

Poor need help in reacting to terrorism

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - If a bomb were to explode on a crowded inner-city bus or if a nuclear power plant came under attack by terrorists, would nearby low-income neighborhood residents know where to go or what to do for protection?

While U. S. anti-terror agents shifted to heightened alert last week after a string of terrorist bombings in London, one U. S. anti-poverty organization announced plans to broaden a program that aims to protect poor neighborhoods from terrorist attacks and prepare people for emergencies.

"Largely poor communities are those communities that are least likely to have anti-terrorism information. They are least likely to have any kind of preparedness training. They are least likely to have positive relations with law enforcement officers. Those communities are least likely to have an evacuation plan," says Derrick Span, national president of the Community Action Partnerships, a coalition of 1,000 organizations around the country that serve poor neighborhoods.

"Yet, they are more likely to have residing in them the untutored and the elderly who may not understand this color code idea. And they are more likely to be situated by these power plants and chemical plants. So, for that reason, they become more susceptible to bio-terrorism."

The program, Community Land Security, has been in operation since last year in three cities: Middlesex County, N.J., Bolivar County, Miss., and Knox County, Ky. But, they are expanding to seven more cities this summer through affiliates of the coalition, Span said.

They are: Monroe County Opportunity Program, Monroe, Michigan; WSOS Community Action Commission Inc., Fremont, Ohio; Costal Community Action Program, Rockland, Maine; Office of Human Affairs, Newport News, Va.; Frederick Community Action Agency, Frederick, Md.; Community Council of South Texas, Rio Grande City, Texas; and Little Dixie Community Action Agency, Hugo, Okla.

The programs are being run with a \$300,000 grant from the U. S. Department of

Health and Human Services that the coalition first applied for in 2002, Span says. The money was granted last year. He hopes to receive an additional \$200,000 to start 10 additional security programs next year. Coalition affiliates that apply for the Community Land Security funding, must be able to prove their readiness to train people for the program and must be able to match the initial funding of \$10,000 per program, he says.

The vulnerability of neighborhoods and proximities to potential targets for terrorists are also highly considered, Span said.

"Much of the criteria had to do with, number one, the ability of the Community Action Agency to reach out and be a part of these emergency response connections," he said.

Gary Goldberg, an emergency management consult-

ant, who has worked in federal emergency management for at least 30 years, including the Department of Energy, developed the training manual for the program.

He said Community Action agencies are, in part, being trained as advocates between neighborhood residents and emergency agencies to assure sensitivity and responsiveness before and during emergencies.

"What I'm training them to do is to be able to consider the fact that low-income people are also a special needs group in terms of emergency response just like disabled people and seniors and people who are incarcerated and people in hospitals and school children," he says.

Those who have been trained are responsible for disseminating information such as evacuation methods; knowledge of people who

may need special assistance in the case of an attack; translating meanings of security codes; providing the names of resources in emergencies; and teaching anti-terrorism tips such as how to be alert and aware of their surroundings. They are also trained to broker relationships between community leaders and first-responders, Goldberg says. "We want them to be proactive."

The agencies are required to establish and maintain a coordinator to oversee the program, a Community Land Security Resource Center; to facilitate presentations by local government representatives, and coordinate volunteer emergency preparedness and response teams, Span said.

"The Partnership became acutely aware that the 110 million Americans living in

or near poverty were not being protected," Span says. "It is of utmost importance that a constant stream of information is flowing into these communities about national security efforts... In order to do this successfully, we ultimately need a Community Land Security program in every low-income community across the nation, but the 10 pilot sites are a step in the right direction."

Cosby

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drugged and then fondled her; all contend similar assaults by the comedian. Montgomery County prosecutors declined to file charges in the case.

Attorney Dolores Troiani, who represents the plaintiff, has said that her client has been bombarded by phone calls and unannounced visits to her home, and the other women fear they would be subjected to similar invasions of their privacy.

Attorneys for Cosby, a Temple Univer-

sity alumnus and booster, have said that he considered himself a friend and mentor to the woman. Cosby denied the assault allegation but acknowledged giving her over-the-counter medication after she complained she was stressed and having trouble sleeping.

Cosby, 67, most famous for his role as a father on a long-running television series, has recently sparked debate with blunt remarks on personal responsibility aimed at the Black community.

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