



# RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

# RESPONSE

"Recognizing Emergency Disastrous Situations to Prepare Options Needed For/During Special Events"

## EDUCATION FORUM SUMMARY

PREPARED BY AMAZING TASTE, LLC

MONDAY, JUNE 12, 2006



"Plan for the worst and hope for the best": A common phrase, but surprisingly enough, many event planners seldom take this practical advice to heart when it comes to major emergencies and disasters. But what if a meeting you were running took place on September 11th in lower Manhattan, would you have had an evacuation plan for attendees? Or, as an event planner, how would you have handled the events following the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Park Bombing? For eight weeks, the 13 students of the Raritan Valley Community College's (RVCC) fall 2005 Events Planning/Meeting Management Class tackled such issues by organizing an educational forum on emergency and disaster preparedness/response for special events.



The fall 2005 Events Planning/Meeting Management students with course instructor Elizabeth Ngonzi

Students were given this opportunity when \$45,000 was granted to RVCC to promote homeland security and emergency preparedness. Students received guidance from their instructor, Elizabeth Ngonzi, President of the event planning company Amazing Taste, LLC, who has 14 years of experience in the industry. "Because my company does events at the United Nations and many of our guests are high profile dignitaries and celebrities, we have to be very aware of issues such as security, evacuation, communication, and have backup plans. I was shocked to find out how few of my fellow event planners do the same," Ms. Ngonzi said. Recent events, from September 11<sup>th</sup>, the 2004 Tsunami in South Asia, and Hurricane Katrina have demonstrated the necessity of such a forum. Planning is especially necessary "with the increased fear due to terrorist attacks, but planners also need to strategize for disasters due to human error or carelessness and natural disasters like the weather," Ms. Ngonzi said<sup>1</sup>.

The forum was designed to highlight how event planners can safeguard against calamities and how to best respond during disastrous situations. Entitled *Response* (Recognizing Emergency and Disastrous Situations to Prepare Options Needed For/During Special Events), the forum took place on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2005, at RVCC in North Branch, NJ. It focused on a framework of the three stages of emergency and disaster management, developed by Ms. Ngonzi, with which the industry needs to create a standard –Preparedness, Response and Evaluation. Preparedness entails: working with law enforcement/health departments to develop plans, training staff in emergency procedures, practicing procedures onsite to ensure that roles, responsibilities, and actions are understood, and, finally, providing adequate signage to facilitate crowd control. The Response

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<sup>1</sup> Loxton, Michelle. ["Homeland Security Grant Initiates Unique Collegiate Forum On Emergency Preparedness for Special Events."](#) Visited 2 June, 2006.

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stage involves: managing the communication flow by designating spokespeople, timing, media, and messaging, managing emergency services and prioritizing injuries, and ensuring that adequate supplies and temporary facilities are available and managed. Stage three, Evaluation, requires: analyzing events leading up to, during, and immediately following the devastation, evaluating responses to the devastation, sharing best practices and lessons learned, creating industry standards and guidelines, and registering appropriate events with Homeland security, and conducting safety audits. The goal of the forum was to share best practices for emergency situations, developing a standardized framework for emergency preparedness that can be applied throughout the event planning industry. Organizing the forum also provided valuable hands on experience to the Events Planning/Meeting Management students at RVCC. Participants in the forum included RVCC students, educators, special events professionals, emergency management leaders, and those allied with the industry. Discussion topics were selected based on responses from an online survey of forum registrants using the CVENT event management application. The New Jersey-North Chapter of the International Special Events Society provided access to the application.

Many of the items needed for the forum (including the door prizes) were donated, with eleven corporate sponsors in total, providing everything from gift cards to The Home Depot to AAA roadside kits and emergency kits from EmergencyKitPro.com. This was made possible through the efforts of the Events Planning/Meeting Management students, led by their instructor, Ms. Ngonzi. In return, the sponsors were given exhibit space in the forum venue, were listed in the forum program and on the event website.

