

***Latinos a Salvo*TM means a safer community for all: The imperative for inclusive and multi-language emergency communication policies**

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Synopsis

The presentation will provide a summary of a two-year (2008-2010) assessment of emergency communication policies and practices related to Spanish-speaking populations in Central Texas. The study gathered data about demographic characteristics, media landscapes, Internet websites, and included interviews with government emergency response officials, media representatives, and community leaders. The project was capped with a *Latinos a Salvo* forum (11/5/10 at Texas State University), which brought together 80 persons from public and private sectors to discuss and offer recommendations to improve emergency communication strategies.

Two assumptions guided this project: First, the safety of a community is contingent on well-informed citizens regardless of what language they speak or understand. Second, any and all individual's security is potentially at risk if others around him/her are not properly informed about what is happening and what to do during crisis situations. The project's main focus on Latinos is justified on the fact that this population is a rather large demographic, is rapidly growing, and demands attention for the safety of its communities.

The term "Achilles heel" is used because the data showed that the policies and practices pertaining to non-English language speaking populations are, at least from this scholar's vantage point, deplorable and can thus potentially undermine the safety of not only minority populations but also society at large. The modus operandi of government and the media is not optimal for overcoming the current shortcomings to assure the maximum possible safety and well being that all residents of every community deserve, regardless of the language they speak.

It is hoped that this report, especially the numerous recommendations by the attendees of the *Latinos a Salvo* forum and those made by the Principal Investigator, will be of value to bring about prompt and positive changes in the emergency communication policies and practices pertaining to non English speaking populations.

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