C. Moore

Thank you, Ms. Hallock, for such helpful information. I am Cornelia Moore, the Women’s Bureau Regional Administrator for Regions II and III, which include Washington, D.C., the national headquarters of the American Red Cross. Our next speaker, Ms. Victoria Melvin, is a program associate in the Preparedness Department of the American Red Cross in Washington, D.C. In this capacity, she is responsible for performing a strategic review of all preparedness and disaster education material and contributing to public messaging in response to disaster needs.

Prior to coming to Red Cross, Ms. Melvin worked on the Alexandria, Virginia, Community Resilience Project sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, popularly called FEMA. Ms. Melvin is a public speaker and former business owner with extensive experience in marketing and community relations.

Please join me in welcoming Ms. Victoria Melvin.

V. Melvin

Well thank you very much and good morning, everyone, or good afternoon, rather. As I was preparing my remarks, I realized that we may have some people in the group who are affected by
Katrina, and, of course, our hearts, as Shinae said earlier, go out to them.

In my comments I wanted to telescope out a bit -- because we have a number of experts here who’ll be speaking on the financial details -- on the role of the Red Cross and what we’re trying to do and also to thank NEFE and AICPA for the wonderful publications that they have on disasters and financial planning and disaster recovery, financial recovery. We’ve sent out a great number of these all across the country to assist people.

We are a non-profit, humanitarian organization, and we’re here to educate and inform and assist in the immediate needs of a disaster. This Katrina [disaster] is the largest that we have ever responded to, and we have hundreds of shelters in 26 states and over 160,000 workers out in the field. If there are people listening who are recovering at this time, we just want to say directly to you, “Take care of yourself first. Maintaining a healthy state of mind is needed in order to get through this devastation, and it’s going to take time to get things back to normal.” People who may be returning home after a flood, we’d like to say, “Check the foundations outside and the cracks for erosion. Inspectors may need to have to okay your premises for reentry. Be very careful
newly coming into that premise because of sagging ceilings and floors before entering rooms--and you’ve all heard plenty about the toxic water--to disinfect and wash hands frequently.” And I’d like to just say in general that our primary goal is to help the public protect their property from risk, as well as financial loss.

We’d just like to emphasize that a number of people lost their lives during Katrina. It could have been prevented in some instances. For the insufficient water, dehydration, and disabled people were very vulnerable and at risk, and we encourage disabled people to contact our local emergency, county emergency managers and hopefully get on a list so that they know where to locate people. That would be the most helpful, and then a plan can be defined.

So in your own mitigation--just to think about in your home, where you are now,--consider what human-made and natural disasters could occur in your area. So I’d like to ask you some questions, and if you’re not sure what might occur there, ask your local or county emergency management office. In protecting your home, before you move in anywhere, just check around what’s nearby. For instance, are there fire hydrants nearby? What are the buildings, such as factories and warehouses? Maybe even train tracks. There may be chemical-spill hazards. Is your home or
apartment situated on...how is it situated on the land? The land should slope away from the dwelling. New construction or remodeling--check to make sure your construction meets the local building code or, even better, just to find out what that code is and exactly what your building is situated for.

If you live in a dry, arid area where wildfires are possible, check the yard and outbuildings for potential fire hazards. Is your vegetation too close to the building? Are there overhanging trees and dead limbs? Those kinds of things. It would be common sense to think about it, but perhaps a lot of people haven’t thought about it.

And I’d like to emphasize that anyone could experience a flood. It doesn’t have to be from a storm. It could happen with a water main break. It could happen from the street or it could happen from the bathroom. There could be a fire next door or upstairs in an apartment. A candle could be unattended and topple, and a huge number of fires start that way. So protecting yourself and property [from] damage is very important. Perhaps you’re in an earthquake area, and heavy bookcases and electronics need to be bolted down and to the walls to keep them from toppling.
So if your power went out, how would you cook? Do you know how long foods last in the freezer and when it’s safe to use them? Do you have smoke alarms or carbon monoxide alarms? Are there family members in your household who cannot hear or see alarms? I’d just like to note that there are some wonderful products out on the market now that have vibrating or strobe-type of alarms for people that might need to be alerted in a different way.

We think that building safety means being prepared, so we encourage creating a plan, building a supply kit, and then practice a plan or get training; and it really can make a life or death difference. We see that now.

So to make a plan, look at the floor plan of your home and find two exits in case one gets blocked. You would need to also establish an out-of-town contact. If you have a friend or relative, following a disaster, family members can call this person and tell them where they are. Very often phone lines are down, and if you know that one person to call, you can call in and let them know that you are safe, and that way everyone can find out. They have one person to contact to do that.
And when you’re in town, where will you decide to meet? Do you need to have two places for that as well? Right outside the house, because you wouldn’t want it to be a fire and people exiting through the back and not meeting you where they’re supposed to meet you because then they would appear to be missing. It needs to be one location and everyone needs to know exactly what that location is.

The second location outside the home would be in case you cannot return to your home--some place in the neighborhood, outside the neighborhood, a location that you can decide on. So the whole family needs to be involved in making a family communication plan and deciding where to meet. And it’s very helpful to know where you’re going to go if you evacuate and make plans in advance, especially if you have a pet. Such tragedy, with people losing their pets and not taking them with them. If you plan in advance, you can find out where a safe place for the pet would be or take them with you in a carrier. And also know what the school’s plan is for your children and the work plan at your office because you don’t know where you’re going to be should a disaster strike.
And in all cases of an emergency, if nothing comes of this and nothing is remembered except one thing, it would be to fill in a contact card for every single member in your family. There’s a location on the Red Cross Web site to download contact cards [http://www.redcross.org/prepare/ECCard.pdf] And in the remarks at the end of...on your online Web site, I will submit all of these places where these things can be downloaded and names of publications that help with making these kinds of plans.

And so the second item would be to create a kit. It’s very important to have a list of medications, doctors, insurance policies, as Meloni said. But especially for people who are disabled, it’s very important if they could have and keep a supply of very important medications on hand. Doctors will allow for a 30-day supply if they can arrange that, just to make sure that that supply stays updated. Make sure that they don’t expire, and keep copies of the prescriptions in your kit. Keep the documents in waterproof containers, and this kit is something that you can just take with you immediately and be able to just go right out the door. If you wouldn’t have very much time, you would have that all ready. You would have that all set.
It does pay to practice. You know our kids practice fire drills at school so they know what to do in an emergency. The same really goes for the entire family at home. If everyone knows what to do, then they can just grab what they truly need—the true essentials—and have time for other important things like gathering your pet and fresh supplies, and you can be out the door.

So again, these items I will put on site so that you have references of where to download these kinds of information, and I’ll be open for questions later. So again, I just wanted to say that building safety really does mean being prepared. Thank you.