



Catastrophic Response

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EXEC'S PODIUM

“MASTER, I SEEK WISDOM”

KELLY MCKINNEY, NYC Office of Emergency Management



I want to share with you a story about a friend of mine. Gloria is a young emergency manager who had a rough time during Sandy. After that long activation she wanted a break from work to recharge her batteries and assess her life and her career. She had always wanted to travel, so she threw a t-shirt and a pair of jeans into a backpack and headed for Nepal. One day after an arduous climb, she was startled to see an old man sitting cross-legged on the very crest of the snowy mountaintop. His wide, tanned face was dominated by a furrowed brow and an enormous grey mustache. And instead of a shaman's robes he wore a polo shirt embroidered with a stylish logo. Around his neck was a wide lanyard clipped to a handful of shiny cards.

Gloria was the first to speak. “Master, I seek wisdom.” “About what do you seek it?” the shaman asked. “I am an emergency manager and I love my job,” Gloria replied, “but sometimes I feel lost. How can I use my energy and my talent to help people?”

Thinking he would send her away with one or two cryptic clichés, she was surprised as he launched into a passionate diatribe in his high-pitched creaky voice, as if he had been waiting for this particular question. Because he didn't seem to have a website or sell CD-ROMs, she had to listen. The following are excerpts from his speech, being what she could manage to type in to her iPhone after it thawed out later that same day:

“Ah, you emergency managers, always secretly wanting to be in charge. But you are not the incident commander! All confusion starts with the emergency manager who doesn't know the difference between command and coordination.”

“You say your job is coordination. Ha! You don't know the meaning of the word. Coordination is so hard. You must be able to manage information, resources, and consequences. Of these, consequence management is most important because it means solving problems and helping people.”

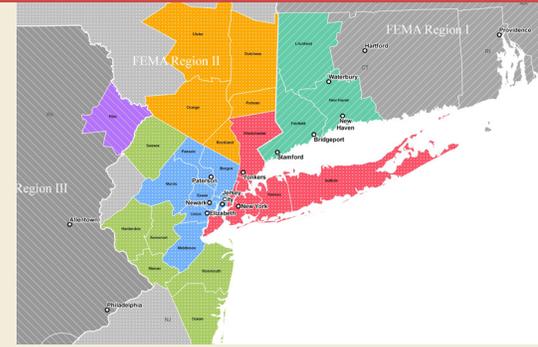
“You emergency managers are from Mars but your logisticians are from Venus. You think you understand disaster logistics but you don't. And you worry that your logistics capability is weak, but delude yourselves that someone else will bail you out. Hear this, oh emergency manager: the cavalry isn't coming! FEMA will always be too little and too late. You must plan to be on your own because that is where you will always find yourself.”



McKinney briefing National Guard during SRITH operations, 2012

“Day after day you emergency managers sit in boring lectures about how your ‘system’ is ‘scalable and flexible’ for disasters. Ha! How bad at this you are! Until you can get big enough fast nothing else will work.”

“These boring lectures go on to talk about creating a ‘Common Operating Picture.’ Must I remind you that there is nothing ‘common’ about multiple situation reports for the same job? These should instead be called Different Operating Pictures. You are trapped in silos you call ‘eteam’ and ‘WebEOC.’ My yaks have more bandwidth than emergency managers working in different states.”



“How you delude yourselves about the future! You are not paid to be optimists. You must talk and act worst-case at all times. Hope is for suckers.”

“Why do you not make the bosses do their jobs? Put the hard questions in front of them. ‘That agency doesn't want to help?’ Make it the boss's problem. ‘That stuff you need is too expensive?’ Make the boss say no to it.”

“What is all this fuss and fret about the rules? The rules are not for you. Police officers and firefighters put their lives at risk every day. Yet you fail to act because you fear harsh words and reprimands. Rules are for daily life, not for disasters. It is your job to throw them out. If after the job a bureaucrat doesn't ask you, ‘Why did you break that rule to help those people?’ then you were too meek.”

“Why do you act like a bureaucrat? Bureaucrats avoid problems. You must seek out and own the problem. Emergency managers who act like bureaucrats are justly scorned. So many problems in a big job can only be fixed in the EOC. If you hide from them they will only find you later after they have grown into monsters.”

