

Are You Prepared?

Emergency Management for Townships

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The effects of recent disasters and the tragic events of September 11, 2001, have certainly focused a great deal of attention on emergency management, changing how we view its role in the years to come. Several states were quick to establish their own Office of Homeland Security. In many instances, existing emergency management structures were reorganized and new homeland security directors appointed over emergency management directors.

In Michigan, rather than create a new level of bureaucracy or reorganize emergency management, the new responsibilities were integrated into the existing emergency management organization—the Michigan State Police Emergency Management Division (MSP-EMD). The fact that emergency management is located within state law enforcement in Michigan immediately provides us with a critical component of a homeland security strategy.

In Michigan, MSP-EMD has worked very closely with local emergency management programs to provide a solid base on which to expand and improve local capabilities. The dedication of local emergency programs and unity of this effort has soundly positioned Michigan governments, ready to protect citizens in the event of a terrorist incident. State and local officials are the first protectors and the first responders when an emergency or disaster occurs, and as such we have an obligation to do whatever we can to strengthen our capabilities to detect, prepare for, prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from any terrorist threats or attacks against Michigan's homeland.

The aim for homeland security in Michigan is to continue to build upon existing capabilities at all levels of government and promote joint planning, clear communication, comprehensive coordination, mutual aid and increased information sharing. New and renewed partnerships at federal, state and local levels are essential to implement further safeguards for the protection and well-being of Michigan's citizens.

The Michigan Emergency Management System

Key to responding to an emergency event is understanding how the emergency management system works. The Michigan Emergency Management Act (Public Act 390 of 1976, as amended) is the basic state emergency management enabling legislation. This act prescribes the powers and duties of the governor and certain state and local agencies and officials, related to preparing for, responding to, recovering from and mitigating disasters and emergencies. It establishes the organizational framework for the emergency management system used in Michigan.

When an emergency or disaster occurs, local agencies are typically the first to respond. These agencies initially assess the situation, determine its scope and magnitude, and determine if additional assistance is required. Generally, response is handled at the local level to the fullest extent possible. The local emergency management coordinator monitors the situation and notifies the EMD district coordinator. Together, they assess the nature, scope and magnitude of the situation, and determine the need for resources.

If the situation escalates to the point where coordination among several agencies is required, the local emergency management coordinator may decide to activate the local Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and notify key personnel to report there to manage the incident and coordinate activities. The local emergency management coordinator may recommend that the chief executive of the county or municipality declare a local "state of emergency."

If the incident is deemed by the chief executive to be beyond the control of the jurisdiction, he/she may request that the governor declare a "state of emergency" or "state of disaster." This request is made through the EMD district coordinator and forwarded to the EMD office in Lansing, which notifies the governor of the nature, scope and magnitude of the situation.

Before state assistance is authorized,

the jurisdiction must have used all of its appropriate disaster relief forces, including local contractors, activation of mutual aid, and use of regional or other nearby resources. State assistance is *only* used to supplement local efforts and resources to help relieve extraordinary burden caused by threats to public health and safety, and property. It is not used for simple budgetary relief or to relieve hardship.

Subsequent to declaring a state of emergency or disaster, if the governor determines that federal assistance is necessary to supplement the efforts and available resources of the state, the governor may request that the president of the United States declare a "major disaster" or "emergency" for the affected area under the provisions of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act. Such a request is made through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) regional director and is based on a summary of the damage assessment data submitted to EMD by the affected local jurisdictions and involved state agencies.

If the governor requests a presidential declaration, a joint federal and state preliminary damage assessment (PDA) is conducted to determine if the situation warrants federal intervention and assistance. The PDA is conducted by damage assessment teams comprised of one or more federal representatives from FEMA, one or more representatives from the EMD or another state agency, and a local representative. Teams are dispatched to the incident scene to survey the damage and confirm the initial assessment data submitted to the EMD. Based on the results from the PDA, FEMA is able to conclude whether sufficient damage and impact has occurred to support a presidential declaration. The FEMA regional director makes a recommendation to the FEMA director in Washington, D.C., who in turn recommends a course of action to the president.

Under the Stafford Act, the president has three options when a governor's request for a declaration is submitted:

- (1) If the president does not find suffi-

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Elements of Effective Emergency Management

Policy and Leadership—Policy provides both a foundation and a framework for action. The chances of effectively managing an emergency are increased with a community-wide all-hazard plan tailored to the conditions and resources of the community. Leadership is necessary to ensure effective implementation of plans and maintenance of preparedness.

The Incident Response Team—An Incident Response Team can be a highly effective organizational unit for dealing with a variety of crises. Such teams can operate at three levels: individual sites, community and multi-jurisdictional. Well-functioning teams provide a network that can support action whenever crises arise.

The Community Emergency Management Plan—A community that is prepared *before* a crisis occurs will be much more likely to deal with consequences effectively. An unprepared community is asking for chaos.