While the forum ran from 8:00am until 12:00pm, a continental breakfast, provided for by Starbucks Coffee and Panera Bread, began at 7:30am. For a copy of the complete forum agenda, please refer to Appendix 1.



Distinguished speaker Anthony Poveromo and two events planning students enjoy the continental breakfast

Opening remarks for the forum were provided by Dr. Richard Celeste, Executive Director of the Somerset Police Academy and SAFE Project Coordinator. This was followed by a welcoming message from Dr G. Jeremiah Ryan, the then President of Raritan Valley Community College.

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Fifteen-minute presentations were then given by four distinguished speakers: Anthony Poveromo, President/Founder of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Security, Inc.; George Wagner, Office of Emergency Management for Hunterdon County; Colleen McKay-Wharton, a Public Health Planner for NJDHSS/Somerset County Department of Health; and William Bernard, RVCC Assistant Director of Facilities and Grounds. These subject matter experts provided their expertise, speaking on topics tailored to their careers. Mr. Poveromo spoke about event security, Mr. Wagner on trends in disaster/emergency preparedness and response, Ms. McKay-Wharton on emergency preparedness from the Department of Health perspective, and Mr. Bernard on disaster preparedness from the facilities management perspective.

For instance, more specifically, Ms. McKay-Wharton gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Public Health Emergency Planning in Somerset County." She explained that a public health emergency can be natural or manmade and discussed the topic's relevance throughout society. She explained some of the services that the Somerset County Department of Health provides and the many groups with which they work. She also discussed the importance of prevention and planning that includes training, as well as having proper emergency contact numbers.



Colleen McKay-Wharton, a Public Health Planner for NJDHSS/Somerset County Department of Health delivering her presentation entitled "Public Health Emergency Planning in Somerset County"

The forum was designed to touch on many different perspectives of emergency preparedness by using various modes of communication. The forum continued with a 25-minute presentation by Ken Staats, Vice President of Operations and Vice President, Special Project – Promo 1, on the New Jersey Festival of Ballooning and how it relates to emergency preparedness for large events. After a 10-minute break and drawing for door prizes, the forum continued with hour-long roundtable breakout sessions that enabled all forum participants to provide their input. There were eight different groups, each facilitated by safety and event industry experts, such as Chet Jasinski, the Event Manager of the NJ Expo & Convention Center and Joan Rothbard, President of Recreation Picnic Service, a 50-year old company that runs team-building activities for large-scale corporate picnics and events. Each group discussed one of four roundtable topics: Manmade Disasters due to Terrorism, Manmade Disasters due to Negligence, Natural Disasters, and Health Emergencies.

**The two groups focusing on the roundtable topic "Manmade Disasters due to Terrorism" made the following recommendations:**

1. Do background checks on all employees at the event, including members of the kitchen staff.
2. Security should be particularly tight at the most easily accessible locations, such as the front door and kitchen entrances.
3. Make sure all exit signs are posted clearly and nothing is blocking the exits.
4. Event organizers should always refer to the professionals. For instance, if you have a question about security, refer to a security company.
5. Always have an EMT or a trained professional on site.
6. Have the emergency contact information of all of the staff, including volunteers, on file.
7. On everyone's cell phone there should be an ICE (In Case of Emergency) contact number listed.
8. Professionals (bonded, licensed, and insured security companies) should be hired to do the security for all events, regardless of size, and this security should be incorporated into the event planning.
9. All staff members should have designated emergency situation command posts in central locations.
10. Security should check the HVAC system in the building where the event will take place.
11. Be prepared for bomb threats and create a plan of action.

**The two groups assigned to the roundtable topic "Manmade Disasters due to Negligence", recommended the following:**

1. Have a checklist preparing for emergency situations.
2. Verify that employees are properly trained, including transportation personnel.
3. Be guided by professionals to determine whether there is a real threat and if evacuation is necessary.
4. In the case of an evacuation, know ahead of time where to send people.
5. Determine the severity of the situation without alarming the crowd.
6. Plan for medical emergencies by having emergency contact numbers.
7. Prepare a decision-making matrix (ICS, Incident Command System) so that people know who to take direction from in emergency situations.
8. Test fire extinguishers, generators, etc. and make sure all of the staff is trained for emergency situations.

