

West, Southwest, Rocky Mountains, Plains Regions Town Hall Meeting

March 29, 2021

Summary

Speakers:

- Tami Fordham, Director, Alaska Operations Office, EPA Region 10
- Ryan Pietramali, Branch Chief, Risk Analysis Branch, FEMA Region 8
- Jill Sherman-Warne, Hoopa Valley Tribal Member/Past Tribal Council Member, Native American Environmental Protection Coalition
- Arcenio Lopez, Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP)
- Lara Popyack, California Fire Safety Council
- Aya Nagano, Midori Law Group, P.C. and Ameer Raval, Asian Pacific Environmental Network

Some key discussions:

- Government agencies should be equal partners with community groups to understand the unique issues from each community, and invest in community organizations before disasters hit to build capacity and relationships.
- Neighborhood level mapping and vulnerability assessments for those neighborhoods (block-by-block) is key to understand local issues and existing resources. Work with academia to use tools such as mapping programs to understand specific needs for each community.
- Consider methods used to capture and disseminate information, taking into consideration language, delivery methods, etc.
- Preparedness should be done ahead of all disasters and in collaboration with all stakeholders.
- Create a central hub where all preparedness, response, and recovery information can live — especially in communities that need it the most.
- There is a need for more trainings and resources for vulnerable communities.
- A clear pathway for communication should be established to make sure that it is clear, concise, and useful to those who receive the messages.
- Revisit evacuation plans to make sure it meets reality, and revisit responses to other disasters to make sure they are feasible for vulnerable communities.
- There is a need to help the government recognize that communities have issues that are already front and center. Disasters exacerbate existing issues in communities. There is also a need to empower communities to help them recover after disasters.
- Communities should be involved in developing disaster plans.
- Mental health is a major issue for community members. Consider creating “safe spaces” for people to talk about issues they face and how to support each other with respect and mindfulness.

*Please note that these comments only reflect a portion of the discussion from the Town Hall Meeting. Key findings and recommendations from the meeting will be incorporated into a draft report to the EJ and Natural Disasters Subcommittee. If you have additional comments you would like to incorporate into the meeting notes, please email environmental-justice@epa.gov with the subject line “EJ and Natural Disaster Town Hall.”