safe Neighbor Network.** The pilot is similar to Safe and Secure but was developed

independently. Representatives of both programs have shared tools and information to the mutual benefit of both initiatives.

SAFE AND SECURE SEVEN-STEP PROCESS

Using the above models as a basis for comparison, representatives of our various partners helped our Citizen Corps staff develop this seven step comprehensive program. Two key principles guided the development of this program. First, it was felt that the best homeland security in terms of citizen involvement would be to focus on building a strongly-interconnected community, using the neighborhood watch model of neighbors watching out for neighbors and people working together. Second, whenever possible we would use the existing resources of our partners for education and training rather than "recreating the wheel." We will describe the seven-step process based on the intended goal of the step, how the step was developed, and the special components or features of each step.

1. Outreach and organization.

Goal: Engaging neighborhoods, businesses, and public and non-profit entities in the program.

Development: This initial step required speakers to go out to groups and describe the Safe and Secure process. The speaker's bureaus of Tulsa Project Impact and Citizens Crime Commission were provided instruction on presenting a PowerPoint on this program as well as a general PowerPoint about the entire Citizen Corps program in Tulsa. The executive director of the Citizens Crime Commission and the coordinator of the Mayor's Office for Neighborhoods worked together to identify target neighborhoods to present this program and ask them to become pilots for this process. It was felt that neighborhoods with an Alert Neighbors program and with a neighborhood association would provide the best environment for testing the process.

Special features: In each presentation, the need to build strongly-interconnected communities was emphasized. Designed to last on average 8-12 weeks, we also stated that scheduling could be flexible to the needs of that neighborhood or business. The neighborhoods/businesses/non-profit entities that participate are called community units in the following steps.

2. Assessment of needs and opportunities.

Goal: Analyzing the risks, vulnerabilities, and capabilities of the participating entities.

Development: Representatives of entities such as the Citizens Crime Commission, the Mayor's Office for Neighborhoods, the American Red Cross, the Tulsa Fire Department, and Tulsa Project Impact's Technical Advisory Group met over the period of a month to review existing assessment forms. These forms, which covered public safety, public health, and disaster preparedness issues, were whittled down to a neighborhood block assessment form, a resident assessment form, and a business/non-profit agency assessment form. Neighborhood residents are asked to use and disseminate the neighborhood block and resident assessment forms, then return them to the program volunteer assisting with this process.

Special Features: An ESRI Geographic Information System developed by the Indian Nations Council of Government through Tulsa Project Impact provided each site with information of local flood plains, tier two hazardous waste facilities, as well as the locations of resources such as police and fire stations. Participants are told of a police crime statistics mapping system that can be accessed on the web. Businesses and non-profit agencies are also given the opportunity to have one of a group of trained architects, engineers, or contingency planners offer an educated eye about possible vulnerabilities at a site.

3. Planning.

Goal: Identifying strategies and mitigation opportunities to improve safety and ensure continuity of services in a disaster.

Development: Ideas for mitigation and preparedness projects were gathered to assist volunteer facilitators in working with the community units. However, the planning step was primarily designed as an exercise in facilitating neighborhood discussion of possible ways to minimize vulnerabilities and use resources based on the information/results of the assessment step. Also, based on information from resident assessments, training and education opportunities are highlighted as courses people should consider taking.

Special Features: A project identified in this step is to be used in the step 5 mitigation and preparedness step. Community units are also encouraged to pursue all identified projects.

4. Training and education.

Goal: Providing training and education to participants on a variety of disaster- and emergency-preparedness topics.

Development: It was decided that the education and training programs would all be optional--they would only be offered if people in a community unit were interested in taking the class. An overview of the Alert Neighbors program was offered as an education module. The CERT program, which was just being implemented by the Tulsa Area Emergency Management Agency, was also offered to neighborhoods. Other partners such as the American Red Cross, the Tulsa Fire Department, the Tulsa City-County Health Department, the Association of Contingency Planners, and the Language and Culture Bank provided training for our volunteer facilitators or the facilitators themselves for a variety of course offerings. These training/educational modules are delineated in a fact sheet provided as a handout with this presentation. Many of the partners provided their training and/or volunteers as an in-kind

service. In some cases, our program provided a mechanism to meet the objectives of the partnering agency. The City County Health Department, for example, had a grant to offer bioterrorism education to the public, which they provided in part through Safe and Secure.

Special Features: All of the course offerings were provided free of charge to the recipients, and for the first year were provided at the neighborhood/business/non-profit agency site. Because we wished to emphasize community building, neighborhoods and businesses were strongly encouraged to participate in the Alert Neighbors program as well as the CERT program.

5. Mitigation and preparedness.

Goal: Implementing mitigation/preparedness measures to enhance safety and service continuity.