**Recommendations from the two groups discussing the roundtable topic "Natural Disasters" were:**

1. Natural disasters include but are not limited to floods, blizzards, snow storms, hurricanes, and earthquakes.
2. If the power shuts down, the computers will shut down and you will need a regular landline since there may not be cell phone service in the area.
3. Have two-way radios and shortwave radios on hand.
4. An emergency water supply must be readily available.

**The two groups focused on the roundtable topic "Health Emergencies", recommended:**

1. Chemical tests should be done to make sure food and drink is properly prepared.
2. The biggest threat is to large scale, high profile events.
3. Make sure that the local chemical plants are tightly secured and protected against chemical spills.



William Bernard Jr., RVCC Assistant Director of Facilities and Grounds facilitating roundtable discussion focused on Natural Disasters (assisted by events planning students)

Many of the topics in each roundtable discussion can be applied to various emergency situations (i.e., precautions taken for natural disasters can also be used for health emergencies.) It should be noted that many, if not all, of the security precautions mentioned during the roundtable discussions were practiced in planning the *Response* forum. For instance prior to the forum, all exits were checked for accessibility, fire extinguisher locations identified, and the contact information of all of the staff was captured and those with CPR certification were highlighted. Additionally, at the beginning of the forum, a student, referencing the room diagram that everyone received, told participants where all of the exits were located. For a copy of the room diagram, please refer to Appendix 2.

After a 10-minute break, the forum continued with a 55-minute summary of the roundtable discussions, presented by Dr. Linda Mather, President of The Forums Institute for Public Policy. A 15-minute Question and Answer session, facilitated by Ms. Ngonzi, followed this report. There was then one more drawing for door prizes, concluding this timely and informative forum.



Panel of distinguished speakers responding to questions from the audience

Applying what students had learned about emergency preparedness, the forum program provided "10 Event Planning Tips for the Holidays" as well as "Emergency/Disaster Management and Response Resources."

**These 10 tips included:**

1. Make back up transportation plans and identify possible places for attendees to stay in the event of an emergency (e.g., snowstorm).
2. Have a list of current local emergency phone numbers (e.g., Poison Control Center – 1.800.222.1222)
3. Program your cell phone with ICE (In Case of Emergency) contact numbers.
4. Avoid planning menus that contain too many common food allergens (e.g., peanuts, shell fish, berries).
5. Attach a food allergy/restriction questionnaire to the event invitation.
6. Maintain an accurate and updated list of everyone who is on premises during the event (e.g., volunteers, speakers, vendors, team members, support staff such as caterers, wait staff, etc.).
7. Locate all fire exits and extinguishers upon entering a venue.
8. Make certain to have more exits than you do entrances.
9. Have an emergency kit on hand with matches, flashlights, prepaid cell phone with programmed numbers, GPS Enabled walkie-talkie set, latex gloves, aspirin, and spray bottle of chlorine bleach.
10. Designate an Emergency Preparedness Team Leader for every event who will be responsible for staff training, staff assignment, and will be familiar with the venue's emergency management plan.

**Emergency/Disaster Management and Response Resources:**

1. American Red Cross – Greater Somerset County Chapter  
<http://chapters.redcross.org/nj/gsccl/>
2. American Red Cross – Hunterdon County Branch  
[www.hunterdonredcross.org](http://www.hunterdonredcross.org)
3. Department of Homeland Security  
[www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/](http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/)
4. Federal Emergency Management Agency  
[www.fema.gov/](http://www.fema.gov/)
5. National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster  
[www.nvoad.org/](http://www.nvoad.org/)
6. Somerset County Office of Emergency Management  
[www.co.somerset.nj.us/\\_ongoing/somerset\\_county\\_office\\_of\\_emerge.htm](http://www.co.somerset.nj.us/_ongoing/somerset_county_office_of_emerge.htm)

