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Iberville Parish LEPC/I-CAER receives 2001 International Hazardous Materials Spills Award

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency's Chemical Emergency Prevention and Preparedness Partnership Award was presented to two local groups for the E-Merge/ E-Notify emergency notification software developed for Iberville Parish. The Iberville Parish Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC), and the Iberville Community Awareness Emergency Response Committee (I-CAER) received the Award for its "significant efforts and accomplishments in Preparedness, Prevention and Response programs."

Awards Committee Chairman, Dr. Mark Scott, of the National Institute for Chemical Studies and Mr. Jim Makris, U.S. EPA's Director of Preparedness and Prevention, presented the award to Iberville Parish Emergency Preparedness Director S.H. "Jackie" Jackson on behalf of the recipients. The joint EPA International Hazardous Material Spills Prevention and the EPA Region III Chemical Emergency Preparedness and Prevention Conference was held in Baltimore, Md. last week with 1800 attendees present from all parts of the world.

Louisiana's Sixth District U.S. Congressman Richard H. Baker told Jackson that he was very proud of Iberville's achievements. "This is a true vision of advanced homeland security." Baker also expressed great pleasure in seeing the warning and notification system that Iberville Parish has put in place by industry, local, state, federal governments and private business all working together for the benefit of its residents. Iberville Parish President J. Mitchell Ourso, Jr. echoed those sentiments and congratulated all who worked so hard to achieve the award by having the vision to do something no one else in the world has done. (This is an international award.)

Andy Mosher of Dow Louisiana Operations, Chairman of I-CAER, said "the operative word is partnership. The partnership between Iberville's industries, local officials, and the state and federal governments, has been built over almost two decades and has yielded a world-class emergency preparedness program that provides enhanced safety for the community. That has always been our goal. It is very satisfying to be recognized for those collective efforts."

Jackson was also a conference speaker. He presented two sessions on the One Minute Notification and Warning System that Iberville Parish developed with the assistance of Emerge of Louisiana, a Baton Rouge-based company. Speaking along with Jackson was Capt. D. Mike Egan PE USCG Chief of National Response Center, NRC's Weapons of Mass Destruction hotline and coordination who spoke on such sophistication and benefits a system such as Iberville Parish has that can save lives and property. Jim Staves of Region VI EPA's Technology Division spoke on Iberville Parish OEP/911 being selected as a Beta site to test a new program developed by EPA Region VI and University of Texas in Dallas called E-Plan. Jackson said that the E-Plan program will be very beneficial to first responders and fire dispatchers.

The E-Notify system allows industry or local responders at a chemical accident or release to report electronically, displaying a map of the effected area to the Iberville Parish Office of Emergency Preparedness/911 center; thus eliminating confusion and mis-communications. Then the E-Merge system is activated. It allows emergency personnel to send a notification message electronically and that activates community sirens, cable override, computerized telephone

ringdown and AM radio stations in the effected area only in less than one or two minutes of being notified, using a single computer program. Jackson also stated that to his knowledge no one else in the country has a similar system.

Other speakers at the conference included Mayor Martin O'Malley of Baltimore, Congressman Curt Weldon of Pennsylvania, Christie Whitman, U.S. EPA Administrator and ex Governor of N.J., and U.S. Maritime Administrator Edmond Fording, as well as those from the Pentagon and the New York, Pennsylvania and Arlington, VA fire and police departments. Topics covered terrorist attacks, riots, and all areas of preparedness, prevention and response.

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INTERNATIONAL AWARD
Iberville 'lightyears ahead' in emergency preparedness
By Deidre Cruse

Iberville Parish's two leading emergency preparedness groups last week received an international award for "significant efforts and accomplishments" in the development of a one-of-a-kind computerized notification system.

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency presented its Chemical Emergency Prevention and Preparedness Partnership Award to the Iberville Parish Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) and the Iberville Community Awareness Emergency Response Committee (I-CAER).

The award was presented at the joint EPA International Hazardous Material Spills Prevention and the EPA Region III Chemical Emergency Preparedness Conference in Baltimore in recognition of the E-Merge/E-Notify emergency notification software developed for Iberville Parish. More than 1,800 people from all parts of the world attended the conference in Baltimore, Maryland, last week.

Emergency Preparedness Director S. H. "Jackie" Jackson, who was also a speaker at the conference, accepted the award on behalf of the two groups.

"This is a true vision of advanced homeland security," U. S. Rep. Richard H. Baker, R-Baton Rouge, told Jackson. Baker also said he was pleased to see that Iberville's warning and notification system was put into place by business and industry and local, state and federal governments working together for the benefit of local residents.

Iberville Parish President J. Mitchell Ourso, Jr. congratulated all who worked so hard to achieve the award by having the vision to do something no one else in the world has done.

"The operative word is partnership," said Andy Mosher of the Dow Chemical Company and chairman of I-CAER. "The partnership between Iberville's industries, local officials and state and federal governments has been built over almost two decades and has yielded a world-class emergency preparedness program that provides enhanced safety for the community.

