

Don't host the world without them

States and cities are turning to emergency managers to help manage and coordinate public safety at large-scale public events.

BY TRINA R. HEMBREE

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Utah will be ready for any emergency when it hosts the 2002 Winter Olympic Games. The Olympics pose unique problems for officials responsible for public safety. Olympic planners expect more than 174,000 spectators to attend the games each day and more than 70,000 people to travel to the state for the 16-day event. The center of attention will be the estimated 3,500 athletes and officials from 80 countries who will compete in seven sports with 70 medal events.

With crowds and venues for the Games spread out over seven counties and five cities, keeping everything flowing smoothly promises to be an Olympic-size challenge. Should an emergency arise or a disaster occur, Utah has prepared for a quick, coordinated response. Utah began planning for public safety at the Olympics in 1996 when it established the Utah Olympic Public Safety Command. As an integral part of the command, the Utah Division of Comprehensive Emergency Management has partici-

pated in the planning effort from the start.

Utah is among a growing number of states and cities turning to emergency management agencies to help plan and manage large-scale public events. Emergency managers also have played a vital role in the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, the July 4th celebration on the Mall, the presidential inauguration ceremonies in Washington, D.C., and the Boston Marathon, among other special events. With emergency management involved, International Monetary Fund/World Bank meetings in the District of Columbia and Columbus, Ohio, took place without the headline-making disturbances of Seattle.

Emergency managers are skilled at identifying potential trouble spots, developing and exercising plans, and readying resources for rapid deployment in an emergency. Emergency managers can coordinate resources and assistance available from numerous state agencies and volunteer organizations during a disaster. They can



Massachusetts emergency managers help coordinate the Boston Marathon.

apply these skills to special events and participate in a coordinated effort involving law enforcement, public health, fire service and emergency medical personnel, all of which must know their roles in emergencies.

An Olympic role

The Utah Division of Comprehensive Emergency Management has helped local jurisdictions and Olympic venues prepare and review operational plans. The division also updated the Utah state emergency-operations plan and assisted state agencies in reviewing and updating their plans. The plans cover every likely hazard and emphasize current procedures on requesting resources and declaring an emergency or disaster.

The division currently chairs two of the 27 subcommittees of the Utah Olympic Public Safety Command. The Infrastructure Protection Subcommittee allows coordinated efforts by representatives from power, water, telecommunications, health-care, trans-

portation, finance, government and emergency services. The Emergency Management Subcommittee ensures that in jurisdictions where Olympic events are held, the existing systems for emergency management are integrated and prepared to respond to a disaster or extraordinary event.

In addition, the division participates in a Joint Terrorism Task Force, established by a presidential directive to coordinate law-enforcement and emergency-response functions. The division also facilitates specialized training for law enforcement, hazardous materials, resources management and counter terrorism in counties and cities where Olympic events are held.

The threat of terrorism

The growing threat of domestic terrorism makes it important for emergency managers to be part of special-events planning. Emergency managers are responsible for managing the consequences of a terrorist event – coordinating the emergency response, securing resources and assistance, ensuring continuity of government and protecting overall public safety. This allows law enforcement officials to focus on the criminal investigation of an incident.

In preparation for the 2002 Winter Games, Utah public safety officials have been working with Georgia public-safety agencies to incorporate lessons learned from the 1996 Summer Olympics. Few people can forget the pipe bomb that detonated inside Centennial Olympic Park, killing two people.

Within 20 minutes of the explosion, state personnel evacuated 60,000 visitors and secured the park as a crime scene and triage area to treat those injured. Within 32 minutes, medical personnel and equipment were set up in the Olympic Ring area so they could respond instantly and 118 of the injured were transported to area hospitals. Crisis and grief counseling was provided to 73 victims. This quick re-

sponse was attributed to the state's consolidated approach to public safety combined with its advance planning, personnel training and exercises held for operations plans.

