

Homeland security huddle

Emergency response groups discuss preparedness issues

BY AMY C. HUGHES

While congressional leaders were deliberating legislation to create a new Department of Homeland Security last November, representatives of the nation's principal emergency responder associations initiated a dialogue on all-hazards emergency preparedness and homeland security.

Representatives from state and local law enforcement, public works, emergency management, fire, public health, public safety communications, emergency medical services and National Guard associations were invited to the National Emergency Preparedness and Response Partnership Summit held in Washington, D.C. Nov. 12 and 13, and hosted by the National Emergency Management Association.

The two-day meeting was held to establish a working relationship among the lead state and local emergency responder organizations, identify areas of mutual interest, and learn more about each association's policies and positions on homeland security and emergency preparedness and response.

Common priorities and concerns

Each organization, through a brief survey, was asked to identify its top priorities for all-hazards emergency preparedness and response. Through this exercise, common priorities and concerns emerged and were the prevailing topics of discussion during the summit.



Homeland security funding

State and local emergency response agencies are suffering from a severe lack of funding not only to maintain current initiatives but also to support new priorities such as terrorism preparedness and planning. A recent survey of state emergency management directors conducted by NEMA revealed that less than one third of states have received additional state funding for homeland security efforts. Among those states, however, little of the money is earmarked for activities and purchases beyond those with a high visibility factor such as equipment purchases, terrorism exercises, and extra security patrols at capitol buildings.

With the bleak budget outlook for fiscal year 2003 and beyond, state and local agencies will struggle to accommodate any cost-share requirements for homeland security funding. Several of the organizations in attendance voiced concern that existing public safety programs would suffer if they had to compete with new homeland security programs and urged the future leadership of the Department of Homeland Security to

explore development of a comprehensive funding strategy that:

- Phases in cost shares over several years;
- Addresses the importance of existing and new programmatic funding streams and the need for *both* to be a part of the homeland security strategy;
- Does not cut existing, proven programs for the sake of new ones; and
- Provides for funding to be coordinated through a single point of contact in each state using a standardized approach.

National Guard and the military

The summit participants recognized the potential of the National Guard to provide much needed personnel and resources to support state homeland security priorities. Without a clearly defined role and without funds to support preparedness and training activities, however, reserve and active duty military personnel may not be prepared to serve beyond their federal homeland

security responsibilities.

Several recommendations, by the adjutants general in particular, included expanding the mission of the National Guard to include international combat and domestic security; authorizing and funding the Guard to train and exercise with state and local governments; and allowing the National Guard to maintain a Title 32 status, which allows for federal funding when Guard troops are operating within a state's jurisdiction under the authority of the governor.

With the establishment of the U.S. Northern Command, the new U.S.-based military command that is responsible for the defense and security of North America, federal troops could be deployed to respond to terrorist attacks anywhere in the United States. While additional manpower and resources are welcomed, NORTHCOM raises a host of issues regarding coordination and command of these troops while operating in state jurisdictions. To ensure the appropriate use of the military within the letter of the law, forum members discussed moving oversight responsibilities of federal troops to a lead federal civilian agency and moving operational authority under the supervision of the state's adjutant general or governor when deployed within state borders.

In addition, members urged Congress and the U.S. Department of Defense to complete the establishment of Civil Support Teams in all states. These specially trained teams of National Guard personnel are available to support state and local authorities in a disaster or attack involving weapons of mass

destruction. Currently, only 32 states have Civil Support Teams.

National Incident Management System

The National Strategy for Homeland Security, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/homeland> cites the need for a national Incident Management System as a priority for national security. The use of a standardized incident command structure and management approach that is consistent across all federal, state and local agencies creates an efficient flow of resources and information regardless of the type and frequency of the disaster. By speaking the same language and using the same system, emergency responders can more effectively protect lives, property and the environment during times of disaster.

One suggestion for planning a standardized national system is to include all disciplines and organizations involved in disaster prevention/mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. Such a comprehensive plan will require a bottom-up approach with local government recognized as the front line of defense and response to disasters and emergencies, including homeland security. Many organizations and agencies have adopted and use various incident management systems, however, not all response disciplines are familiar with the incident command system.

The group determined that a uniform incident command system could help address duplication and overlap in local, state and federal plans and provide a

framework for addressing coordination and standardization of training, equipment interoperability and national response standards, all of which are identified in the national strategy.