Communications—When an incident occurs, effective communication is essential—within the responding agencies, with the community at-large, and with the media. Effective communication can speed the restoration of equilibrium; poor communication can make a bad situation much worse.

Training, Exercising and Maintenance—Preparation for and response to emergencies rely on people understanding policies and procedures and knowing what they are supposed to do. These are achieved through training and exercises. Maintaining preparedness is an ongoing process that involves debriefing following crises, periodic review and updating, and ongoing training. ■

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Having an emergency management plan that addresses all hazards, is current and has been tested is essential to being prepared.

cient damage to warrant such a declaration, he may deny the request outright. In those cases, some disaster assistance may still be obtained from specific federal agencies and volunteer organizations.

(2) In those situations where the full range of assistance available with a major disaster declaration is not required, the president may declare that an “emergency” exists and thereby provide specialized assistance from federal agencies to meet a specific need that the federal government is uniquely able to provide. Examples of emergency assistance include temporary housing; mass care; debris removal when in the public interest; emergency repairs to keep essential facilities operating; technical assistance with essential community services; and public health and safety measures.

(3) In those situations where a full range of assistance is required to meet many different needs, the president may declare that a “major disaster” exists, which makes available a variety of federal assistance programs to jurisdictions within the designated disaster area. Three basic types of assistance are available under a presidential disaster declaration:

- individual assistance;
- public assistance; and
- hazard mitigation assistance.

The EMD administers these assistance programs on behalf of the state and FEMA.

Understanding Risk

Emergency response planning introduces two important terms to the emergency management field: *risk management* and *consequence management*. Risk is widely recognized as precisely what it implies—a possibility. Within the context of risk analysis, it refers to the possibility of injury, harm, or other adverse and unwanted effects. There is nothing new about risk assessment. Historians tell us that the Babylonians—in 3200 B.C.—had a special sect of people who served as consultants offering advice on risky, uncertain or difficult decisions in life.

Today, risk assessment and risk man-

agement are part of everyday activities for most organizations. Risk assessments are conducted to estimate how much damage, injury or some measurable adverse impact can be expected, and to assist in judging whether the consequences are great enough to require some form of mitigation—whether in management, security or some physical process.

The other component of that objective is minimizing the effects of an emergency. This component is the one that we are more accustomed to—consequence management. We have experience in managing consequences of incidents, whether from tornadoes, chemical spills or fires. However, the World Trade Center incident has demonstrated that this can become a massive project. We need to ask ourselves how capable we are to respond to and manage a catastrophic event. Even though we have a good base capability in Michigan, if we give ourselves an honest assessment of that capability, there is a need to improve our consequence management capabilities.

So, what is being done to address this need? Soon, all emergency management programs will be asked to participate in a statewide homeland security assessment. The purpose of this assessment is to assess threats, vulnerabilities, capabilities and needs related to terrorism incidents at the state and local level. This assessment will be critical to the updating of the state’s homeland security strategy and in defining areas to be addressed at the local level.

Role of the Local Chief Executive

- Direct development of emergency plans
- Declare local state of emergency
- Issue restrictions such as travel, use of public resources
- Authorize expenditures
- Provide for public health and safety
- Authorize invoking mutual aid response

(Source: FEMA)

What Can Local Government Do to Better Prepare?

Much of the success of future response efforts will depend upon establishing close working relationships among the key players at various government levels. It requires us to integrate federal, state and local government into a cohesive emergency response organization—which is ultimately anchored at the local level.

Having an emergency management plan that addresses all hazards, is current and has been tested is essential to being prepared. Complacency, out-of-date plans and not exercising the plan regularly can lead to an uncoordinated response.

Local all-hazard emergency response plans provide a foundation for preparing comprehensive and compatible response plans that maximize state and local terrorism prevention and response capabilities. Key in developing the plans is being adaptable enough to deal with ter-

rorist attacks, no matter how unlikely or catastrophic, as well as all types of natural disasters and other hazards. This can be attained in the planning process by recognizing the effects of all terrorist attacks that occur locally. Once plans are developed, it is important to promote integrated and collective training, exercises and evaluations. And, process matters—specific measures of performance in plans drive clarity, accountability and success.

Informing the Public

Sound and thoughtful public information can assist public officials in preventing panic and unwanted public responses to serious crises such as a terrorist attack. Additionally, if effective public information is provided, it fosters the trust and confidence that are vital in a crisis situation.

If an incident occurs in your community, a critical step is to let the public know what is being done to protect them and restore the community. Ensure that all government employees are briefed and kept up-to-date on disaster and recovery efforts. The public instinctively trusts information from local government officials—whether at work or in private life—and this

makes them an excellent resource for providing accurate information and preventing the spread of rumors.

