Emergency Management and Response Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC)

INFOGRAM 18-09 May 7, 2009

NOTE: *This INFOGRAM will be distributed weekly to provide members of the Emergency Services Sector with information concerning the protection of their critical infrastructures. For further information, contact the Emergency Management and Response- Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC) at (301) 447-1325 or by e-mail at* emr-isac@dhs.gov.

Government Emergency Telecommunications Service

Natural and man-made disasters can cause considerable disruption to telephone service by generating extraordinary levels of call volume. Although backup systems are in place, degradation of service can still occur because of increased vulnerability to network congestion and system failures. This possibility can be seriously problematic for Emergency Services Sector (ESS) departments and agencies that must complete their calls to perform mission essential tasks.

The Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC) verified that the Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS) satisfies the need for government leaders and ESS personnel to have priority status on congested landline telephone systems when disaster strikes. GETS is a White House-directed emergency phone service provided by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) National Communications System (NCS). GETS supports federal, state, local, tribal, industry, and non-government organization personnel in performing their national security and emergency preparedness missions by offering service priority call routing during incidents when telecommunications networks are jammed.

Using enhancements based on existing commercial technology, GETS allows the emergency management and responder community to communicate over Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) paths with a high likelihood of call completion during the most severe conditions of high-traffic congestion and disruption. The result is a cost-effective, easy-to-use emergency telephone service that is accessed through a simple dialing plan and Personal Identification Number (PIN) card verification methodology. The EMR-ISAC noted that GETS is maintained in a constant state of readiness as a means to overcome network outages through enhanced routing and priority treatment.

To learn more about this service, contact GETS at gets@dhs.gov or see their web site at http://gets.ncs.gov. For information about the wireless companion to GETS, the Wireless Priority Service (WPS), access the WPS link at http://wps.ncs.gov.

Self-Dispatching Issues

In a recent incident, off-duty firefighters raced to a rapidly expanding wildfire and attempted to integrate committed strike teams, according to an article in FireRescue1 News. When researching this matter, the Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC) learned that self-dispatching is normally prohibited by departmental policy or orders.

On previous occasions, the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), International Association of Firefighters (IAFF), and the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) have urged all emergency departments and agencies to “refrain from self-dispatching” to areas affected by a minor or major disaster. These organizations discouraged self-dispatching “because of the significant accountability issues and serious safety risks to responders, civilians, and others who are operating within the parameters of the incident action plan.”

"We appreciate and understand that firefighters and fire chiefs want to help the areas hit by disasters," said former IAFC President Bob DiPoli. He added, however, that we remember an emergency response plan will be in place, and order is essential for the safety of the communities devastated by storms, etc. "Self-dispatching disrupts this order and puts more lives at risk."

The EMR-ISAC confirmed that any department or agency having resources available to deploy to a catastrophe (outside of their jurisdiction and mutual-aid agreements) should first contact their state emergency management office for higher level coordination, approvals, and details. More information about the recent incident of self-dispatching can be seen at http://www.firerescue1.com/fire-products/wildland/articles/484300-Calif-firefighters-broke-chain-of-command.

Airport Disaster Preparedness

A study funded by the American Public University System is a late-2008 snapshot of preparedness efforts by airports and their Emergency Management Agencies (EMAs), focusing specifically on their coordination and cooperation during non-aviation disasters such as natural disasters and pandemics. It looked at trends in airport emergency planning and the extent and effectiveness of relationships between 37 U.S. airports and their Emergency Services Sector (ESS) partners from a multi-hazard perspective.

First among the study's hypotheses was that "Coordination and cooperation between airports and emergency management agencies is a powerful, cost-effective method of enhancing preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery for multi-hazard disasters and catastrophes." In pursuing this study, researchers noted the increasing professionalism among EMA and airport managers as the Federal Aviation Administration moves toward an all-hazard National Incident Management System (NIMS)/Incident Command System (ICS)-based approach for airport certification and emergency planning.