“Why do you not make people do their jobs? There is no way that everyone is not all-in in your job. Make that ask. No request is too big when lives are at stake. There is power in asking for help. They will have to answer for not helping.”

Gloria thought long and hard about what the old man had said. Then she came home and made a wise decision. She is now in law school in Pasadena...

What it Takes...

Following disasters, critical issues for planning are immediately identified. No matter how well anticipated the disaster, written the plan, or trained the emergency managers, each emergency will bring to light opportunities for growth. In the health and medical field, these issues are often exclusively prioritized as healthcare facilities quickly become consumed with normal operations post-disaster.

While healthcare facilities must address these newly identified critical issues during the recovery phase, the challenge becomes holding



National Guard supporting healthcare evacuations Sandy 2012

a wider gaze. Healthcare facilities and those involved in planning for healthcare facilities must follow the whole community approach advocated by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response. In doing so, increased resiliency and the ability to rebound effectively and efficiently from all types of disasters will be achieved. While this approach is more challenging in that it forces innovative problem-solving for issues yet unseen, the ultimate result is a prepared and resilient healthcare community that will recover quickly.

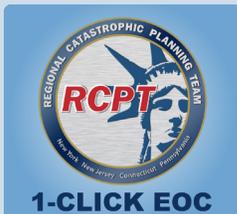
Following Hurricane Irene in 2011, we experienced both the desire to address the most recent problem and the unexpected consequence of doing so. Citywide, planning was initiated on the shelter-in-place process for healthcare facilities. Extensive work was conducted to address how patients could remain safely in place, since healthcare facilities did not experience flooding or adverse effects during Irene. While this work was critical, it also



Healthcare evacuations Sandy 2012

meant that other issues, such as the repatriation and re-opening process, were not addressed. Hurricane Sandy provided a dramatic lesson in why it's necessary to plan for extensive facility damage, as 73 healthcare facilities lost power and many closed for months with residents displaced post-storm. The challenge now will be to not only focus on the re-opening process, but continue to critically evaluate all aspects of healthcare preparedness to ensure a shorter recovery and increased resiliency.

STAY TUNED



1-Click EOC is a mobile application designed as a

one-stop-EOC shop for the busy emergency manager. The application is geared for use on mobile devices and navigates our EOC plans and tools with one click. Seconds count in a catastrophic disaster and this application puts the right tools in front of the user quickly, simply, and intuitively. 1-Click EOC enables users to search by common terms and quickly disseminate plans and Quick Sheets. An elegant and simple application with a graphic-based navigation system, 1-Click EOC helps emergency managers get the job done faster.

Building the EOC Machine

It can be argued that the greatest tool an emergency manager has is the Emergency Operations Center, or the EOC. Think of the EOC as a powerful machine that, when well calibrated, can handle almost anything that is thrown into it. Critical to the EOC's effectiveness is a well-trained emergency manager, and our challenge is getting enough of them to staff an EOC during a big job—that's where the Lightning Bolt simulation comes in. The RCPT Lightning Bolt (or LB) is designed to incrementally train emergency managers to work in an EOC using repeatable scenario-driven drills that can be unpacked and played with a minimum of setup time. The simulation has three scenarios (Hurricane, Radiological Dispersal Device, and Improvised Nuclear Device) that escalate in difficulty. As an EOC team grows in skill, the game



Lightning Bolt SimCell in Nassau County EOC, July 2013

can ratchet up the difficulty level to push players hard to practice coordination and management skills. Each scenario has four modules that last about an hour and a half each, which allows the game to work as a brief morning exercise or an all-day simulation. Injects for each module include geographic features and agency names that can be tailored by an EOC Manager to fit her jurisdiction's specific details. In the coming months the RCPT will be field-testing and improving the LB exercise throughout the 30 counties with several pilot tests beginning with NYC OEM and Nassau County EOC. After those tests the team will release the final package, including player's guides, instructor materials and full Master Scenario Events Lists (MSELs), nationwide through our Virtual Joint Planning Office. When completed, Lightning Bolt will help you understand how to get your EOC big enough fast enough to tackle a catastrophic event. For more information please contact the Regional Integration Center (RIC) at RIC@RegionalCATPlanning.org.



Nassau County EOC activation for LB Demo, July 2013