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DISASTER PREVENTION KICK-OFF THIS WEEK IN LAREDO/ RIO GRANDE CITY

Laredo, May 29 2006: With hurricane season officially underway, disaster prevention will be the watchword during community meetings this week in Laredo and Rio Grande City. Texas A&M International University and the Rio Grande Institute have teamed-up with local jurisdictions to conduct an all hazard risk assessment and develop a comprehensive pre-disaster mitigation plan for the local communities and the region.

This is the start of a three year, "Cover the Border," process underwritten by FEMA and the Governor, Division of Emergency Management (DEM) that is designed to assure each local Texas border jurisdiction has systematically assessed the hazards it faces, and has a clearly defined plan to reduce the risks posed to life and property during and after a disaster strikes.

In announcing the program, TAMU Project Director, Dr. Ken Tobin, said "good planning cannot only save lives and protect property, it can minimize disruption to communities following a disaster by anticipating and preparing for economic and social dislocations. He added that cities and counties on the border can ill afford to lose their eligibility for the full range of future Federal disaster prevention funding." In November 2004, FEMA announced that some of the Federal pre-disaster mitigation assistance will be conditioned on cities and counties having an approved Hazard Mitigation Plan in place.

The current phase of the border effort is focused on jurisdictions in ten counties: Starr, Jim Hogg, Webb, Duval, Brooks, McMullen, Terrell, Pecos, Reeves and Kenedy. One should not think all these local governments have assessed risks or made plans; most have. But they haven, taken their concerns, priorities and plans and presented them as a Hazard Mitigation Plan in the way state and federal agencies require, according to Tyrus Fain of the Rio Grande Institute. Our assignment is to help those that are ready and willing to do so.

Fain's, Brewster County based Institute and TAMU will be joined by H20 Partners, an Austin-based disaster mitigation planning company that has worked on over 100 local mitigation plans across Texas and is currently providing assistance to the State of Mississippi. H20 is headed by Jo Ann Howard who directed FEMA, national flood insurance in the last administration.

At the kick-off meetings the H20-led team will introduce the project to local emergency management officials and interested stakeholders and explain the steps to follow in developing a plan that can meet FEMA and DEM requirements. At critical junctures in the planning process, the Project Team will conduct workshops and public meetings to elicit input and share information.

The Laredo, "kick-off," meeting is at the TAMU Student Center, starting at 9AM, Wednesday, May 31st. The Rio Grande City kick-off will be the next day, June 1st, starting at 2:00 p.m. in the City Council Chamber Room, 101 South Washington Street.

More information is available at a website specially constructed for this project by TAMU. Internet users can go to <http://cees.tamiu.edu/covertheborder/index.html> or ask for information by directing an e-mail to info@riogrande.org.