



# Catastrophic Response

Coordination | Communication | Unity of Effort

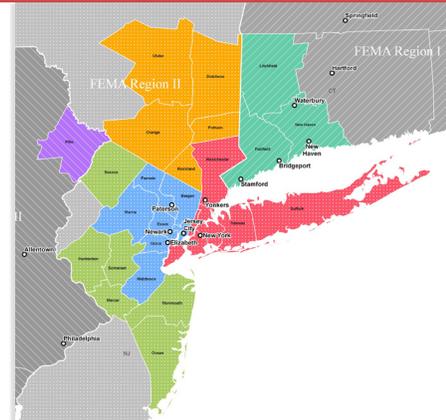
*Working together makes us stronger*

[www.regionalcatplanning.org](http://www.regionalcatplanning.org)

What have we learned in four years of regional catastrophic planning in this region? We have learned that catastrophes are different types of disasters. They exist over large areas and long time horizons, they involve cascading impacts and overlapping problem sets, every one of which can require large and complex operations. Finally we have learned that there are systemic weaknesses in existing doctrine and training that leave us unprepared to manage these incidents.

But we are on the right path. We are building plans that will work for states and locals across this vast project site. Plans that give us the tools we need to get big enough fast enough to do our job; to manage information and resources, to identify and solve problems, to coordinate personnel and resources.

None of this is new and we do it on every job. But the magnitude of a catastrophe will overwhelm us. This would of course be a very bad time for all of us. But failure is not an option. The more we think through now what we will do the more likely it is that we will succeed.



## EXEC'S PODIUM

### WHAT ABOUT HERE?

BY JOHN R. GIBB – *Acting Commissioner, NYS Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services*



We were all moved as we watched the images and read the accounts of the response and recovery efforts to last month's devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Each of us in this business looked at the challenges that the catastrophe presented; the anticipated and unanticipated consequences of the events; the magnitude and organization of the local, regional, national and international response efforts; and asked ourselves, What about here?

The devastating disaster halfway around the world is a reminder—unnecessary in my view, but a reminder nonetheless—of the importance of the work being done in this region to plan and prepare for those catastrophic events that could well befall us.

When our region pulled together nearly three years ago and made the commitment to pursue comprehensive, regionally based disaster planning, it was a

huge advance for the emergency management field and a big win for the citizens of the New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, and northeast Pennsylvania region who should have an expectation that we are working collectively to overcome regional disaster preparedness hurdles.

The Regional Catastrophic Planning Team's efforts across the dozen planning projects we have invested in underscore the magnitude of the problem and the need for an ongoing commitment of all of the regional partners and the federal government. While the final Continuing Resolution for this year's federal budget maintains a commitment to the regional catastrophic planning grant program, it has been reduced by nearly 60 percent: The regional leadership team I know will be working closely together to assess the impact of funding cuts and find ways to continue these vitally important, cross-cutting emergency planning efforts.



RCPT members Kenny, Burns, and Wacha

## NEWS

The Regional Radiological Dispersal Device (R2D2) team conducted a stakeholder meeting at the New Meadowlands Stadium on April 19th to present the final draft of the regional plan and Incident Action Plan template. The meeting was attended by more than 20 representatives from the four-state region. For more information go to: <http://www.regionalcatplanning.org>



Plan Manager Ben Stevenson facilitating discussion during the R2D2 plan rollout with area stakeholders

### CATASTROPHIC QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

*“All too forgotten as a skill set in their own right, basic communication skills are essential—they are the fundamental building blocks that allow us to achieve success.”*

—Don Boyce, Regional Administrator, FEMA Region I

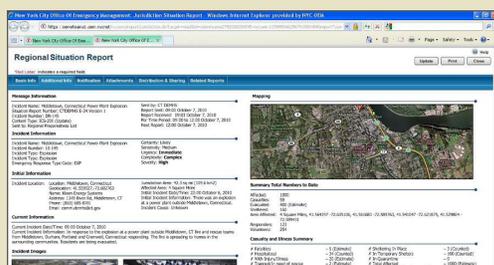
## GET INVOLVED

## 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](mailto:nharris@regionalcatplanning.org).

### Virtual Regional Operations Center: Building a Common Operating Picture

In the past Emergency Management organizations have been focused on maintaining a Common Operating Picture (COP) within their own jurisdiction. Yet the impact of catastrophic events will not be confined to a single jurisdiction, city, county, or state but will affect a region or even the entire nation. The recent drive toward regional planning is evidence of our growing awareness that catastrophes are different, and has highlighted the need to create shared situational awareness and data interoperability among Emergency Management organizations.