In addition to the information provided in the forum's handout, students researched how to prevent and handle emergency situations during events, properly preparing them for the forum. Using this research, each student wrote their own paper on Emergency/Disaster Preventative and Action Plan. The class instructor, Ms. Ngonzi, chose two of the best papers to be combined as a single class example. Leah Ciurczak and Ginette Todeschini wrote the two papers, and the following excerpts were taken from their combined paper. The paper opened with an explanation of the purpose of an Emergency/Disaster Preventative and Action Plan, which defined the "necessary

measures that need to take place in order to help prevent an emergency/disaster and to define the necessary actions that need to be taken during the incidence of an emergency/disaster. Its importance is also to increase aid to attendees, staff and all other persons at the event if an emergency/disaster should occur." A list of local emergency contact numbers was then provided, including the numbers of RVCC security, the North Branch Fire Department, Branchburg Police Department, and the Somerset Medical Center.

The students' following example of emergency supply kit necessities and location is also an integral part of any emergency action plan.

### **Emergency Supply Kit**

- Battery operated radio
- Batteries
- Mega phone
- First aid kit
- Flashlights
- Blanket
- Fire blanket
- Water
- Copy of emergency contact numbers
- Copy of list of local radio stations
- Copy of floor plan with evacuation route and maximum occupancy

The kit will be kept in one of the storage closets by the front doors of conference room B and make sure all staff members are aware of where the supply kit is located. One person will be assigned to retrieve kit, hand out supplies and use mega phone.

Another integral part of the students' action plan is the following checklist of necessary precautions:

### **General Preventative/Action Reminders**

- Have at least two cell phones that are fully charged and have full service in conference area
- Have emergency contact list and floor plan with evacuation routes on hand during event
- Assign a staff member to every exit in case of an emergency evacuation
- Prior to event make sure security knows when, where and what time event will be taking place. Also, make sure they have a final headcount of total attendees.
- Make sure exits and stairwells are not blocked
- Make sure closet with emergency supply kit is not blocked

- Keep track of maximum occupancy limit by totaling registration list and adding staff members
- ALWAYS STAY CALM!
- When evacuating, once outside, remain at least 250 feet away from building
- Once evacuated do not re-enter building until "okayed" to do so

The paper provided more specific lists of "Preventative Measures and Actions in the Incidents of an Emergency/Disaster" for cases of: fires, power outages, severe weather conditions, medical emergencies, and bomb threats. These preventative and action guidelines provide the tools for the standardization that is so needed across the event planning industry.

While the forum proved to be an informative four hours, the real measure of its impact is how this information is applied. The next step is making sure that the things learned from the forum are put to use not only after a disastrous event has occurred, but beforehand as well, working to prevent its occurrence. While recent large-scale natural and manmade disasters have highlighted the necessity for emergency preparedness during events, the need is nothing new. "Whether you are planning high-profile events for thousands of people or more intimate meetings for VIP's, special events producers have always had to plan and be prepared for a crisis," says Ms. Ngonzi said<sup>2</sup>.

With each event planner that puts the guidelines discussed for emergency preparedness into place, they are not only ensuring the success of their own event, but are also helping to provide an industry standard. If things like emergency evacuation plans are considered the norm for event planners then the occurrence of disasters during events, and the destruction they cause, will severely decrease.

For further information, please refer to the following Emergency/Disaster Mgmt. & Response Resources:

**Organizations:**

Department of Homeland Security: <http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/>

Federal Emergency Management Agency: <http://www.fema.gov/>

National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster: <http://www.nvoad.org/<>>

**Articles:**

[Gone With the Wind: What hurricanes mean for meetings: what was ruined, what remains, and what's to come](#) by Sara J. Welch

[How to Cancel an Event: What to consider when pulling the plug on a meeting — and how to minimize losses](#) By Louise M. Felsher, CMP, CMM

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<sup>2</sup> Loxton, Michelle. "[Homeland Security Grant Initiates Unique Collegiate Forum On Emergency Preparedness for Special Events.](#)" Visited 2 June, 2006.

