

# The Duquesne Project:

## Development of an Awareness and Training Model for Community-Based Emergency Preparedness

Emilie H. Delestienne, Samuel Stebbins, MD, MPH, Ravi Sharma, PhD

### Purpose

In a community highly socially and physically vulnerable to disasters, project staff worked with leaders and residents to understand community perceptions and practices towards disaster preparedness and response, develop improved methods of awareness raising and training, and ultimately assist residents to become better prepared using an “all-hazards” approach. Recommendations and lessons learned may be applicable to similar settings throughout the United States.

### Objectives

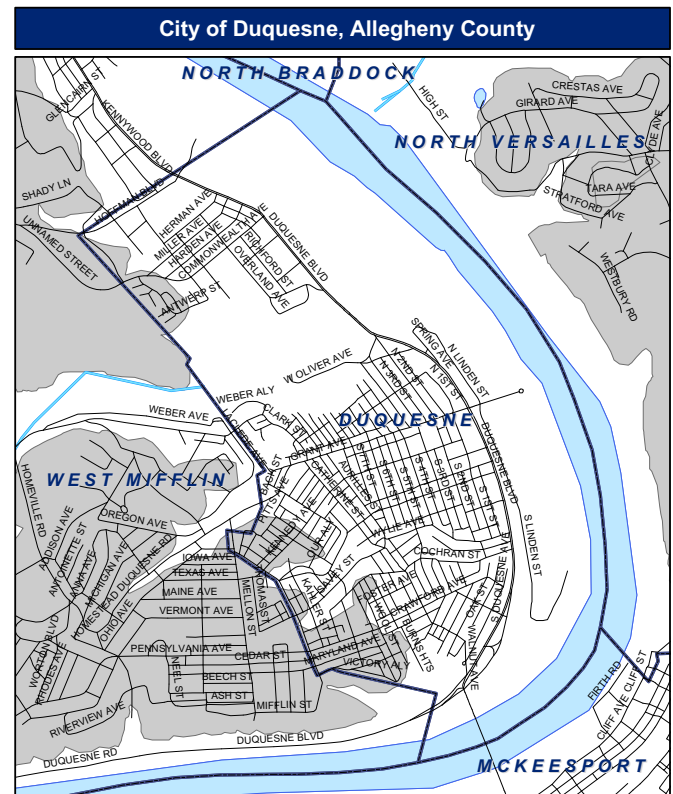
- 1) Define risk perceptions and understand information-seeking behaviors.
- 2) Better understand the challenges faced by low-resource populations in utilizing emergency preparedness and planning materials.
- 3) Engage community members and incorporate community perceptions in emergency preparedness, training, and planning.

### Background

- Although “all response is local,” many local communities are not disaster-ready. Resource poor communities and communities with a high proportion of vulnerable individuals will likely be disproportionately affected in the event of an emergency.
- Preexisting social conditions that contribute to the vulnerability of communities include: low socioeconomic status; age (number of individuals who are less than five or greater than 65 years of age); race (proportion of non-white population); proportion of non-English speaking and special needs populations; low educational attainment and low literacy; high rates of unemployment; and reliance on public transportation.
- The City of Duquesne is located along the Monongahela River 13 miles southeast of Pittsburgh, PA on two square miles of land. Once home to Duquesne Steel Works, Duquesne is a post-industrial community comprised of slightly more than 7,000 people, split approximately 50/50 between African American and white. The city faces many, if not most, of the challenges highlighted above.

### Methods

- Worked with community partners to gain entrée and greater understanding of Duquesne.
- Developed ways to assess risk perceptions, information-seeking behaviors, and challenges facing community members.
  - Random telephone survey (n=100) in Duquesne and surrounding communities of West Mifflin and McKeesport, PA.
  - Focus Group discussions with a convenience sample of city leaders, community leaders, the general public, the elderly (aged 65 and older) and individuals with disabilities.



## Duquesne Project continued

**Results**

- Compared to other threats, survey and focus group participants did not associate high risk with natural disasters, terrorism, or disease outbreaks.
  - Highest perceived risk was associated with poor public education, violence, unsafe and inadequate housing, and low paying jobs; African Americans expressed higher levels of concern than whites.
  - 52% of individuals surveyed felt that the likelihood of experiencing a wide-spread emergency was ‘unlikely’ or ‘very unlikely’.
- Survey and focus group participants did not identify local officials, including city councilmen and the mayor, as trusted sources of information during a disaster or emergency.
  - The survey identified television as the most popular and the most trusted source of information for news about a local or national emergency. Word of mouth communication via family, friends and neighbors was identified as the most popular and most trusted source of information and news by focus group participants.
- The majority of individuals surveyed perceived having some level of personal preparedness, but were largely unfamiliar with city or community emergency plans.
  - 73% of individuals surveyed reported having some degree of preparedness as defined by having an emergency plan and/or emergency supplies. When discussing personal preparedness, focus group participants assumed electricity and water would remain intact. Of individuals who did not feel prepared, 52% cited the lack of time or knowledge to prepare, or preparing being too expensive. Focus group participants felt a lack of interest and will to prepare were primary barriers that prevented people from adequately preparing for emergencies.
  - The majority of individuals surveyed were not familiar or did not know of a safe place to go within their community during an emergency.
- Less than 20% of people were ‘extremely’ or ‘very interested’ in learning more about preparing for emergencies whereas 39% were ‘slightly’ or ‘not at all’ interested.

**Conclusions**

- 1) High risk is not associated with emergencies or disasters.
- 2) A serious disconnect exists between local officials, agencies and the public; information delivery during local emergencies may not be consistent with the information-seeking behaviors of individuals.
- 3) Individuals are largely unfamiliar with existing citizen preparedness materials; perhaps because this information has not percolated into these communities, tends to focus on low probability events, and is not consistent with the needs of resource poor and vulnerable populations.

**Recommendations**

To develop a community-based emergency preparedness training and awareness model that encompasses:

- 1) The engagement and training of community members in emergency planning and preparedness; and that preparing is made as relevant as possible to everyday experience.
- 2) Information delivery networks and systems that are consistent with community information seeking behaviors.
- 3) Emergency preparedness guides that are tailored to the needs of resource poor communities.

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