Georgia's readiness stemmed from then-Gov. Zell Miller's executive order in 1996 that established the State Olympic Law Enforcement Command and named state emergency management director Gary McConnell as its chief of staff. This order placed all of the state's resources for public safety under a single command, relying on Georgia's emergency response capabilities and experience.

Such a coordinated effort is vital to pulling together all the state's resources and expertise.

"The Games required a total public safety effort, combining all state personnel and resources under one unified command, SOLEC," McConnell said. "This command, encompassing 29 state agencies, required the total commitment and cooperation of



Utah will host the 2002 Winter Olympics. Photo by Tom Till.

agency heads, as well as the hands on involvement of the governor."

A national stage

The Atlanta Olympics is an example of emergency management's ability to facilitate and coordinate various state and local agencies and their resources.

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Today, the District of Columbia arguably serves as the special-events capitol of the nation. Emergency management is key to successfully staging nationally prominent events. The D.C. Emergency Management Agency coordinates the District's support of major events including road races, parades, demonstrations, protests, marches and other



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large gatherings such as the annual Fourth of July celebration on the Mall.

Peter LaPorte, the District's emergency management director, heads the Mayor's Special Events Task Group of city, federal and independent agencies, which meets twice monthly to review plans for proposed special events. "Perhaps the most important thing we do relative to special events is to provide the same overall coordination and control that we do for emergencies," LaPorte said. "We make sure the city and its citizens are not adversely affected by the event, that all of the needed resources are in place to ensure public safety and that once the event is over the city is returned to its pre-event state."

The 2001 presidential inauguration ceremonies used the planning and coordination expertise of emergency managers. Emergency management and other district and select federal agencies formed 15 subcommittees addressing security, vending, licensing and inspections, health and medical, communications and public-works issues.

Emergency management also employed prototype technology programs, including a system to provide medical-surveillance information on patient symptoms aimed at identifying unusual patterns of illness as a means to detect

any release of a biological agent. Medical-aid stations located near the site of the swearing-in ceremony, along the parade route and at the evening's celebrations could have been used to transmit medical data for analysis by area health and military agencies. A second prototype program allowed emergency management to track situations and provide a chronology instantly accessible by security forces at the inauguration.

From runners to golfers

Emergency managers are lending their expertise to other special events across the nation. The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency has long assisted with special-events planning. Annually, the agency helps coordinate the Boston Marathon, which requires route control for up to 20,000 runners, crowd control for up to 1 million spectators, and traffic control for 26 miles of roads and streets. On the day of the marathon, state emergency

management officials monitor the race from their emergency operations center and ensure proper communication among the many agencies and organizations involved in the event.

Minnesota's emergency management agency is working closely with the Professional Golfer's Association to prepare for a PGA tour event in 2002. The emergency officials are addressing potential problems such as severe weather, bleacher collapse, evacuations and incidents of domestic terrorism. "The PGA sees local and state emergency managers as the key to successfully overcoming events during the tournament," said director Kevin Leuer.

Emergency managers have much to offer outside the traditional realm of disaster response. States should take advantage of the planning, facilitation and coordination expertise that exists within their own government structure. ★

Sales tax bill hits the mark

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field for all retail sales through state-based tax simplification for collection of state and local sales and use taxes.

Additionally, some retailers are increasingly interested in a level playing field between retail stores and Internet stores. Peter Lowy, CEO of Westfield America, which has 39 super regional and regional shopping centers, said, "Simply put, there is no logical argument that supports taxing the same retail transaction differently depending on the delivery system. The marketplace should determine sales decisions, not discriminatory tax policies."

On the other hand, Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, has introduced a bill to extend the moratorium and impose significant hurdles for states to collect

sales taxes on remote sales.

Dorgan is optimistic that a compromise bill can be crafted before the moratorium expires in October. "My sense is that we're making a lot of progress on this issue," Dorgan said. "We'll be looking for the common ground that I think is going to emerge."

In doing so, Congress will have to address the convergence of technology and how to distinguish between the variety of services to which to apply state and local taxes when telephone, cable, data and other telecommunications services are bundled.

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