The E-Notify system allows industry or local emergency responders at a chemical accident or release to report electronically to the Iberville Office of Emergency/911 Center. A computerized map shows the affected area, eliminating confusion and miscommunications. The OEP then activates E-Merge, which allows emergency personnel to activate community sirens, cable override messages, the computerized telephone ringdown and AM radio stations in the affected area in only a minute or two using a single computer program.

"This early warning allows citizens to take the actions that can save their lives," the award citation noted.

Jackson said that, to his knowledge, no one else in the country has a similar system.

After talking to other conference participants, Jackson said he was convinced that Iberville's civil defense procedures are far ahead of those in the rest of the country.

"When they're talking about homeland security, they're lightyears behind," the director said.

LEPC and I-CAER do door-to-door campaigns every year to pass out emergency guidebooks and talk with residents about what to do in response to emergencies.

"When I shared that with those folks, they couldn't believe that we're this far advanced," Jackson said.

Jackson and a panel presented two 90-minute sessions on the one-minute notification and warning system that Iberville Parish developed with the assistance of Emerge Systems of Louisiana, a Baton Rouge based company.

Speaking along with Jackson was U. S. Coast Guard Capt. D. Mike Egan, chief of the National Response Center, who spoke on the benefits of a sophisticated system such as Iberville's in saving lives and property.

Jim Staves of Region VI EPA's Technology Division spoke on Iberville's Office of Emergency Preparedness/911 being selected as a site to test a new program, E-Plan, developed by EPA and the University of Texas at Dallas. Jackson and E-Plan would benefit first responders and fire dispatchers.

Other conference speakers included Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley; U. S. Rep. Curt Weldon of Pennsylvania; Christie Whitman, U. S. EPA administrator and former New Jersey

Governor; U. S. Maritime Administrator Edmond Fording, and representatives of the Pentagon, New York, Pennsylvania and Arlington, Virginia, fire and police departments.

POST SOUTH

Per Simmons

By: Deidre Cruse

Civil Defense at its Finest

Of the many things Iberville Parish has to be proud of, its emergency preparedness operations may be its best.

The Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) and the Iberville Community Awareness Emergency Response Committee (I-CAER) won an international award last week for its innovative, homegrown computerized emergency notification programs.

Emergency Preparedness Director S. H. "Jackie" Jackson came up with the idea for the first part of the computerized system. Now known as the E-Merge system, it allows emergency personnel to activate any or all the notification systems to alert the public of any natural or manmade incident with a few strokes on a computer keyboard. The system shaved about half an hour off the time it once took to notify the public.

Local contractors worked for free developing the computer software for E-Merge, but since have formed their own company to provide the software to others.

Local industries took up the cause on their end and had the E-Notify software developed. This allows them to report any chemical accidents or releases – complete with a map of the affected area – to 911, shaving even more time off the notification process and improving accuracy as well.

As far as anyone knows, this is the only computerized notification system of its kind in the world!

Even before the September 11 attack on America, and the subsequent new emphasis on "homeland defense," the system had attracted national attention and a few nibbles from abroad. Jackson had been busy on the speaker's circuit, including a presentation to the National Response Team in Washington D. C. at a meeting just a few blocks away from the Pentagon and just shortly before terrorists struck the building. He also spoke at the international conference at which this latest award was presented.

Not even Washington or New York has a notification system as sophisticated as the one developed right here in Iberville Parish.

President Bush's new director of homeland security would do well to visit Iberville Parish to see how civil defense is done.

Very few parishes (or counties), especially ones with populations as small as ours, can boast a telephone ring-down system that sends recorded messages to specific areas affected by an emergency, a parish-wide emergency radio station a tone alert system in

all the parish schools and a parish-wide siren system. Presumably, most at least have cable override messaging capability. The Iberville LEPC previously has garnered national awards for its work setting up all these systems.

Jackson said participants at the recent international conference were impressed at the annual door-to-door campaign LEPC and I-CAER conduct each year to pass out emergency handbooks and inform residents what to do in the event of a disaster. A prepared populace is key to an organized emergency response.

Our local police and firefighters, our first responders, continuously upgrade their training and participate in at least one mock disaster exercise every year. Many of our firefighters are trained to handle hazardous materials.

There is a lot to protect in Iberville Parish – not only the chemical plants, which have been responsible for many of the local measures, but also the Mississippi River, the Intracoastal Canal, the Atchafalaya Basin, the Strategic Oil Reserve at Bayou Choctaw, railways on both side of the river, water and sewer plants, electrical generating facilities in Plaquemine and on the Eastside, hundreds of miles of natural gas pipelines, an interstate and other major highways, two state prisons, two National Guard facilities, a hospital, 11 schools and 33,000 residents. Besides all the potential manmade disaster areas, the area is prone to hurricanes, tornadoes and floods.

This is a big “congratulations and thank you” card to LEPC, I-CAER, Jackie Jackson, the first responders and all the local officials who support their work for a job well done.

The international attention is well deserved.

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