Development: Each community unit is to do a mitigation or preparedness project, no matter how small, to minimize or prepare for some threat related to public safety, public health, or disaster preparedness identified in the planning step. The project is chosen by the community unit and is done by the community unit, although outside resources or volunteers may be contacted to help. The project may access existing programs to achieve a goal. For example, the City of Tulsa has a free smoke detector program for residents of low to moderate income that could be used. Projects could be as simple as cleaning up blighted areas, with the idea that such blight affects crime rates, or dumping out sitting water that breeds mosquitoes and West Nile Virus, or putting an Automated Electronic Defibrillator or NOAA Emergency radio in a business or agency.

Special Features: Each community unit is required to do some kind of mitigation or preparedness project in response to what is discussed in the Assessment and Planning steps.

6. Community connections.

Goal: Assessing and developing plans for the individual and group involvement in the larger community, both in a large-scale disaster and in building community in Tulsa.

Development: Once people know how to be safe in their homes, their neighborhoods, their places of work, we want them to consider their role in the larger community. We discuss in a final meeting what opportunities there are for volunteer service through the Citizen Corps program and our partners. We also suggest any ways a particular community unit might be able to assist the larger community in the event of a disaster. For example, a church or business site might be able to be an emergency shelter during a disaster.

Special Features: The final meeting is treated as a graduation ceremony where the successes and highlights of the program in that community unit are celebrated. A pitch is then made for the various programs we have available for volunteer service, including Alert Neighbors.

7. Volunteerism.

Goal: Strengthening the larger community through volunteerism.

Development: This seventh step is really combined with the sixth step, in practice.

Special Features: People sign up to become Citizen Corps volunteers. At this point, the Safe and Secure process becomes more than an education/training program but rather a true volunteer recruitment and mobilization program. For purposes of the grant, we have set an average number of five recruited volunteers from each community unit. (CERT members could be called for city-wide activities, and are automatically counted toward this number.)

Contacts after Process Completion

Once the Safe and Secure process is completed, follow-up contacts and training are expected to occur through the Alert Neighbors program and/or through the CERT program.

RESULTS AND FUTURE PLANS

In our first year (September 2002-August 2003), our intent was to reach 20 community units. Due to a variety of factors delaying staff and volunteer recruitment, we had 16 community

units either completed on in process as of October 2003. One of the greatest successes of the program has been the variety of venues these community units represent. Small and large neighborhoods, condominiums, apartments, a Hispanic church, a tribal-related Head Start facility, the information technology center for the Bank of Oklahoma, and the corporate headquarters of Dollar Thrifty Rent A Car are Safe and Secure sites. Non-profit agencies such as Habitat for Humanity, the Metropolitan Tulsa Urban League, and TSHA (Tulsa Speech & Hearing Association) are all Safe and Secure sites and/or are allowing us to provide this program to their constituent communities. More are signing up every week as word gets out about the program. Sixty more sites are anticipated for year two.

Among the adjustments we've had to make to the program has been how training and education are provided to the community units. Because some sites had as few as three people for a training module and because of rising demand, we will be consolidating many of the training modules into monthly sessions for multiple community units, unless a site has over twenty participants. The outreach, assessment, planning, mitigation, and the final steps of recruitment would still be done on site. Consolidation may also affect a second problem that has developed. Due to the schedules of the community units, the length of time for completing the process has ranged from just over a month to eight months instead of the anticipated eight to twelve weeks. At least two neighborhoods have asked that the training sessions occur once a month during regular neighborhood meetings. Consolidation might speed up the process time if a neighborhood does not have the requisite number of attendees to offer the course on site.

Training and involvement of our volunteer facilitators has also been an educational experience for our program. The speakers' bureaus of both Tulsa Project Impact and the Citizens Crime Commission were under-utilized for the outreach presentations, both due to the staff being

requested for the engagement and because speakers did not feel ready to present this new material. In year two, we anticipate sending volunteers out in pairs for these presentations with staff present for the initial outings. We will also be training volunteer coordinators to manage the coordination of volunteer presenters and meeting locations for the community units. In the original plan for Safe and Secure, volunteer facilitators assigned to each community unit were to work as a team and select a team leader to serve this function. In practice, the facilitators were focused on their own presentations and were unwilling to take on the additional task of being a team leader. Coincidentally, there were also volunteers unwilling to make presentations but willing to serve in more behind-the-scene roles. We will also attempt to pair volunteers for these tasks as well instead of assigning one per community unit.

Finally, both experience and advice from our grantor, the Corporation for National and Community Service, have led us to develop a memorandum of understanding document for both the partners involved in the project and the community units themselves. The first MOU was done between the Mayor's Citizen Corps program and the Citizens Crime Commission on the shared use of volunteers from each program.

As we move forward, we expect Safe and Secure to both build on the Alert Neighbors program and to break ground for Alert Neighbors in new areas. One of our performance measures for our grant in year two states that half of the community units will either commit to future or revitalized involvement in the Alert Neighbors program or set up a CERT team. These seeds will be sown for Alert Neighbors and CERT to reap in the future and, with them, help build a safer, stronger community.

HANDOUTS AT CONFERENCE: Safe and Secure Fact Sheet, Safe and Secure Promotional Materials, Safe and Secure Assessment Tools, USA On Watch article, PowerPoint presentation.