Public safety spectrum and interoperable communications

When it comes to achieving interoperable communications, there are two issues to consider: radio spectrum and interoperable equipment.

Adequate radio spectrum is necessary to achieve undisrupted communications among public safety personnel and to implement new communications tools such as wide-area mobile data systems that give first responders access to critical on-scene data. If spectrum is not available to accommodate a surge of communication during the response to a terrorism event, users are forced onto other channels, hindering the seamless communication needed to quickly dispatch personnel and equipment.

According to a homeland security white paper released by the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials International in December 2002, Congress required the FCC to allocate a portion of a radio band, soon to be vacated by the transition of consumers to digital television, for public safety purposes but set a long-range deadline of December 2006 for broadcasters to vacate the band. While Congress ordered the remaining spectrum be put on the auction block, the public sector has little hope of successfully bidding against the broadcasting industry for such a valuable commodity.

During the summit, representatives from police, fire and emergency management services noted that the technology is available to achieve interoperable communications equipment, but like spectrum, it is cost prohibitive for state and local governments. Several associations, including those from public safety communications, recommended that a standardized national interoperability model be developed as a guideline for technology development and as a requirement for federal funding to state and local governments. Through a joint effort of federal, state and local governments and with support from the U.S.

“The success of our nation's strategy to combat terrorism, as well as to prepare for the response to a disaster of any sort, demands collaborative and collective efforts from all of our nation's emergency response partners. This unprecedented forum of all our leading public safety entities provided a critical first step towards the cohesive national coordination efforts that our citizens demand and deserve.”

**— Glen Woodbury,
Washington state emergency management
director and NEMA president**

Telecommunications Industry Association, APCO International has developed recommendations and detailed technical specifications for digital radio systems that can be used as the basis for interoperable systems and equipment. Through user-group feedback and standards-building activities such as this, the public safety and emergency response communities are driving the change in technology to achieve affordable products and services that meet the needs of state and local government.

Training

While there are many training programs for state and local emergency responders, little coordination or standardization exists among those programs and those offered by various federal agencies. This leads to inconsistencies in the preparedness of state and local personnel. The forum discussed development of a comprehensive and academic review of all existing homeland security-training programs, across all disciplines, to identify overlaps, gaps and best practices. It is hoped that the Department of Homeland Security will develop a single, national agenda for all training programs with input by the appropriate state and local organizations and provide a delivery method for the curriculum in the form of a national training academy.

Mutual Aid

Mutual aid at the local, state and regional level provides access to additional response and recovery capabilities

Preparedness summit participants


- **American Public Works Association**
http://www.apwa.net/
- **Association of Public Safety Communications Officials**
http://www.apcointl.org
- **Association of State & Territorial Health Officials**
http://www.astho.org
- **International Association of Emergency Managers**
http://www.iaem.com
- **International Association of Chiefs of Police**
http://www.theiacp.org
- **International Association of Fire Chiefs**
http://www.iafc.org
- **National Association of State EMS Directors**
http://www.nasemsd.org
- **National Emergency Management Association**
http://www.nemaweb.org
- **National Sheriffs' Association**
http://www.sheriffs.org
- **The Adjutants General Association of the United States**
http://www.agaus.org

at times when local and state resources are overwhelmed. The National Strategy for Homeland Security encourages establishment of statewide mutual aid agreements and hints that future federal funding may be contingent upon having such agreements in place. Currently, 47 states, two territories and the District of Columbia are members of the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, a proven interstate mutual aid system. And, more than half the states have successful, well-utilized local mutual aid agreements that could serve as models for

other states and local jurisdictions.

During the summit, participants suggested that all disciplines develop statewide mutual aid agreements and procedures for the deployment of personnel, equipment and resources that address issues of liability, workers compensation and reimbursement. Having mutual aid agreements in place before a disaster can streamline the response and prevent the self-dispatching of personnel and volunteers to the scene, a crippling problem at the site of the World Trade Center collapse and previous large-scale natural disasters.

Discussions will continue

Participants agreed that the exchange of information during the summit was critically needed and that the issues they identified must be addressed for the success of all-hazards emergency preparedness, homeland security and overall public safety. Representatives from each organization agreed to maintain communication on these issues and tentatively scheduled a follow up meeting for March. 

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