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**NEW REPORT SHOWS MOST LOCAL EMERGENCY SERVICE AGENCIES  
IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY LACK RESOURCES TO REACH LIMITED  
ENGLISH PROFICIENT COMMUNITIES IN A DISASTER**

Los Angeles – A new report released by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) and Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC) shows that despite a significant population boom in Los Angeles County’s Asian Americans and Latinos over the past ten years, city and county agencies lack sufficient resources to provide effective disaster preparedness information to Limited English Proficient (LEP) populations. The report entitled, *Are We All Ready for Disaster?: Recommendations for Improving Disaster Preparation of Limited English Proficient Communities* shows that immigrants could face greater vulnerability relative to the general population should a major disaster occur.

The report examines the current capacity of municipalities with a large percentage of limited English Proficient communities in Los Angeles County to reach out before, during, and after a natural or man-made disaster.

The risk of a natural or man-made disaster in Southern California is considerable. Wildfires, earthquakes, and landslides have ravaged area communities in recent decades, and experts predict a large-scale disaster is likely to strike Southern California within the next thirty years. “Despite this situation, city and county agencies lack the necessary resources to hire bilingual first response personnel and provide written materials on disaster preparedness in languages that reflect the needs of Los Angeles County’s diverse population,” said **Stewart Kwoh**, President and Executive Director of APALC.

The report offers several recommendations, one of which is the reallocation and earmarking of federal funds for the purpose of preparing and responding to LEP communities. “Reallocating and earmarking funds stands to increase the capacity of government agencies to provide emergency disaster services to LEP communities,” said **Dr. Harry Pachon**, President of the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute. The report recommends earmarking funds to establish an electronic clearinghouse of essential printed materials in a variety of languages; the distribution of low-cost disaster kits to low-income LEP families; increased public-private partnerships for multi-lingual outreach; and the development of systematic plans to reach out to LEP communities in cities whose LEP population exceeds 25%.

Selected highlights of *Disaster Preparedness for Limited English Proficient Communities in Los Angeles County* include:

## Disaster Preparedness

- *The majority of city agencies reported that funding shortages are the greatest barrier they face in preparing LEP communities for a disaster.* Funding shortages limit city agencies with respect to the hiring of bilingual personnel, making available written disaster preparedness materials in languages consistent with the needs of their populations, and providing Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) trainings in multiple languages.
- *Lack of trust in government officials impedes city and county agencies from collecting information from their Latino and Asian American denizens that is crucial to disaster preparation.* The hesitancy to interact with government officials on the part of Latinos and Asian American immigrant populations prevents city and county agencies from collecting demographic information as well as from developing and conducting outreach to those communities.
- *City agencies should foster close relationships with ethnic media to prepare LEP communities for a disaster.* Most cities have limited capacity to broadcast emergency information in non-English languages, and frequently lack a systematic plan to disseminate information to the ethnic media.

## Disaster Response

- *City agencies lack bilingual personnel.* This raises questions about whether first responders can communicate with Latino and Asian American communities in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Language assistance tools, such as flip cards and translations of key words for use by monolingual personnel may be more practical than hiring more bilingual first responders to ensure that first responders are equipped with the necessary resources to communicate with those communities.
- *Community organizations also play a critical role in reaching out to LEP communities.* Yet, few city agencies have formalized systems of outreach to community organizations working in LEP communities.
- *Withholding questions about immigration status on the part of first responders is crucial to the provision of effective emergency disaster services to LEP communities.* All city agencies report that disaster response is provided to residents regardless of immigration status.
- *The federal and state governments can assist local municipalities.* Resources should be established such as a web-based clearinghouse for transition of disaster preparedness material in multiple languages.

This report follows up on a previous report that TRPI and APALC released in 2008. The 2008 report reveals the need for in-place infrastructure to provide language assistance to ensure that LEP communities understand and can follow the necessary instructions during an emergency. The report also identifies good relationships between disaster management governmental agencies and community-based ethnic organizations as the key to ensuring rapid communication with LEP communities.

*The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute is a nonprofit, independent institution founded in 1985 that specializes in non-partisan policy research on key issues affecting Latinos, including technology, education, political participation, access to healthcare, and immigration. The Institute is affiliated with the School of Policy, Planning, and Development at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles—with an office at Columbia University in New York. For more information, please visit: [www.trpi.org](http://www.trpi.org).*

*The Asian Pacific American Legal Center is the largest organization in the country focused on providing multilingual, culturally sensitive legal services, education, and civil rights support to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. APALC is a member of the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice. For more information, please visit: [www.apalc.org](http://www.apalc.org).*

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