



Raleigh Alliance for Response Kick-off Forum

October 23, 2009

North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, North Carolina

At the recent Triangle Alliance for Response Forum, Raleigh (NC) Fire Chief John McGrath sought to ease anxieties people may have about working with the fire department in emergencies. "We can be intimidating because we bring the biggest toys to the fireground," Chief McGrath said. "But I implore you to identify yourself. We will be grateful for your expertise, and we are looking for your guidance to do the right thing." He added that while the fire department knows how to put out fires, cultural heritage professionals know salvage priorities and how to handle objects.

More than 70 representatives from Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill cultural, educational, and public safety organizations heard Chief McGrath at the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh on October 23, 2009. For many participants, the Triangle Alliance for Response Forum served as an introduction to the importance and wealth of cultural resources in the Triangle area as well as to the official systems and procedures emergency responders use to deal with disasters.

For participants from cultural institutions, the day's program was particularly successful in imparting information about many facets of emergency planning and response, including assessing threats, working with the fire department, understanding Federal Emergency Management Agency protocols, and planning a safe and coordinated response effort.

Joshua Creighton, Director of Wake County Emergency Management, provided guidance on how to evaluate an institution's risks and outlined various ways to work with emergency responders to overcome vulnerabilities. He encouraged participants to schedule facility tours for emergency responders and to work with fire code inspectors to find ways to improve facility protection.

A panel of experts from North Carolina agencies agreed that emergency plans must be continually practiced and revised to be successful. Participants were encouraged to create more effective emergency teams of staff and volunteers by matching duties and abilities. Planners also need to be ready to deal with physical and mental health issues during emergency response.

With a view towards improving cooperative efforts in the Triangle area, the formal program ended with presentations from leaders of several existing networks. David Goist, with the American Institute for Conservation's Collections Emergency Response Team, Frank Thomson from the Mountain Area Cultural Resources Emergency Network, and Andrew Hart from the Triangle Research Libraries Network Disaster Team, underscored how much can be achieved by working together.

The local forum planning committee was led by Robert James of the North Carolina Preservation Consortium and included representatives from emergency management and cultural agencies and area museums and libraries. The disaster recovery firm BELFOR sponsored lunch, and the North Carolina Museum of Art provided meeting space for the forum.