

Bechtel-GHI School Safety Initiative 2010
An Interim Report on Activities to Date



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Introduction: It has been nearly 3 years since Bechtel Corporation and GeoHazards International (GHI) formed an innovative partnership to protect school children in Gurgaon, India from the threat of earthquakes. Once the Bechtel Foundation realized the need to better prepare Gurgaon's schools for earthquakes, it provided funding for GHI to train and equip Gurgaon-based Bechtel India Pvt Ltd employees to become school earthquake safety advocates in the community close to their office. The enthusiastic efforts by the volunteers were much appreciated by the partner schools over the last two years, viz. Gyan Delhi Public School, The Chiranjeev Bharati Public School, The American Montessori school and the GD Montessori School. Thus, till December 2009, as a direct result of this project the 2408 students and 145 teachers of these schools are much more aware of the risk and are significantly better prepared with each of the four schools having prepared their disaster management plans and tested it with drills assisted by the volunteers. The employee volunteers expressed their enthusiasm to the GHI project staff regarding the opportunity to be able to give back to the community.

The 2009-2010 activities: Following these two years of successful programmes, Bechtel and GeoHazards International agreed to replicate their success in more schools in Gurgaon in 2009-10. Since the start of the partnership, Bechtel and GHI team members had aspired to work in DAV Public School, one of the largest schools in Gurgaon, but had not been sure of being able to



take up such a mammoth challenge. However, this year the team felt confident enough to take up activities in the DAV school which in itself has over 2965 students, 173 teachers and 55 non-teaching staff. **Thus the Bechtel GHI initiative has sensitized more teachers and students this year than in the past two years combined.** In addition to this, they have also planned to raise awareness in a small retirement home 'Chiranjiv Karma Bhoomi' where residents will be made aware of the risks and sensitised to take appropriate action in the event of a disastrous event. The residents of the retirement home also run a school for under-privileged children within their campus.

At Bechtel

GHI conducted an open house session on Disaster safety to encourage employees to volunteer for project on May 26 2010. Once the volunteers were selected, GHI conducted two training programmes in June and August in which the old and new volunteers took active part. The trainings, took the volunteers through the hazards facing Gurgaon; and the effects of earthquakes in schools; the danger due to objects that could fall or topple during an earthquake; mitigation and preparedness measures; formation of school safety committee and related topics. GHI provided practical guidance through many sessions explaining "how to" conduct activities ranging from the initial discussions with a school principal to conducting a preparedness drill at a school. The trainees were also taken through virtual "hazard hunts" during which they located objects that could fall, slide or topple.

At DAV Public School :At the DAV Public school, volunteers have so far completed the training of all the teachers, sensitised all but 520 of the 2965 students at the school, helped the school form the School Safety Committee and develop the Emergency Plan for the school. All teachers of the school were trained by the volunteers in packed sessions conducted in the school auditorium. The information included details on the hazards facing



Gurgaon, the effects of earthquakes on schools, and how schools can prepare by developing emergency preparedness plans for earthquakes and other hazards and anchoring objects that can fall during an earthquake and injure children. The volunteers also urged teachers to develop their own family preparedness plan so that they could fulfil their duties at school after any disastrous event.

As can be inferred from the sheer numbers, the students' trainings were held over many days and the volunteers worked very hard to reach every child in various sections. The volunteers led the students through the basics of earthquakes, falling hazards and mitigation, school safety preparedness and family preparedness. The students were actively engaged and asked the volunteers some very interesting questions ("How do I get my puppy to get under the table when the earth shakes?") and this level of interest and excitement was very encouraging to the volunteers. After a special session

from GHI on how to address toddlers, the volunteers stepped into the exciting world of primary school children and moved from class to class engaging the children in games, talking about what happens in an earthquake, telling stories especially developed for the purpose and demonstrating what the children could do to make themselves safer. The children were very excited about the sessions and the disaster safety videos they got to watch afterward. As expected, the volunteers found the sessions challenging but extremely satisfying.

The activities that will be completed in the next few months include the sensitisation of the remaining children, Hazard hunt with the students and teachers, fixing falling hazards in locations selected by the school, finalising the Plan and testing it with a preparedness drill. It is a tribute to the enthusiastic volunteers that the project has been able to achieve so much so far.



At the Retirement Home: The activities with the residents of the retirement home will start after the completion of the hazard hunt activities at the DAV school. However, at the informal school for under-privileged children, we carried out a session for the 2 teachers and 42 children helping them understand the risk and simple steps they can take to reduce losses in any disastrous event. The little ones enjoyed the way the new information was passed on to them through stories and videos. Disaster management related colouring books developed by the Government of Delhi was given to every child in the school after the training session.

Leveraged programmes

As a result of the work being carried out under the Bechtel GHI project in Gurgaon schools, there have been a few organisations that have expressed interest in arranging similar programmes within their campuses.

- After the teachers sensitisation programme at DAV Gurgaon was held, we were contacted by another DAV school in Delhi and members of the Bechtel GHI team obliged and conducted two back to back training programme for about 130 teachers at DAV school, Dayanand Vihar, New Delhi. The school is planning to carry on with the disaster management related activities and is keeping us posted on their progress.
- After hearing about the unique programmes being conducted by the Bechtel GHI team from one of the team members, an organisation called 'Room to Read' has requested the team to carry out a sensitisation programme at their office. Since this is an organisation working with children, the team feels that this will lead to the inclusion of disaster management aspects in all programmes taken up by Room to Read.



The Bechtel-GHI school safety program is making steady progress this year. Most of the remaining activities can be completed before the end of the year and we expect to be able to organise the preparedness drill shortly. The school administration has been extremely pleased with the enthusiastic volunteers and supportive of the activities at the school.