[Safe House? A revealing look at the weak spots in convention center security](#) By Brendan M. Lynch

[Are Security Concerns Slipping? Some Industry Insiders Claim Complacency on Part of Planners](#)  
By Morton D. Rosenbaum

[Crisis Management: Could You Cope if the Unthinkable Happened](#) By Bert van Walbeek

**General Resources:**

Emergency Kit Pro <http://www.emergencykitpro.com/>

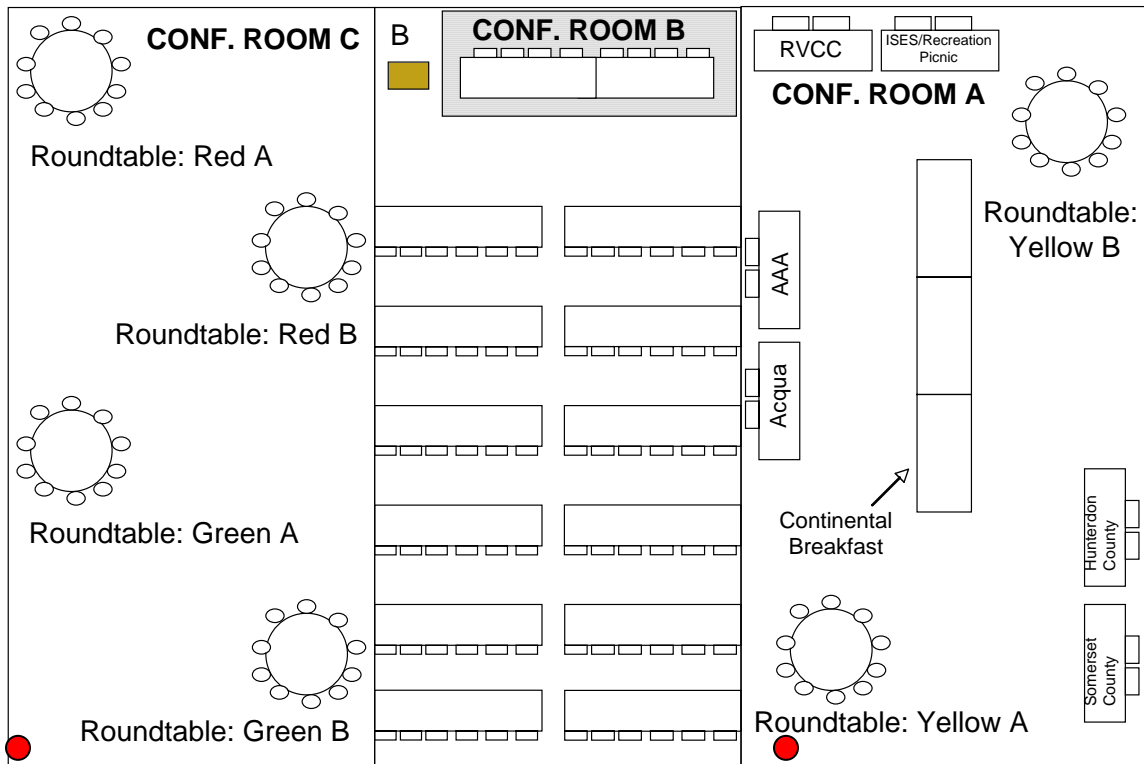
Education/Training/Certification Programs:  
[http://www.disasterresource.com/articles/edu\\_train\\_cert\\_laye.shtml](http://www.disasterresource.com/articles/edu_train_cert_laye.shtml)

Emergency Email Network: [www.emergencyemail.org](http://www.emergencyemail.org)

