



Top: Photo of the 4th Annual RGV Media Partners Hurricane Workshop participants, May 26, 2016; **Middle:** Left – Meteorologist-in-Charge Jim Reynolds readies opening remarks as George Garrett, Emergency Management Coordinator for the City of Mercedes, TX, opens the 6th Annual RGV Emergency Management Partners Hurricane Workshop on May 25, 2016; Center – Some of the crowd of nearly 100 at the Mercedes Safe Room/Community Center; Right – Barry Goldsmith addressing the crowd on the 2015 season and the 2016 Atlantic Hurricane Season Forecast. **Bottom:** Forecaster Maria Torres address standing room only crowd of more than 100 at the City of Brownsville Hurricane Fair, May 26, 2016.

Week of Hurricane Workshops, Fairs, and Meetings Bring 2016 Awareness Message to Life

Hundreds Listen as NWS Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley Explains Upcoming Season; Emergency Management Partners Discuss Impact-Specific Decisions

Though the official Hurricane Awareness Week (May 15 through 21, 2016) had already completed, the Rio Grande Valley continued its tradition of ramping up for the season during the final full week of May, just ahead of the Memorial Day Weekend. On May 25th, the City of Mercedes hosted the 6th Annual Rio Grande Valley Emergency Management Partners Hurricane Workshop, at their brand new Safe Room/Community Center, a domed structure built to withstand winds of more than 150 mph and shelter at least 500 local residents who would otherwise be unable to evacuate from the hazards that a tropical cyclone can bring. Recent years have brought more than 100 partners from many of the [Emergency Support Functions](#) ranging from first response to public health/mass care, transportation, land management, and more. This year was no exception; some of the representatives included:

- U.S. State Department Consulate, Matamoros, Mexico
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection
- Transportation Security Administration
- State of Texas Region 3 and Disaster District 21
- Emergency Management Coordinators from Cameron and Hidalgo County, as well as most large and medium sized cities
- Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council Homeland Security Advisory Committee
- Texas Department of Transportation
- Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District
- American Red Cross
- Texas Impact VOAD

The meeting kicked off with introductory remarks from Meteorologist-in-Charge *Jim Reynolds* and Emergency Management Coordinator for the City of Mercedes, *Mr. George Garrett*. Warning Coordination Meteorologist *Barry Goldsmith* led off with a review of the 2015 Atlantic (and Pacific) season and impacts on the Valley and beyond; following a short break, Mayor Henry Hinojosa offered remarks on the importance of preparing for the 2016 season and how the officials in the room are critical for ensuring that Mercedes and other communities are ready. Following the mayor's remarks, Goldsmith presented on NWS hurricane products and services for 2016, from the National to the local level. Forecaster Maria Torres presented on Spanish Language information and the results of the [First Faith-Based Integrated Warning Team Workshop](#) that was held in Edinburg on May 18, 2016. Special gifts and plaques were provided to Maria by the State of Texas Region 3/District 21 and the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (below), as she readied her departure to Florida. A brief discussion on NWS Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley's role for the [Rio Grande Valley Full-Scale AirEvac Exercise](#) was provided, then an updated presentation from meteorologist *Chris Birchfield* on the benefits of social media to hurricane preparedness closed out the morning session.

Over lunch, a breakout session on "More to the Story than the Category" was conducted, with NWS Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley facilitating discussion on potential impacts from rainfall, wind, and storm surge taken separately as an exercise for participants to consider how community readiness and evacuation decisions would vary based on situations that make the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale Category moot, including:

- Rainfall of more than 20 inches forecast from a fictitious Tropical Storm Alfonso
- Storm surge water depth forecast from 3 to more than 9 feet from a large category 1 hurricane headed for the mouth of the Rio Grande
- Wind from fictitious Hurricane Tejas, a Category 5 storm that will slow down and have rapid wind decay from the shore of Cameron County to the large population in the McAllen metropolitan region (Hidalgo County)

Notes were taken by one member of each breakout group; the group of nearly 20 persons from Hidalgo and Cameron County organizations tasked with decisions for rainfall flooding had a healthy discussion on specific neighborhoods prone to life threatening flooding and how quickly they might evacuate them, a decision made independently of those for coastal and near-coastal communities in Cameron and Willacy subject to storm surge and high winds.



Forecaster Maria Torres, who left the Valley for a position in Miami, FL, this June, poses with leaders from Texas Department of Public Safety Region 3 and Disaster District 21, and the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council, at the 6th Annual RGV Emergency Management Partners Hurricane Workshop. Torres was awarded Certificates of Appreciation for the work she did to support highly vulnerable Spanish speaking communities across the Rio Grande Valley to make a difference in their preparedness for weather hazards.

On May 26th, NWS Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley conducted a similar workshop with nearly 20 television and print/web meteorologists and journalists at KRGV Channel 5 studios in Weslaco (top photo). Later that afternoon, the office staffed a booth at the annual City of Brownsville Hurricane Fair, and also participated in a live radio interview on hurricane preparedness and the #HurricaneStrong resiliency project on the flagship English-language AM news/talk radio station, KURV-710 AM. Ms. Torres was the hit speaker (again) that evening, giving a presentation on NWS English and Spanish information and preparedness to a standing-room only crowd of more than 100 at the Central Public Library. The week closed with a presentation for nearly 50 health care workers by Mr. Goldsmith to the South Texas Emergency Care Foundation in Harlingen – a combination of the 2015 season review, the updated 2016 season forecast, and a brief review of preparedness tips and a renewed discussion on hurricane home and business resiliency (<http://hurricanestrong.org>).