

# EMAC

## A Success Story



Compact praised as “critical part” of emergency management framework

By Beverly Bell

In its recent investigation of the Hurricane Katrina response, the U.S. House of Representatives cited one entity as a success story. The Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), the state-to-state mutual aid agreement that allows support across state lines when a disaster occurs, was praised: “a critical part of the national emergency management framework, successfully provided unprecedented levels of response and recovery personnel and assets to the Gulf coast in record time following Hurricane Katrina.” To date, EMAC—which is administered by the National Emergency Management Association, a CSG affiliate—has deployed almost 66,000 people with missions totaling approximately \$819 million.

Seven months after one of the country’s most devastating events, changes to the national emergency response system—including the role of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), where the agency should be housed and the necessary qualifications of the FEMA director—are still being debated. However, EMAC has already initiated an extensive self-critique and is taking steps toward improvement.

This after-action process began with a post-deployment survey two months after Katrina struck. More than 700 participants provided feedback on various operational elements, including what worked well and what procedures need modification. The survey is the first phase in what will become the EMAC Hurricane Katrina Response After-Action Report (AAR). The Compact produced a similar report after the 2004 hurricane season when it deployed 800 people from 38 states in what was then the largest utilization of state-to-state mutual aid in the nation’s history. The 2004 document guided EMAC in making vast and significant improvements to its system, which enabled it to handle the disastrous events of 2005.

Other parts of the AAR include in-depth discussions with those who served on A-Teams, the lead groups in the Katrina response, and those who provide ongoing oversight, governance and coordination of the Compact. Follow-up was also conducted with federal partners involved in the response, states that received or provided EMAC assistance, and individuals who were deployed. All these sessions revealed successful components that can be expanded, as well as areas that need to be addressed to make the Compact function more effectively.

While the complete after-action report won’t be released until early fall 2006, EMAC is acting on key findings. The main focus this year will be education and outreach. Representatives from various disciplines have acknowledged that prior to Katrina, they weren’t familiar with how EMAC worked. This lack of knowledge resulted in problems with the mobilization and deployment processes for local first responders, which hampered some states’ response efforts.

In 2006, EMAC will also concentrate on establishing systems to support tracking resources—both equipment and personnel; enhancing online requisition procedures; and working on the challenges of integrating private sector assets into the mutual aid structure. Finally, before hurricane season begins on June 1, EMAC will publish a new version of its operations manual as well as lessons learned from last year’s catastrophic events. The intent is to have the Compact performing at the next level of response, whatever that response might require.

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