

By Charles Cassani, CR

The Impact of SAFELY OUT™

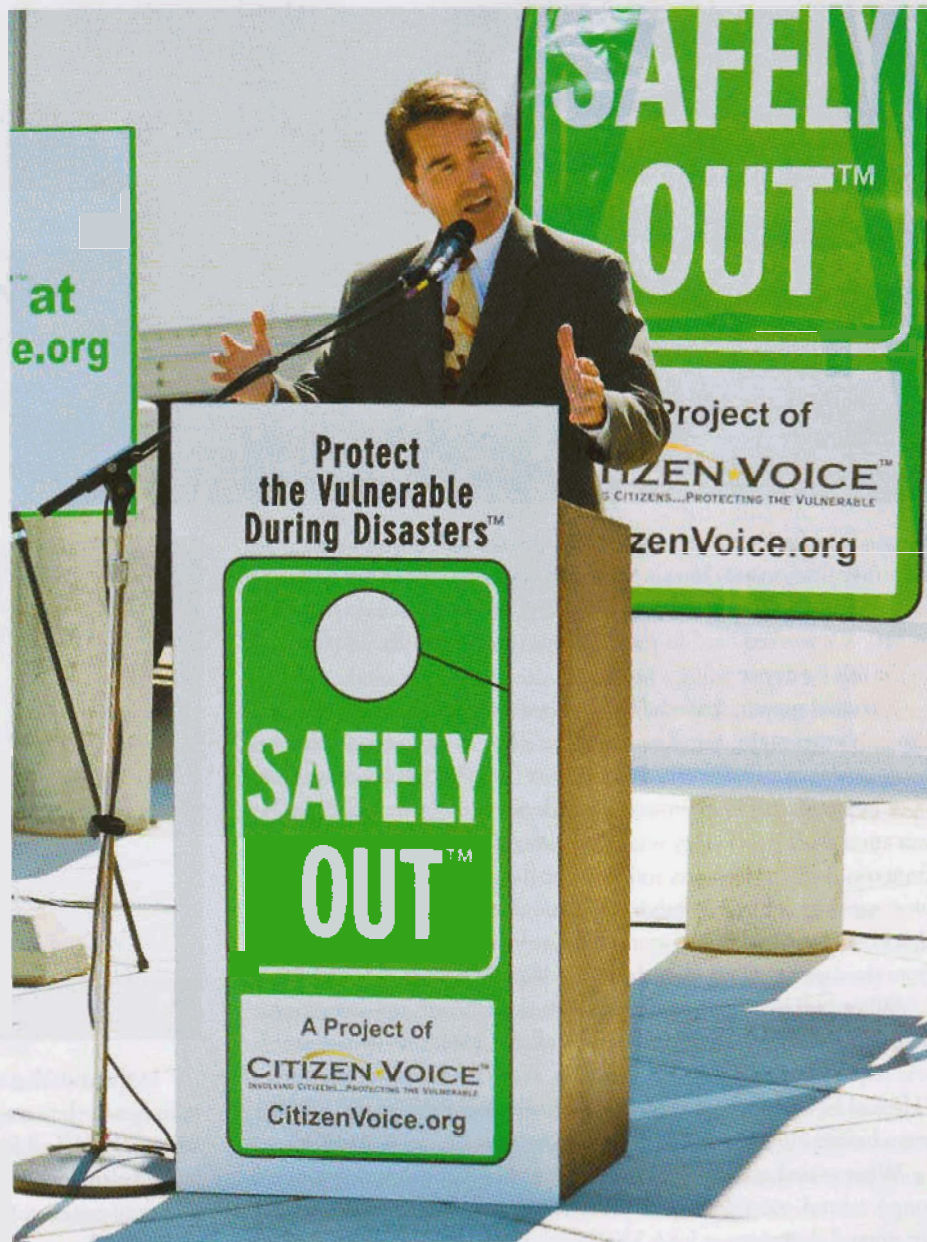
Sometimes when I look around the conference table, I can't believe that two ordinary restoration guys are hanging out with such heavy hitters.

A case in point. A former radio personality, Jay Alan, is now the external affairs director for the California Emergency Management Agency. Alan was at Arnold Schwarzenegger's side as the "public face" for the agency when the governor toured the destruction after a natural gas explosion near San Francisco last September.

