



Catastrophic Response

Coordination | Communication | Unity of Effort

Working together makes us stronger

In this issue of *Catastrophic Response*, Director McKenna reminds us that catastrophes are different. We know that the most devastating impact of a catastrophe is the loss of human life. Unfortunately, the burden of fatality management following a catastrophic incident will far exceed our capabilities. Local medical examiners operate with barely sufficient resources. Federal capability, including from DoD and DMORTs, can have only a marginal impact. Our Regional MFM Response System Project is a unique and historic opportunity to work together at all levels of government to address this significant preparedness gap. As a nation, we cannot hope to manage a catastrophic response without effectively and compassionately managing our dead.

EXEC'S PODIUM

Thinking Beyond Borders

BY CHARLIE MCKENNA, *Director – New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness*



The work of the Regional Catastrophic Planning Team illustrates the change in mindset from viewing the response to a wide-spread catastrophic event not as a purely state-by-state problem, but rather as a regional effort where resources can be pooled, coordinated, and shared to ensure a seamless response.

We are in a financial climate where we must learn to do more with less – but never do less. We have to leverage all of the resources under our control. We are now using technology to make us more efficient and responsive to the ever-changing threat picture. Technological advances in firefighting and communications and advances in medical equipment and medical technology have elevated treatment levels, lowered response times, and will save countless lives.

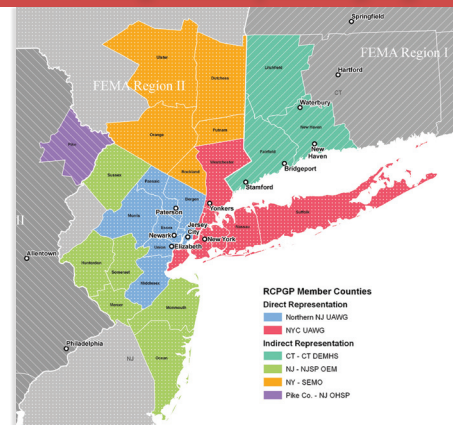
“Unless we plan with all the partners in the region, we will never be as properly prepared as we could be.”

We can all work individually as States to prepare, but it is not until we meld those plans into a regional plan that is trained upon, exercised, and tested regionally, that we are truly serving our citizens.

Thankfully, we have not suffered a catastrophic event on New Jersey soil for some time. However, the horrific events of 9/11 and the loss of 674 brave New Jersey citizens certainly hit home for us, and starkly illustrated that we cannot only think about New Jersey if we are to keep our people safe. We have to think beyond our borders and consider the hazards.

As we plan and move forward on a regional basis we learn from our partners in many ways and hopefully they also learn from us. The sharing of critical information and best practices makes us all better. Certainly Benjamin Franklin would be a fan of the RCPT because he saw the benefit of hanging together to fight an enemy. He understood that separately we were not the force we are when we band together. Thus, as we move forward we must work together to ensure that we do not suffer separately. Working together, we can and will make a difference.

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We want to hear from you!

For inquiries on any of the topics covered in this issue, to learn more about the RCPT-NY-NJ-CT-PA, or to become involved in our planning efforts, email:

ric@regionalcatplanning.org

Article submissions also encouraged.

We look forward to hearing from you!



Doc Lumpkins, Chief of Planning and Assistance (FEMA) reviews the FY '08 Catastrophic Plans with the NY-NJ-CT-PA RCPT and RIC Plan Managers.

CATASTROPHIC QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

“Catastrophic events know no boundaries. They impact regions, not States. The bottom line is that to be effective we have to prepare with an eye to the bigger picture and then we will make real strides.”

—Charlie McKenna

GET INVOLVED

Conferences:

On May 9-10, 2011 the NY-NJ-CT-PA RCPT Regional Logistics Program will hold *LogCon2011*, a conference designed to introduce and reinforce the concept of a *Universal Logistics Standard*. For more information, please contact Nancy Harris at nharris@regionalcatplanning.org.

MASS FATALITY INCIDENTS ARE DIFFERENT

The most devastating impact of any disaster is the loss of human life.

Mass Fatality Management (MFM) is a complex technical process that includes recovery, processing, and identification of victims to facilitate the return of the decedent to their families. It also includes providing families with timely information in a compassionate manner. Mishandling these tasks can and does add to the already enormous emotional trauma borne by families and the public.

The demands of a catastrophic Mass Fatality Incident (MFI) will far exceed our capabilities. Local medical examiners and coroners already operate near capacity with barely sufficient resources. Federal civilian resources are lacking and available military resources are insufficient or difficult to obtain quickly. Conventional wisdom holds that Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams (DMORTs) will do this for us. The reality is that DMORTs may have only a limited impact on helping a medical examiner or coroner respond to a catastrophic event. The support provided by DMORT is currently limited to assisting the local medical examiner with victim identification. DMORT does not provide decedent recovery capabilities. We simply do not have the capability to manage an MFI at any level of government.

