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ALAMEDA COUNTY UNVEILS NEW EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS WEBSITE

The strong earthquake that rumbled through Napa late last month – as well as the approach of an end-of-summer fire season stoked by drought – remind us all that it's time to get serious about emergency preparedness.

Recent local natural disasters have created the Perfect Storm for Alameda County's unveiling of a new emergency preparedness website designed to help us all overcome the indecision and take action. READY.ACGOV.ORG, the mobile-friendly website being launched by the County this week, is offering nothing short of a breakthrough in the way it provides an easy-to-follow, step-by-step process to help anyone prepare for the next major emergency.

"We believe we have come up with a great new tool with the potential of greatly improving the level of safety in our community," said Tim Dupuis, Chief Information Officer for Alameda County.

READY.ACGOV.ORG is designed to be *the* place to go for local residents looking to get a leg up on preparing for the next big earthquake, fire or other natural or man-made disaster. The website is the result of several months of research in which County staff poured through disaster preparedness information from numerous sources – emergency services organizations, public safety agencies and community groups – with the aim of cutting through the clutter and providing people with a straight-forward approach to getting prepared.

The website is designed to work seamlessly with all computer operating systems and on web and mobile platforms. It also comes with an interesting back story involving a group of tech-savvy local youth that was instrumental in its creation.

Emergency preparedness has long been a priority for the County leadership and public protection agencies, which have collaborated frequently on ways to promote disaster planning in a region that has been hit hard by incidents such as the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989 and the Oakland hills firestorm in 1991. The message of preparedness has also resonated with the public – a point made crystal clear in May when a clever mobile app focusing on emergency preparedness was awarded top prize in a County-sponsored community hackathon called the Alameda County Apps Challenge 2014.1 in Dublin.

The winning app – and the fact that technically talented youth were consistently among the strongest entrants in the three community hackathons the County has sponsored since 2012 – helped Dupuis and other County leaders strike on the bold idea of tapping young local talent to help in the design of the new emergency preparedness website.

"We continue to see young people in our communities being extremely creative in using the latest technologies to communicate and get their messages out," said Susan S. Muranishi, Alameda County

Administrator. “This project was a perfect opportunity to both engage young people and tap into that creativity and talent.”

Thanks to a Student Internship Program the County sponsored this past summer, a small group of talented local high school and college students was available to work with County IT staff in building the new emergency preparedness website. The group also consulted with the County Sheriff’s Office and Fire Department in developing the site.

“It’s been an unbelievable experience,” said Justin Liu, 18, a 2014 graduate of Castro Valley High School who worked on the Emergency Preparedness project. “I was given a lot of responsibility and the opportunity to work on something that I think can really make a difference in helping people in our community.”

The work of Liu and other interns played a major part in the creation of READY.ACGOV.ORG and its wealth of information about resources in the community, ways neighborhoods can take collective steps toward emergency preparedness – and even what emergency supplies to keep on hand for your pets.

The site’s logical, easy-to-follow approach also recognizes one obstacle that may prevent many people from taking emergency preparedness seriously: the blizzard of information, often from multiple sources, that is often unleashed on a person when they make their first foray into deciding how best to get ready.

That’s why READY.ACGOV.ORG takes pains to start simply, providing small doses of essential information before leading users to more specialized assistance. It recognizes that Emergency Preparation is a process, one where success can be achieved over time through consistent, measured steps. With this in mind, much of the website is formatted with simple check lists so that users can monitor their progress and see that each step brings them closer to being well prepared.

“Alameda County has taken many steps over the years to prepare for the next big emergency, from developing a countywide Emergency Operations Center to holding numerous real-time disaster simulations in which our County employees test their skills and knowledge as Official Disaster Service Workers in our community,” said Keith Carson, President of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors. “I am hopeful this new emergency preparedness website will help to activate our residents so that they will join us in making sure all sectors of our community are ready when the next disaster strikes.”

To arrange interviews with the student interns, and the ITD personnel involved in developing READY.ACGOV.ORG, as well as to see a demonstration of the workings of this breakthrough emergency preparedness website, call Guy Ashley at (510) 272-6569.