

Press Release

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Architects' Association Hosts State's First Safety Training for Post-Disaster Assessment

24 Architects now certified as safety assessment evaluators

Tallahassee, FL – On Saturday, the Florida Association of the American Institute of Architects (AIA Florida) hosted the state's first ever Post-Disaster Safety Assessment Program (SAP) training. The training educates architects on how to assist local law enforcement and emergency services organizations after a disaster strikes.

While Florida recovers from Tropical Storm Fay and breathes a sigh of relief as Hurricanes Hanna and Ike bypass the state, twenty-four architects completed the course this past weekend at the office of HHCP Architects in Orlando. Developed by the California Office of Emergency Services (OES), in conjunction with FEMA and Homeland Security, SAP is a six hour post-disaster assessment certification course that allows architects (and other design/build professionals) to become certified Post Disaster Safety Evaluators.

AIA Florida now has at least one certified member in its 13 regional components that is qualified and available to assist with damage assessment and community rebuilding post-disaster. The 13 components are AIA Northwest, AIA Tallahassee, AIA Gainesville, AIA Jacksonville, AIA Orlando, AIA Tampa Bay, AIA Gulf Coast, AIA Space Coast, AIA Treasure Coast, AIA Southwest, AIA Palm Beach, AIA Ft. Lauderdale and AIA Miami. These components loosely align with Florida's emergency districts.

The training was spearheaded by AIA Florida Vice President, Michael Lingerfelt, AIA, LEED AP who worked with California's OES to get Florida architects certified. Lingerfelt, who became a California certified evaluator in 2003, was recently trained as a certified trainer earlier this year.

"Florida is one of the country's most vulnerable states when it comes to severe weather," said Lingerfelt. "After a storm, the recovery process is often long and arduous. However, architects are uniquely qualified to assess damage to structures, evaluate the safety of a site or structure, and are intimately familiar with the Florida Building Codes as the state requires regular continuing education to keep them abreast of the latest changes. This knowledge and experience make us a natural to come in and help expedite the rebuilding process for devastated communities."

The Association and its members have frequently offered services in disaster response to organizations such as the Florida Division of Emergency Management. To date, no formal process for assisting the emergency management officials exists, but AIA Florida members are hopeful that the certification program will soon be recognized by Florida officials and used in post-disaster scenarios.

“This program is an effort to remind state and local government of the need for certified licensed architects, engineers and others to be a part of the post-disaster process,” said AIA Florida Executive Vice President Vicki Long, CAE.

California’s SAP is a fully integrated program offered through the state’s Governor’s Office. The SAP process allows professional organizations such as AIA Florida to train evaluators (architects, engineers and building inspectors) to perform facility evaluations for various disasters. The goal is help local government perform accurate facility safety assessments as quickly as possible.

“June through November is a critical time for Florida as we warily watch for and prepare for damaging storms,” said Lingerfelt. “Training with a program such as this one can make the difference between active responsiveness and waiting for help.”

For more information about SAP, visit www.oes.ca.gov.

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The Florida Association of the American Institute of Architects, headquartered in Tallahassee, represents the interests of more than 3,600 members in Florida and the Caribbean. Members adhere to a code of ethics and professional conduct that assures the client, the public, and colleagues of an AIA-member architect's dedication to the highest standards in professional practice.