

A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE ON CAPE DISASTER DEBRIEF 2004

As part of the support given to the Cape Disaster Debrief 2004 by the City of Cape Town, 3 co-operative learning students who are working in the Disaster Management branch of the City took part in the arrangements for and management of the conference. Barely 4 days after starting working with the City, the Public Relations, Sports Management and Information Technology students were thrown in the deep end, and proved that they were spectacular swimmers. One of the students, Sibongile Mqakayi, wrote the following eyewitness report. –Johan Minnie

The Western Cape branch of DMISA held their first Cape Disaster debrief, from 4-6 February 2004. The debrief was held at the River Club in Observatory, and was supported by the City of Cape Town and Provincial Government of the Western Cape

On the first morning the River Club was buzzing with people, all keen on seeing what the organizers have prepared for them. There were people from every corner of South Africa. The first hour was very busy with people registering.

The day started with an Opening by Councillor David Erleigh. Mr. Roy Veldtmann started with a presentation of the Montagu Floods. Through this whole session, the organising team were crossing fingers that everything would turn out as planned. There were a few hick -ups but they could be disaster managed. As student it was an eye opener for me, it taught me that in cases like this there is a lot of planning to be done months ahead of the event

I quote the Disaster Management manager Mr. Geoff Laskey,

“The first impression one got was that the delegates were a very diverse group, Functionaries, Support functions, Private sector, National Departments, NGO’s, etc.

Over and above the foregoing the group was very active and participation and discussions were very good and of a high quality.

The good balance between disaster management functional issues, support function aspects and the practical exercise also stimulated thought and sensitized all disciplines to the needs of other functions during planning and response.

The summit proved that although there is a need for conferences where high level academic and policy discussions take place, this type of format where more practical type of development can take place must seriously be considered for inclusion in conference programs.”

One of the co-operative learning students, David Van Boom, says he learnt a lot about disaster management. He did not know that Sea Land express would also

be considered as a disaster and he never knew that there is a possibility of an earthquake in Cape Town.

In the last few hours there was an exercise, where the delegates had to role play a scenario and come up with the solution.

This was followed with a braai for all those interested in food. Everyone enjoyed themselves.

Lucian van Noie, another student, found the conference very exiting, being the first one he has attended. This was his first experience working with people that he had just met. Lucian also says that if he could have the opportunity to help organize future events he will be honored to do so. He also never realized that Disaster Management plays such a big part in Cape Town's municipal government.

By day 2 all the delegates knew each other and new bonds were made. The exhibitions were very interesting to the delegates. There was one in particular that got most of the delegates excited: a candle sick holder, which is filled with water. If it ever falls over, the water extinguishes the candle thereby preventing fires.

Day 3 was optional and delegates could choose to visit particular venues and facilities in Cape Town. After morning coffee and intrepid few explorers left the River Club and fought through heavy traffic into town to visit the 107 Public Emergency Call Centre and the City of Cape Town Disaster Management Centre. After this visit it was a quick exit out of Cape Town to miss the roadblocks associated with Parliament's opening, and straight to the National 112 Call Centre in the Strand. Afterwards is the explorers had another long drive to the north-western edges of Cape Town to visit the Koberg Nuclear Power Station.

The two days that I was there was very interesting to see how people can handle the pressure of last minute planning. I learnt a lot as a Public Relations Student. There were a several delegates who came at the last minute and said that they would have regretted not coming. Some delegates who are not from Cape Town said they will be coming back if there is another summit next year.

Sibongile Mqakayi