Now Alan was at our side at a meeting of the advisory team for SAFELY OUT—Protecting the Vulnerable During Disaster. Also at the table were two other high-level emergency managers: Sacramento County Sheriff John McGinness; the point person for one of the national's largest employers of people with disabilities; me, from Steamatic of Sacramento, (now SOS Consulting); Leo Grover, from Pinnacle Emergency Management in West Sacramento, and the chairman, Gary Dietrich.

A well-known broadcast political analyst in Sacramento, Dietrich is the driver behind Citizen Voice's SAFELY OUT Project. The mission is ensuring the safe evacuation and reunification of vulnerable citizens during an emergency or disaster — unlike what happened in Hurricane Katrina. You may remember Dietrich speaking at the Restoration Industry Association's fall conference in 2008 and the spring convention in 2009. *(Editor's Note: See the June 2008 issue of Cleaning & Restoration for the full feature.)*

Dietrich flew to the Gulf Coast after Katrina both as a broadcaster and as a Red Cross volunteer. What really affected him was seeing the desperation and confusion caused by the inability to evacuate some of



the most vulnerable flood victims. Dietrich and his wife Elyse launched Citizen Voice's SAFELY OUT pilot project on the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina in August 2006.

Citizen Voice will be exhibiting at the RIA convention in March. The team will promote the new "I'm In!" program in which restoration companies partner with the SAFELY OUT Project by donating funds to support

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the production and distribution of SAFELY OUT evacuation kits to protect vulnerable citizens in their communities.

In return, RIA members will get increased visibility by linking to the SAFELY OUT website, access to promotional materials, and authorized usage of the "I'm In!" logo.

Participation in SAFELY OUT has given Steamatic and Pinnacle great exposure alongside a good cause in Sacramento. We've also educated emergency managers about the restoration industry's role in disaster recovery.

As the "I'm In!" program rolls out nationally, I hope to see more RIA members come in at the ground floor.

The SAFELY OUT kit is a unique helper and alert system that contains almost everything that frail seniors, handicapped individuals, or children need to safely evacuate. It only costs \$10 per kit.

Using the materials, vulnerable people, or their caretakers, line up at least three neighbors who agree to help ensure they evacuate safely in an emergency. The kit also has a two-sided door hanger that tells rescuers that help is needed or that they are safely out, a refrigerator magnet with essential evacuation contact information, and an easily visible bag for collecting and storing critical medical, contact and insurance information.

Last year, Citizen Voice's SAFELY OUT completed its pilot project of distributing 50,000 kits in Sacramento with the majority going to the Natomas area. That's the neighborhood that will drown in 20 feet of water if the levees break. The project also produced another 40,000 kits for further distribution in Sacramento, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and the Central Valley this year—the next step in the state and nationwide launch of SAFELY OUT.

Another piece of this project is motivating people to actually complete the simple forms

inside the kit. This happens at community events and meetings like the Great California Shake Out, an earthquake drill involving 6.9 million people last October, and the upcoming Golden Guardian exercise to prepare for catastrophic flooding in the Central Valley. Cal E-M-A has asked SAFELY OUT to integrate the kits into the citizen evacuation component.

A high-profile nonprofit project, Citizen Voice's SAFELY OUT has received more than half a million dollars in government grants. The most recent was a major grant from Cal E-M-A for a statewide rollout of the project. Receiving a coveted Cal E-M-A grant as a nonprofit was a rare honor, according to Jerry Colivas, a member of the SAFELY OUT advisory team. Key to getting the \$200,000 was SAFELY OUT's partnership with local businesses, he told me. The agency director, Matthew Bettenhausen, also has written that he supports the project as a way to reduce the heavy burden on emergency responders who must go house to house after an emergency.

SAFELY OUT also has landed a highly sought after grant from Google. When specific keywords are used, a project ad appears at the top of a Google search page. The grant is for 330 clicks a day with each click worth a dollar, making it a \$100,000 annual in-kind award.

For more information about SAFELY OUT, go to http://www.citizenvoice.org/safely_out. For more information about the "I'm In!" program, contact Lynne Fishel at 916-503-3194 or at lfishel@citizenvoice.org. You also can reach me at cassani@soshs.com. ■

Charles Cassini, CR, is the president of SOS Consulting. Special thanks to Gail Bullen for her contributions to this column.