

November 6, 2012

How resilient is your city? – Worldwide underground community asks following Sandy destruction

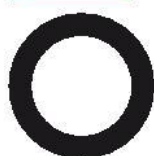
LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND – As New Yorkers demonstrate their resilience in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, worldwide city authorities are once again reminded of their own challenges with regards to natural disaster preparedness. With a big question asked of them by the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction program (UNISDR) – How resilient is your city?

The ITA Committee on Underground Space (ITACUS) is working with UNISDR on that very issue, demonstrating just how underground space can be used effectively, in a sustainable way, to help cities around the world increase their resilience to natural disasters. Currently, all over the world, the use of underground space is either underrated or needs to be rethought in order to make existing infrastructures more resilient. A fact that Han Admiraal, Chairman for ITACUS, hopes to change at ACUUS 2012 in Singapore, by raising awareness of the way in which underground space can prove to be a solid strategic planning asset in this battle for preparedness.

Just as the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon, highlighted in a letter published by the New York Times in May 2012, we are living in a time in which the influence of human activity on the Earth's dynamics no longer seems deniable. Twenty years after the Rio summit, he is asking the world to turn our cities – where more than 50% of the world's population now lives – into places that exist in harmony with nature. The good news is that it is something that can be done, both in terms of how we plan and design them, and in terms of how we build them.

An effective and sustainable use of underground space in urban areas goes beyond the obvious. As megacities grow even larger, driven not only by population growth but also by migration out of rural areas, the sheer concentration of people living in the same area will place additional pressure on transport, energy supply, water, waste, and the buildings themselves. This is where underground space can contribute yet more places to house heating and cooling units, storage, or parking facilities that could be integrated to existing traffic tunnels. Underground space can also be opened up to incorporate it more fluidly to life and activities above the surface, such as creating green areas underground with skylights opened to the area aboveground. To avoid disruption of service, and/or contamination, water and waste can all be reorganized underground – where excess flood water can also safely be channeled off and stored.

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This will not be just another exercise to prevent chaos. Making our cities more resilient is an ongoing process which concerns many stakeholders, in an open dialogue around sustainable solutions that are creative and innovative. Such solutions could ultimately combine water management with traffic management, such as in Kuala Lumpur's SMART tunnel, or road tunnels with underground energy structures, for greater impact.

Randomly and individually using small portions of underground space is just no longer sufficient to meet current and future challenges. Worldwide city authorities and urban stakeholders also need to come together to resolve conflicting interests in the use of their underground space, in order to come up with a strategic, sustainable plan to ultimately provide a positive answer to the question.

The International Tunnelling and Underground Space Association (ITA) is an international non-profit, nongovernmental organization that promotes an improved use of underground space as a solution for sustainable development. Founded in 1974 and headquartered in Lausanne, Switzerland, ITA currently federates 68 Member Nations, 200 Affiliate Members, 15 Prime Sponsors and 30 Supporters.

For additional information on the use of tunnels and underground space, please view the attached press kit.

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