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Build it Better Leadership Forum Concludes in Charlotte

Disaster Safety Leaders Hail Progress in Boosting America's Disaster Resilience, Outline Major Work That Remains in Making Communities Safer from Natural Hazards

Charlotte, NC – The Build it Better Leadership Forum concluded in Charlotte today with Forum organizers and attendees leaving with long to do lists arising from two days of discussion and brainstorming about how to help communities build stronger buildings that can better resist the impact of natural disasters.

Steve Weinstein, Chairman of the RenaissanceRe Risk Science Foundation, the lead sponsor for the Forum, thanked the more than 200 panelists and attendees for their contributions over the two day event. “While we face daunting challenges, the participants at this Forum reminded us to be inspired by our many successes. For example, Florida’s My Safe Florida Home retrofit grant program helped more than 25,000 households and the Safe Carolina Safe Home Program is a model for pragmatic, cost effective mitigation. Here in North Carolina families have moved to safer ground and high risk areas have been transformed for community use and natural habitats,” said Weinstein. “These are important successes that need to be celebrated while we rededicate ourselves to the hard work that remains in helping other parts of America become better prepared, particularly our fellow citizens of lesser means.”

Julie Rochman, President and CEO of the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS), a Forum co-sponsor, said disaster safety experts largely know what steps are needed to make the country and its buildings more disaster resilient. “We can see the path forward to make our buildings stronger and communities less vulnerable to disasters,” said Rochman. “What we need to do is summon the political will in America to make the changes needed to help us become a safer nation.”

Experts said those impacted by Hurricane Sandy have an important opportunity to make their homes safer for the next disaster. “We want to see those rebuilding after Hurricane Sandy to do so using modern building techniques that will produce far more disaster resilient homes,” said Leslie Chapman-Henderson, President and CEO of the Federal Alliance for Safe Homes (FLASH), a Forum co-sponsor.

National Hurricane Center Director Rick Knabb, PhD., who helped open the Forum in remarks yesterday, summed up the sentiment of participants when he said, “Preparedness is an annual event but resilience is a permanent topic.”

North Carolina Insurance Commissioner Wayne Goodwin also addressed Forum attendees. In his remarks, Goodwin applauded North Carolina’s lower than average insurance premiums in comparison to other states and said the lower rates were “largely due to in part to improvements made to our Beach Plan and excellent working

relationships with our stakeholders.” Goodwin also underscored the value of mitigation in keeping rates lower and reducing property in losses in disaster.

Additional featured speakers and experts at the conference included:

- Bill Read, Former Director of the National Hurricane Center; currently Severe Weather Expert at KPRC-TV, Houston
- Margaret Davidson, Director of NOAA Coastal Services Center
- Chris Estes, President and CEO, National Housing Conference

Panel discussions addressed the unforeseen consequences from Hurricane Sandy with on the ground experts addressing the complexity of the emergency management and rescue efforts along with the compounding effects of wind and water on community infrastructure.

Other panels addressed commercial and residential building exposure in the face of severe weather with a look at steps some communities have taken to better protect themselves through building codes, natural protections, better construction designs and the application of modern building science.

A review of which states are most and least prepared for severe weather showed how communities at risk can better protect themselves through innovative efforts in infrastructure, training, forecasting, building codes and public awareness. Finally, the Build it Better Forum tackled the unique challenges of low income communities facing natural disasters and how vulnerable communities and low income families can better prepare to respond to and recover from disasters.

The Build it Better Leadership Forum was sponsored by the RenaissanceRe Risk Sciences Foundation along with the Coastal Hazards Center, a U.S. Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence, the Federal Alliance for Safe Homes (FLASH), the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS), the National Housing Conference and the Center for Housing Policy, the UNC Center for the Study of Natural Hazards & Disasters and WeatherPredict Consulting, Inc.

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