



Partners in Prevention

Volume 19, Issue 9, September & October, 2017

Partner Spotlight - James R. McGowan

James R. McGowan is the Director of Development and Philanthropy for the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank, a nonprofit organization that solicits, procures, inventories, and warehouses donated food and other products. The food is distributed to community agencies that serve people in need. He has a demonstrated history of working with non-profit organizations and cares strongly about disaster and humanitarian relief, poverty alleviation, and social services.

FLASH: What is your background?

McGowan: My background is in nonprofit management. I have worked in numerous nonprofits, primarily in development positions for disaster organizations. In my previous career, the organization that I worked for had a strong focus on disaster preparedness, response, and recovery, which introduced me to the Federal Alliance of Safe Homes and the need for better mitigation and preparedness activities for individuals and organizations.

FLASH: How did you get interested in disaster safety?

McGowan: While growing up in South Alabama we experienced numerous hurricanes and the aftermath following them, which sparked my interest in disaster response. I started volunteering at a young age never knowing it would turn into a career. After starting my career in the disaster field, I learned how many people have relaxed attitudes in preparing for disasters. It was disheartening. Knowing that if I could better educate the community to be prepared for all emergency situations, it lessens the burden on emergency response personnel.

FLASH: What do you see as the future of resilient building? What do you think is moving the cause of resilience forward?

McGowan: In recent years, many different types of disasters—from floods to earthquakes to forest fires—have impacted areas like they have never seen before. This increases the need for an all hazard building approach to better save lives and protect property. The future of resilient building is looking at ways scientific and engineering advances can better prepare homes and buildings for the all hazard approach instead of picking just one that is common to your area.

FLASH: Can you tell us about a specific project you are working on or are passionate about in the resilience field?

McGowan: As an Alabama native, the tornado outbreak that occurred in April 2011 hit close to home. The tornado impacted many people during this devastating time. Looking back on what we learned from this disaster, we see today that the public is better educated about the value of safe rooms and preparing emergency action plans. Hopefully the loss of life will be lessened because of that. Many people do not have the knowledge and resources to know that a safe room is important, but it takes as little as getting a plan together to prepare for any kind of disaster that may occur.



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FLASH: Do you have any other comments or words of wisdom to offer our readers?

McGowan: It takes a whole community to prepare for a disaster. It is important to look out for yourself as well as your neighbors. Everybody plays a part in emergency preparedness, and by taking small steps you can mitigate and help your family to be ready when something happens.