



Catastrophic Response

Coordination | Communication | Unity of Effort

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Catastrophic EOC Simulation at The National Planning Workshop

NEWS

National Planning Workshop

On December 12-13, 2011, approximately 100 emergency managers from throughout the United States came to New York City for the first annual Regional Catastrophic Planning Grant Program (RCPGP) National Planning Workshop. On the morning of December 12th, the workshop attendees assembled for a kickoff session at the New York City Office of Emergency Management's (OEM) Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The kickoff was an experiential work session simulating a local emergency operations center during a catastrophic radiological dispersal device incident. The goal of this session was to demonstrate how an EOC works during a catastrophic event by bringing together the right people to solve problems, manage information, and manage resources.

During this session, the players were pre-assigned to emergency support functions (ESF). Following additional briefings, each ESF briefed the EOC leadership on current actions, planned actions, resources needed, and the highest priority issues/decisions required.

Feedback from workshop attendees regarding the kickoff session was overwhelmingly positive. Like a catastrophic incident, this scenario allowed experienced emergency managers from across the country to be suddenly thrust into an EOC with a larger group of emergency managers with whom most had never worked. This distinctive way to kick off the workshop set a tone for the remainder of the two days and will hopefully lead to further collaboration on a national level.



Workshop attendees visit Ground Zero

EXEC'S PODIUM

REGIONALITY: Our New Reality

CHARLIE MCKENNA, – DIRECTOR, New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness



Natural disasters, the fallout from industrial accidents, and the effects of a terror attack will not abide by man-made boundaries. They will not stop at municipal, or county, or state borders. They will affect regions, not political subdivisions. Thus, to properly respond

to such events we must do it on a regional basis if we are to maximize our effectiveness. It was Commissioner Joe Bruno who coined the term "Regionality." He used the term to describe the way we, as adjoining cities and states, should think in order to properly prepare for and respond to a catastrophic event. At the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (NJOHSP) we support both the phrase and, more importantly, we embrace the concept that drives the ongoing efforts of the RCPT to build the planning capability for a major regional response in the New York-New Jersey region.

The leadership of New Jersey and New York City's Urban Area Security Initiatives (UASI) took a historic and unique step in 2008 by agreeing to combine our catastrophic planning and funding resources to take, what we believe to be is the most aggressive multi-million dollar catastrophic planning effort in the nation. This effort involves four states; multiple federal, state, and private sector organizations; and over 30 counties. It has provided a necessary planning framework and practical guidance for a regional, rather than fragmented response. Additionally, through exercising and training the RCPT is building a coordinated backbone to better respond to a catastrophic event impacting our highly urban shared metropolitan areas.

As I marvel at the progress we have made, it is important to note that much work is still in front of us. Future funding is a major concern, for as present funding levels shift, we will be confronted with several challenges in addition to the planning hurdles we face on a regular basis. The multi-state and jurisdictional planning, coordination, and networking

established over the last four years will serve us well to meet these regional challenges, but they are just the starting point. The following are areas that will require further work not only for state and local governments, but for FEMA and other federal agencies and NGOs. However, this coordinated effort is imperative if we are to maintain a regional readiness:

- Greater integration of federal planning into established RCPT planning and coordination initiatives.
- Further education of local and county officials regarding the concepts and plans for responding to major regional catastrophic events.
- The ability to set aside resources for the continual maintenance of plans, coordinating systems, and information systems developed by the RCPT.
- Further integration of the private sector and the owners and operators of critical infrastructure into regional planning for catastrophic events.

The RCPT has been making headway, but without the continued commitment of leadership at all levels of government the successes will be short term. As I move on from my position as director of NJOHSP, it is my hope that the energy and dedication of those involved in this critical regional planning effort carry through in the future for all our organizations. I can assure you that it is our commitment in New Jersey to work to that end and I believe it to be the commitment of all in the region. But we must strive to ensure that those who come after us and those in charge of the purse-strings in Washington understand how vitally important Joe Bruno's term Regionality really is to the preparedness of this, the most populous region in the Country. Without Regionality to ensure coordination among a multitude of organization and states; to ensure appropriate sharing of resources, and to ensure the integration of federal and other outside support to assist us, we are not fully acquitting our responsibility for public safety.

The Right Idea

We need an information sharing tool that can be used around the country at any level of government by any jurisdiction. Recent events and the need for catastrophic preparedness have made the importance of sharing information across affected jurisdictions more apparent. Despite the obvious need, progress towards real information sharing has been too slow. There are two problems: old technology and outdated thinking.

Jurisdictions use incident management software that grew out of “small incident-, local jurisdiction-” focused emergency management concepts. The value of information-sharing outside of a jurisdiction seemed unnecessary or even undesirable: “I don’t want anyone outside my jurisdiction knowing what I’m doing, or what I’ve got.” Emergency managers and first responders still hold this outdated attitude, and it’s this attitude that drives most software development. This has led to a proliferation of tools created for specific information-sharing projects between specific jurisdictions that only “solve” discreet problems and cannot handle today’s complex information-sharing challenges.

