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Preparedness Campaign Urges Families, Businesses to ‘Drill’ this September; Parents Urged to Learn How to Text

200,000 Volunteers Focus on “Pledging to Drill;” 15 Cities Participate in Coast-to-Coast Rollout of Practicing ‘How to Communicate’ in an Emergency

Atlanta – The Safe America Foundation has announced a preparedness campaign, the “9/11 Drill Down For Safety,” to encourage American families to conduct ‘communication drills’ this September as a first step in an annual practice rehearsing what they would do during a natural disaster or other form of emergency.

A month-long campaign coinciding with National Preparedness Month, the “9/11 Drill Down For Safety” program has drills planned in Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Dallas, Palm Beach, Salt Lake City, San Diego, San Francisco, Tucson, Washington, D.C. and a variety of smaller communities from Maine to Hawaii.

The campaign was created by the Safe America Foundation, a suburban Atlanta-based 501C-3 that has worked on a variety of preparedness programs with the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA over the past seven years. Former Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta, who played a pivotal role on 9/11 and in the post-event formation of the Transportation Safety Administration (TSA), is the program’s Honorary Chairman.

Mr. Mineta will join other non-profit and corporate leaders in kicking off the program on September 1 at USA Today Headquarters for a ‘Pledge to Drill’ luncheon. Organizations that are partnering in the kick-off include 10 national non-profits: the **U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s Business Civic Leadership Center (BCLC)**; the **International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM)**; the **National Emergency Managers Association (NEMA)**; the **American Logistics Aid Network (ALAN)**; the **U.S. Medical Reserve Corps** (under the Surgeon General’s Office); the **National Association of Government Communicators (NAGC)**; the **National Association of State EMS Officers (NASEMSO)**; the **National Association of EMTs (NAEMT)** and the **National Volunteer Fire Corps (NVFC)**.

Safe America President Len Pagano notes that a series of ‘demonstration drills’ will occur beginning on September 11 in Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Palm Beach, Florida; Philadelphia, Salt Lake City; San Diego; San Francisco; Tucson; Washington, DC. Drills will also be conducted in a variety of non-metro areas and in the states of Maine, Michigan and Hawaii.

“We’re delighted with the response to-date, before we have even gone public,” Pagano noted. “Safe America believes that individuals are the ‘missing link’ in preparedness; and, through this program, we will annually involve millions – teaching them that in an emergency, THEY are their own first responder.”

The Foundation is working with wireless carriers on focusing on non-voice communications, especially texting. Pagano noted that in emergencies where digital communications may go down, texting messages may still ‘get through’ or be held in the cue for delivery (once service is normalized). He noted that having parents learn how to text is a valuable safety tool. And, he noted Safe America will offer texting ‘lessons’ from a newly-created www.safeamericaprepared.org web site.

The “Pledge to Drill”/pre-9/11 media blitz will also focus on other social media tools like Twitter and Facebook, which can also help keep family and friends ‘in touch’ if voice networks are knocked off line. Individuals can sign up at www.safeamericaprepared.org to pledge to drill and then post post-drill ‘success stories’ online and compete for prizes and recognition.

“Much as been written about how to stockpile food and water during a crisis, but we want Americans to think about how they’d communicate if phone lines were down or networks go offline. How they’d get in touch with loved ones is a critical issue, as we learned during Katrina. We want families to plan now how they will communicate, and have the tools like texting – or newer ones like Twitter and Facebook – loaded into their phones and mobile devices, ready to use in an emergency,” said Secretary Mineta.

The project will also focus on the importance of educating children in how to communicate in adverse situations. As part of ‘9/11 Drill Down for Safety,’ parents will be urged to have their children pre-load emergency URLs and messages into their mobile devices, as well as set up text messaging templates that can speed up communications and provide immediate access during an emergency.

“We will always be facing natural disasters, so having people practice how they’d respond to a crisis – and improve their communications’ readiness – is as critical to families as stockpiling water and food,” said UPS Foundation President Ken Sternad, a program sponsor.

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