

## Educate to Mitigate

### State-wide, Louisiana

**BATON ROUGE, LA** — After hurricanes Katrina and Rita walloped Louisiana in 2005, the need to rebuild stronger, safer, and smarter became obvious.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) addressed that need by awarding a Hazard Mitigation Grant to the state for Community Education and Outreach (CEO) to educate people on how to build so that their homes would better withstand future storms. The Governor’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP) implemented the CEO program in 2010.

“Our history and our experiences, especially over the past decade, have reinforced and driven the State of Louisiana to the point where building stronger, safer, and smarter is now more important than ever,” said Jeffery Giering, the State’s hazard mitigation officer. “Educating our citizens and leaders that we have choices in how we build and rebuild is an important opportunity to increase community resiliency.”

The CEO program has several components aimed at educating different populations.

One component focuses on construction professionals and the general public. The program partnered with building code officials to stress the importance of building safer, stronger, and smarter. Permit offices in Louisiana’s 64 parishes now display posters and offer hundreds of brochures. The mitigation theme “Got to, Should do, Want to” appears on every poster and brochure. “Got to” means building codes must be followed, “Should Do” means that everyone should implement best practices during construction, and “Want to” acknowledges that people want to protect their families and property.

The second component addresses the business community. A 46-page book, “From Risk to Resiliency,” was developed and designed specifically for businesses. It discusses the value of mitigation, preparedness, planning, and responding to disasters.

A third component involved educating students about mitigation. The CEO program identified the need for an effective tool to teach young people about Louisiana’s major hazards, hazard mitigation measures, and how those measures can lessen the impact of future disasters. The CEO team created the board games “Mitigation Nation” and “It’s Your Turn!” designed for elementary, middle, and high school students. These games are a fun and informative way to educate students on the importance of mitigation and the steps they can take before disasters strike. A more advanced game is being developed as a teaching tool for adults.

Workshops and training sessions are also an integral part of the outreach campaign. Focusing on speeding up the recovery process, GOHSEP offered a series of workshops to contractors and the public geared toward moving Louisiana forward, including “Getting It Right! The Practice of Procurement.” The “Funding Hazard Mitigation Series” is also offered.



Each effort has succeeded, with more than 30 national and international awards presented to the CEO program for successfully conveying the “mitigation matters” message to the public.

A CEO communication tool accessible to the public is the GOHSEP Hazard Mitigation website found at <http://www.getagameplan.org> that contains materials and information. Included on the website is a newsletter with important messages about mitigation.

“The Community Education and Outreach effort brings the message on the importance of hazard mitigation to our State, our friends, and our communities, making ‘mitigation’ a household word,” said Giering