This doesn’t have to be the case. **There are organizations and companies out there that are forging ahead with new thinking about broad information-sharing solutions.**

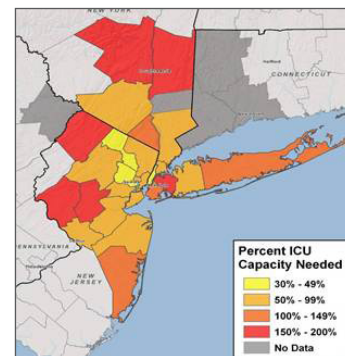
MITRE Corporation, a non-profit funded by the Department of Homeland Security’s Science and Technology Directorate, has been essential to creating forward thinking technology for the NY-NJ-CT-PA RCPT. MITRE has the mission of providing homeland security stakeholders like first responders and emergency managers with the tools they need for integrated communications. Unlike other initiatives, MITRE didn’t come to the RCPT with a tool built for something else, insisting that it would solve all of our problems. They came to the RCPT with a question: “What do you need?” Even more important, they listened to what our members had to say. With limited resources they’ve begun to take pieces of our vision and build them into functioning tools and real working proofs of concept that we can share with the whole nation. The unique scale and complexity of the NY-NJ-CT-PA region provides a Petri dish of different technology systems. If we can build something that works in this environment, it will be applicable to areas all around the country.



Solving complex mass fatality problems at The National Planning Workshop

RCPT: Builds Tool to Support Vulnerable Populations and Communities

Although it is increasingly important to assess a hazard’s actual or potential impact on vulnerable populations and public health infrastructure, most county health departments lack the resources to address this need. The objective of the Regional Public Health Hazard Vulnerability Analysis (RPHVA) is to help county public health departments when planning for, responding to, or recovering from an emergency. The RPHVA will fulfill this function using a three-pronged approach: 1) public health risk assessment; 2) vulnerability analysis; and 3) a decision support system (DSS). The public health risk assessment tool enables public health departments to identify and prioritize potential hazards. Combining the best practices from existing tools, the risk assessment helps set departmental priorities by estimating a hazard’s expected frequency and intensity. The vulnerability analysis establishes a process for determining who is exposed to what hazards, the cause of the vulnerability, and the location of those at risk. This process should generate hazard-specific vulnerability indicators that help emergency managers allocate resources and prioritize outreach activities. The DSS is a secure, web-based geographic information system that assists community health departments in locating and connecting with vulnerable populations. The foundation of the DSS is a set of web services that will enable state and local agencies to incorporate DSS functionality into existing situational-awareness applications. These three elements together help county health departments to effectively and efficiently prioritize and prepare for hazards.



Public Health Jurisdictional Risk Assessment



Public Health Triage Area at Operation Red Zone Exercise – March 2011

From terrorist threats to coastal storms and other climate-change-related hazards, today’s public health departments are asked to respond to an ever-increasing range of possibilities. At the same time, due to budget cuts and other fiscal constraints, public health departments have fewer resources to plan and prepare for this multitude of scenarios. It is therefore essential that we focus our efforts on those threats that pose the greatest risk to the public health sector.

Risk assessments provide a rational basis on which to base operational plans and policies. They bring specificity to the planning process and enable public health departments to more accurately predict and evaluate the impact of hazardous events.

The RCPT is coordinating the development of a public health-focused Jurisdictional Risk Assessment Tool, which analyzes three areas: the probability that a hazard will occur, the severity of its impact on the public health sector, and the agency’s preparedness. Combining the best practices from existing emergency management, public health, and health care facility risk assessment models, the tool helps set departmental priorities. In a time of limited resources, it is the hope that this tool will help health departments more accurately estimate risk and better prepare for public health emergencies.

STAY TUNED

Regional Mass Fatality Response System Annual Training

The NY-NJ-CT-PA project site has built and exercised the Mass Fatality Response System Plan. This spring, we will continue to introduce more emergency managers to our system, to train more medical examiners on this valuable tool and to exercise regionally to prepare for a catastrophic mass fatality incident.

The Regional Mass Fatality Response System planning team designs this annual exercise to direct focus onto local, regional and federal response to catastrophic incidents. As we roll out these yearly exercises, we discover we are more cohesive as a Regional Unit; new leaders step forward, we define issues, identify critical assets, and establish best practices.

Our goal is to simulate the chaos of a mass casualty event and propel the emergency manager into that high-stress environment. Our Regional Mass Fatality Response System offers a tool to manage the chaos and an elegant solution to break down the problem and to start working the job. Medical professionals are not usually emergency managers or incident commanders. Our system empowers them to retain jurisdiction, delegate operations, coordinate incoming resources, and maintain unity of effort throughout the operation.

The exercises are designed to build upon the last, become increasingly realistic, grow in complexity, and test various aspects of the Regional Mass Fatality Response System Plan. Past events have included a nuclear explosion in downtown Manhattan and a vehicle-borne IED attack at a sporting event in Bergen County, NJ. On May 2012, the Regional Mass Fatality Exercise will be held in Dutchess County, NY, and hosted by Dr. Kari Reiber. The exercise will center on a transportation incident involving a propane tanker colliding with a crowded commuter train resulting in approximately 250 fatalities. Please RSVP to Emily Carroll, Regional Mass Fatality Management Plan Manager, at emcarroll@ocme.nyc.gov to express your interest in attending annual training.