With terrorism, the infliction of psychological pain, trauma and fear is the overall objective of the terrorist. Therefore, emergency planners should include planning that will minimize psychological suffering for both victims and responders. Mental health support and psychological operations can be equally important to the emergency response as any other preparedness or response activity.

Michigan's Emergency Management Assistance Compact

Understand what mutual aid agreements can and cannot provide to your community during an emergency response. Make sure that the agreements have been tested and that all participants understand how the incident management structure will operate. Also, understand what FEMA's policy is regarding reimbursement and mutual aid agreements when a federal disaster is declared.

Over the past two years, MSP-EMD has been working toward implementation of a statewide emergency assistance compact for all local government jurisdictions and public safety agencies within Michigan. While the primary impetus is linked with the state's homeland security strategy, the Michigan Emergency Management Assistance Compact (MEMAC) could offer a much broader

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Emergency Operations Plans

Local government is the first responder to emergencies and disasters. A critical element of any local government's emergency preparedness is an emergency operations plan (EOP). An EOP assigns responsibility to organizations to carry out specific duties at projected times and places during an emergency that exceeds the resource capabilities of any particular entity. An EOP should:

- Set forth lines of authority and organizational relationships
- Show how all actions will be coordinated
- Describe how people and property will be protected during an emergency or disaster
- Identify personnel, equipment, facilities, supplies and other available resources within jurisdiction or by agreement with other jurisdictions for use during response and recovery activities
- Identify steps to address mitigation concerns during response and recovery activities
- Cite its legal basis
- State its objectives
- Acknowledge its assumptions

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range of potential applications and benefits in line with the “all-hazards” approach to emergency management.

No single jurisdiction in isolation could possibly afford to maintain or muster all the necessary resources for effective response to a major natural or technological disaster, or to a terrorist attack involving chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or explosive weapons of mass destruction. A state-wide assistance compact would facilitate the free flow of public safety personnel, equipment and other vital resources across jurisdictional boundaries for communities to help each other during emergencies and disasters.

One lesson we have all learned from September 11 is that any effective response to terrorism or any large-scale emergency requires teamwork among local, county, state and federal agencies. The more communities that agree to participate, the more prepared we will be to respond to the challenges that could impact us.

Forging Partnerships

When dealing with disasters, we can accomplish more together as a group than as individuals. Disasters can permeate every corner of our communities. No individual, business or organization is left untouched. For this reason, communities need to work together to become better prepared.

Partnerships bring a comprehensive

approach to emergency management goals. These partnerships exemplify how local government can coordinate with other levels of government, industries, nonprofit organizations and interest groups to inform more people about disaster mitigation, preparedness response and recovery.

Better Preparedness—Who Pays?

While it is extremely important to move forward and better prepare state and local governments to deal with disasters, it also becomes an issue regarding how these efforts will be funded. Many communities fund emergency management programs but often it is

not enough to accomplish all the tasks required. This is made even more difficult by the budget constraints that state and local governments are now facing. Federal funding is critical for building a national homeland security system, emergency preparedness and response capability.

The federal government has provided state and local governments with funding to address homeland security efforts. Michigan is currently administering several federal homeland security grants, which have allowed state and local governments to purchase equipment to protect and prepare our first responders, develop response plans and procedures, train response personnel and conduct exercises to test the adequacy of plans.

Building Effective Homeland Security

The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism details a very specific desired outcome for terrorism prevention and



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preparedness. The scope and capabilities of global terrorist organizations are reduced when they become localized, unorganized, unsponsored, and rare enough that they can be dealt with primarily by criminal law enforcement.

It is important to note that the national strategy does not say the "elimination" of terrorism. We cannot guarantee our citizens that it will never happen here in Michigan. What we can assure them of is that we have built the best homeland security infrastructure that we are all capable of producing.

In order to achieve this, there are critical factors that will determine our success:

- involvement of stakeholders;
- building partnerships;
- strategic planning—further refinement of Michigan's homeland security strategy and the threat assessment process necessary to build that strategy; and
- effective public communication capabilities.

Building an effective homeland security capability will require well-functioning relationships with our partners. It means that we must establish effective mechanisms to strengthen the

ability of agencies to share information and build partnerships that yield results and help meet our homeland security objectives.

We must successfully integrate agencies and activities into a cohesive group to achieve the synergy for providing better homeland security against terrorism. We need to learn from the best practices of the private and public sectors.

In the final analysis, success will depend largely on utilizing the right people, setting priorities, and building effective partnerships with the appropriate public, private and nonprofit sector entities. ■

Mark Wesley has been with Michigan State Police, Emergency Management Division since 1988. He is currently acting as a division coordinator for the Office of Domestic Preparedness FY 03' Homeland Security Grant and Terrorism Planning Grant efforts. He also serves as the division's governmental and public affairs officer. For more information, visit the state's homeland security Web site: www.michigan.gov/homeland.

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