The study investigated the subjects' potential for, and progress towards, mutual aid. Two examples of large-scale regional mutual aid organizations, described as possible models for the rest of the country, are the Southeast Airports Disaster Operations Group (SEADOG) and the Western Disaster Operations Group (WESTDOG). Additional research areas of significance found by the Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC) included the following best management practices of EMAs and airports:

- Cooperative planning with EMA and other mutual-aid partners.
- Joint training with mutual-aid partners and other EMAs.
- Frequent and realistic drills.
- Using real incidents for training and drills.
- Airport involvement as an asset in non-aviation community drills.
- Aggressive After-Action Reviews (AARs) for real incidents, drills, and exercises.
- Formal NIMS and ICS training at all levels within the organization, including refresher training.
- Succession planning (to ensure that connections outlast personal relationships).
- Drills and exercises that test succession by removing key employees, and/or placing senior managers in observer roles.

The EMR-ISAC observed that innovative preparedness measures include establishing a remote Emergency Operations Center during disaster evacuation; using training Compact Disks compiled from surveillance tapes during real incidents; establishing frequent, regular meetings of operations and emergency managers; integrating Geographic Information Systems into emergency management (EM) and EM communications; and instituting cooperative pandemic planning with state and local health departments, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the airport.

"Airport Disaster Preparedness in a Community Context" (211 KB, 44 pp.) is available as a PDF document, and is condensed as a PowerPoint presentation at http://www.airportstudy2008.com/.

NIST High-Rise Fire Study

Two new reports from the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) detail how wind affects fires in high-rise buildings and the potential techniques for fighting those fires, which could lead to improved safety and survivability for Emergency Services Sector (ESS) personnel and the public.

Funded by the Department of Homeland Security's Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program, the reports are based on experiments conducted in NIST's large fire laboratory, where conditions were controlled and measured. Field experiments were also performed in an abandoned seven-story building on Governors Island, New York, in conjunction with the Fire Department of New York (FDNY). These field experiments confirmed the laboratory findings: conditions created by wind can push hot gases and smoke from the apartment of origin into the public corridors and stairwells.

The Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC) learned that while much is known about wind's impact on outdoor blazes, little information was available about how a fire rapidly turns into a "blowtorch," that is, when a blast of wind enters through a broken window, particularly in high-rise buildings. With thousands of high-rise apartment fires occurring annually, according to NIST, its researchers experimented with techniques that had a significant impact on reducing the hazardous conditions. For example, firefighters placed a fire-resistant material over windows to block the wind, and also used a "floor below nozzle" that allowed them to spray water through a broken window from the apartment below. The importance of controlling the doors inside a building to interrupt the flow path and stop the spread of fire gases was demonstrated many times during the experiments.

"Fire Fighting Tactics Under Wind Driven Conditions: Laboratory Experiments" (NIST Technical Note 1618), can be seen at http://fire.nist.gov/bfrlpubs/fire09/PDF/f09002.pdf. "Fire Fighting Tactics Under Wind Driven Fire Conditions: 7-Story Building," (NIST Technical Note 1629) is available at http://fire.nist.gov/bfrlpubs/fire09/PDF/f09015.pdf. (Allow several minutes to download the documents.) The EMR-ISAC also confirmed the availability of a set of DVDs that include a video overview, both reports, a PowerPoint presentation summary of the results, training videos, and video documentation of all of the experiments. To acquire the DVD set, send an electronic request to madrzy@nist.gov.

REPORTING NOTICE

The National Infrastructure Coordinating Center (NICC) within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Infrastructure Protection is the central point for notifications regarding infrastructure threats, disruptions, intrusions, and suspicious activities. Emergency Services Sector personnel are requested to report any incidents or attacks involving their infrastructures using at least the first and second points of contact seen below:

1) NICC - Voice: 202-282-9201, Fax: 703-487-3570, E-Mail: nicc@dhs.gov
2) Your local FBI office - Web: *http://www.fbi.gov/contact/fo/fo.htm*
3) EMR-ISAC - Voice: 301-447-1325, E-Mail: *emr-isac@dhs.gov*, fax: 301-447- 1034, Web: *www.usfa.dhs.gov/subjects/emr-isac*, Mail: J-247, 16825 South Seton Avenue, Emmitsburg, MD 21727