

Gulf Coast Alliance Aims to SECURE Disaster Preparedness, Recovery

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A consortium of seven medical and public health institutions will expand and combine research projects to help U.S. Gulf Coast communities prepare for and bounce back from weather-related disasters, epidemics and environmental health threats. The effort, known as SECURE (Science, Education, Community United to Respond to Emergencies) is funded by a \$4 million grant from the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities , which supports the consortium's focus on the underserved and minority communities who often suffer disproportionately during disasters.

The consortium will hold a news conference with John Ruffin, director of NCMHD, at **10 a.m., Friday, June 11**, at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, located at 2515 Franklin Avenue in New Orleans.

"This is the first consortium to examine disaster preparedness and response through the lens of existing health disparities within vulnerable communities," says Dr. Maureen Lichtveld, SECURE principal investigator and Freeport McMoRan Chair of Environmental Policy for Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. "Using research and targeted interventions, we hope to create sustainable programs that empower local communities to protect against real-world threats from natural disasters or environmental incidents, such as the current gulf oil spill."

"Our goal is to develop a comprehensive approach to disaster preparation and recovery all along the Gulf Coast," says Lovell Jones, SECURE principal investigator and director of the Center for Research on Minority Health at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.

Projects by members of the SECURE consortium will include development of technology to enhance surveillance systems for early health and environmental

warnings and to guide the efforts of first-responders during and after a disaster. Other consortium projects will include arranging post-disaster health care; establishing training programs to improve preparedness through community groups and schools; and post traumatic stress counseling.

SECURE Consortium Members include: The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Tulane University, University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, University of Miami, Baylor College of Medicine, Meharry Medical College and City of Houston Health and Human Services.