Appendix 1: Response Forum Agenda

<p><b>R</b>ecognizing <b>E</b>mergencies / Disastrous <b>S</b>ituations &amp; <b>P</b>reparing <b>O</b>ptions <b>N</b>eeded for / during <b>S</b>pecial <b>E</b>vents</p>	<p><b>AGENDA</b></p> <p><b>FORUM ON EMERGENCY / DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE FOR SPECIAL EVENTS</b></p> <p>Raritan Valley Community College - December 8th, 2005</p>
7:30 AM - 8:00 AM	<p><b>CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST / NETWORKING</b> RVCC Conference Center - The Grand Conference Room</p>
7:58:00 AM	<p><b>WELCOME FROM THE EVENTS PLANNING/MEETING MANAGEMENT PROGRAM</b> Elizabeth Ngonzi, Forum Organizer and Adjunct Instructor</p>
8:00 AM - 8:05 AM	<p><b>INTRODUCTION OF PRESIDENT</b> Opening Remarks: Dr. Richard Celeste, Executive Director of the Somerset Police Academy and SAFE Project Coordinator</p> <p><b>WELCOME MESSAGE</b> Raritan Valley Community College President, Dr. G. Jeremiah Ryan</p>
8:05 AM - 8:20 AM	<p><b>SECURITY PRESENTATION</b> Presenter: Anthony Poveromo, President / Founder - 21st Century Security, Inc.</p>
8:20 AM - 8:35 AM	<p><b>TRENDS IN DISASTER / EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE</b> Presenter: George Wagner, Director of Public Safety for Hunterdon County</p>
8:35 AM - 8:50 AM	<p><b>EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS - DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PERSPECTIVE</b> Presenter: Colleen McKay-Wharton, Public Health Planner NJDHSS / Somerset County Department of Health</p>
8:50 AM - 9:05 AM	<p><b>FACILITIES</b> Presenter: William Bernard, Jr., Assistant Director of Facilities and Grounds - Raritan Valley Community College</p>
9:05 AM - 9:30 AM	<p><b>PRESENTATION OF NJ FESTIVAL OF BALLOONING</b> Presenter: Ken Staats - Vice President of Operations, and Vice President, Special Projects - Promo 1</p>
9:30 AM - 9:40 AM	<b>BREAK</b>
9:40 AM - 10:40 AM	<p><b>ROUNDTABLE BREAKOUT SESSIONS</b></p> <p><b>SHARING OF BEST PRACTICES FOR PREPAREDNESS FOR AND RESPONSE TO:</b></p> <p><b>1. Manmade Disasters Due to Terrorism</b> RED A Anthony Poveromo, President / Founder - 21st Century Security, Inc. RED B Chet Jasinski, Event Manager, NJ Expo and Convention Center</p> <p><b>2. Manmade Disasters Due to Negligence</b> GREEN A Jeffrey Rinaldi, Managing Director - 21st Century Security, Inc. GREEN B George Wagner, Office of Emergency Management for Hunterdon County</p> <p><b>3. Natural Disasters</b> YELLOW A William Bernard, Jr., Assistant Director of Facilities and Grounds - Raritan Valley Community College YELLOW B Joan Rothbard, President, Recreation Picnic Service and the NJ North Chapter of the International Special Events Society</p> <p><b>4. Health Emergencies</b> BLUE A Colleen McKay-Wharton, Public Health Planner, NJDHSS / Somerset County Department of Health BLUE B Thomas A. Bittle, Deputy Coordinator, Somerset County Office of Emergency Management</p>
10:40 AM - 10:50 AM	<b>BREAK</b>
10:50 AM - 11:45 AM	<p><b>ROUNDTABLE SESSION REPORT-OUT</b></p> <p>Facilitator: Dr. Linda Mather: Chief Executive Officer The Forums Institute for Public Policy</p>
11:45 AM - 12:00 PM	<p><b>QUESTION &amp; ANSWER</b> Facilitator: Elizabeth Ngonzi, Forum Organizer and Adjunct Instructor Events Planning and Meeting Management Program</p> <p><b>DRAWING FOR DOOR PRIZES</b></p>

Appendix 2: Response Forum Room Layout



Room ATTC 102: Roundtables: Blue A and Blue B →

● = Fire Extinguisher