The most efficient way to achieve shared situational awareness is to have each jurisdiction's existing incident management systems 'talk' with each other. Our Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program (RCPGP) is developing the Virtual Regional Operations Center (VROC) to make this a reality. The VROC is not simply a tool for sharing information but a way to structure and see incident information in a COP using our existing systems. We are now developing a Proof of Concept for the regional COP which will begin first with customized reports in E-Team. We've even built a sample of a generic COP using selected Emergency Data Exchange Language (EDXL) SitRep data that can be seen here: <http://regionalcatplanning.org/sitrep/situationreport.htm>.

We know this will be challenging and that to achieve true interoperability we need our federal partners to support us by ensuring that everyone is talking the same language using the same federally supported open source data standards like EDXL.



RIC Housing Team presents Participatory Housing Toolkit to RCPT

## Evacuation Orders and Executive Decision-Making

The decision to evacuate is one of the most difficult choices an elected official may need to make. Past experiences in 2005 exemplify this issue. During Hurricane Katrina, officials in New Orleans delayed issuing a mandatory evacuation order until 19 hours before landfall, leaving many of the most vulnerable populations stranded in the city. When Hurricane Rita approached less than a month after Katrina, Texas officials issued timely evacuation orders but evacuation routes jammed up early from a high rate of evacuee participation. Additionally, a phased evacuation saw people in higher locations evacuating before those in more low-lying areas could get out. These events highlight the need for clear, timely, and coordinated evacuation orders.

Our responsibility as emergency managers is to provide our chief elected officials with clear, accurate, and timely information so they can make the appropriate decisions. These decisions do not need to be random or made on subjective assumptions; there are tools and protocols that help structure evacuation decisions based on real-time, incident-specific data. For example, the Metro NY Risk Profile, a new tool that is being introduced in parts of this region, provides objective data on the risk of an approaching coastal storm. The Metro NY Risk Profile is housed within the Hurrevac program and uses National Hurricane Center advisories, geographic considerations, pre-determined clearance times, and other information to provide emergency managers with

critical indicators on the likelihood of a storm striking the region and the impact it might have.

Our ability to make the right evacuation decisions is also improved when we coordinate across jurisdictional boundaries. Timelines for regional evacuation decision-making both for forewarned and no-notice scenarios to guide us during a mass evacuation have been developed as part of the RCPGP evacuation project. Each point along these timelines represents a key decision that emergency managers in all localities will be considering. When we create a common operating picture across a large area and use a coordinated decision-making approach, we can ensure a safer and more efficient evacuation.

The decision to evacuate will never be easy or straightforward, but through the use of objective tools and a common operating picture, executives can make a sound decision in a consistent and timely manner.



RCPT Executive Jack Burns attends regional evacuation training workshop at NYC OEM

## Potential of the Waterways for Evacuation

Disruption to the transportation network is likely during any catastrophic event. These disruptions hamper the ability for people to move out of an impacted area and toward safety when demand is increased, anxiety and panic is great, and uncertainty about the incident is high. It is important for emergency managers to make use of the full capacity of all viable modes of transportation. Experiences on September 11, 2001 and during the 2003 New York City blackout illustrate the importance of the water transportation network during emergencies.

Significant planning efforts for accommodating the movement of people across the rivers and along the coastline has been underway for some time. Plans have focused on developing load-and-go bus services and water-based operations using both public and private assets. The new public information campaign, *Know T.H.E. NJ/NY Plan*, educates commuters

on water-based exit points located in New Jersey and New York City that would be used during an emergency. This campaign is part of a multi-pronged effort in planning for using waterways during emergencies that affect other modes of transportation.

The next step is to gain greater insight into the most efficient routes and landings to support the flow of passengers across the waterways. To that end, the RCPGP evacuation project is conducting an in-depth analysis of the region's landings, vessels, and routes. This effort will develop a waterways transit tool to validate existing planning assumptions and create new strategies for waterborne transportation during emergencies. The project will also include analysis and outputs to aid in real-time decision-making and operations.

## STAY TUNED

In the NEXT issue of *Catastrophic Response*, don't miss the update on the R2D2 Plan:

- Responding to radiological terrorism requires extensive coordination between emergency managers and radiological subject matter experts. The R2D2 Plan integrates data management and scientific support groups into the operational response and incident planning process.
- Built from guidance and best practices, the R2D2 Plan provides local emergency managers with a modifiable Local Plan Template that, through their local planning process, they can easily develop into a Radiological Dispersal Device Plan specific to their jurisdiction.