The Regional MFM Response System Project is building a robust capability by leveraging the subject matter expertise and resources throughout the region. It is also working to push this issue onto a federal agenda. We are advocating for a greater focus on MFM through creation of a new emergency support function for it. The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is currently the lead agency under ESF#8, (Health and Medical). We also recommend developing an MFM capability within HHS followed by integrated planning to develop consistent protocols for fatality identification, decedent collection and storage, data management, and resource support.

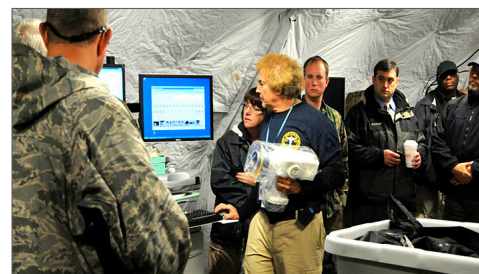
This unique regional project is a historic opportunity. By working together at all levels of government we can address a significant preparedness gap with national implications. As a nation we cannot hope to manage a catastrophic response without effectively and compassionately managing our dead.

Mass Fatality Plan Response System: *UVIS*

The Regional Mass Fatality Response System Plan provides guidance to medical examiners and coroners on the management of mass fatalities following a catastrophic event. This response system promotes asset-sharing such as the Unified Victim Identification System (UVIS) developed by New York City after 9-11 to manage missing persons and victim identification. UVIS has been made available at no cost throughout the nation. Most recently, New Jersey acquired the UVIS application, modeled after the NYC Medical Examiner operation, and customized the software to its population and reporting structures, thereby strengthening this region's overall capability and capacity to respond.

UVIS manages information in the following ways:

1. In a missing person event, emergency managers can expect an overwhelming number of calls to local first responder agencies to request information or report their loved one missing. This will overwhelm 911 call centers that are trying to manage the events of the emergency. UVIS is capable of managing a high volume of calls through regional Call Centers—311 (NYC)/211 (NJ).



2. Family Assistance Centers gather information through family member interviews and ante-mortem data collection such as DNA. Using UVIS, ante-mortem data collection will facilitate the rapid identification of victims.

3. UVIS allows medical examiners to document post-mortem findings and compares this information with data collected at the Family Assistance Center.

4. Missing Person reporting will challenge available state and local resources. UVIS will capture this information through the 311(NYC)/211(NJ) Call Centers and make it available to law enforcement to facilitate Missing Person Investigations.

Federal Guidelines: *Access and Functional Needs*

The release of FEMA's *Guidance on Planning for Integrating Functional Needs Support Services in General Population Shelters* has led to the questions, "What are functional needs?" and "How does this affect our plans?"

Functional needs services enable individuals to maintain their independence in the community. For individuals with disabilities, full integration at general population shelters may require additional supports such as replacement durable medical equipment, medical supplies, and personal assistance services.

This guidance document establishes no new legal authority upon emergency planning. Instead, it reinforces long-standing disability access laws, like the Americans with Disabilities Act.

While the law always demanded the integration of all people within emergency services and operations, this document offers a fresh mandate:

"Special needs" concerns the affected populations

(people with disabilities, older adults, people with health vulnerabilities); "functional needs" are services for these populations. Functional needs services assure integration, and must be preplanned with the affected community. The new standards seek to operationalize the process of functional needs-related planning by identifying potential gaps and adapting general population shelter operations accordingly. Failure to do so could have legal consequences.

Functional needs planning cannot be an afterthought, relegated to an annex or simply changing a few words in existing plans. This is a significant challenge for emergency planners because the people and services are broad and diverse. The new guidance is your opportunity to partner with service providers and disability advocacy groups to meet these challenges together and enrich your plans with their experience and legitimacy.

STAY TUNED

Regional Disaster Housing Plan updates in an upcoming issue of *Catastrophic Response*. Don't miss:

- **Collaborative planning process:** The Regional Disaster Housing Planning Team brings together over 200 experts in housing, planning, and emergency management from throughout the NY-NJ-CT-PA metropolitan region to contribute to and review the housing plan.
- **Upcoming FY '09 Regional Disaster Housing Recovery Center Plan:** We'll be planning for how to get displaced persons the services they need to find permanent housing after a disaster.
- **2011 Housing Summit:** Our second annual housing summit will feature a scenario-based exercise to allow the planning team to test the Housing Plan.

