



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

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***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.*

Call for Vigilance

The New York Sun, and several other newspapers throughout the United States, reported last week: “America’s counterterrorism community is warning that Al Qaeda may launch more overseas operations during October.” Referring to a series of recent messages from Al Qaeda’s leadership, multiple news sources called the possibility of attacks on Western targets: “Osama bin Laden’s October surprise.” Considering the contents of intercepted messages, the national intelligence officer for transnational threats at the Washington Institute for Near East Affairs said he expects to see more Al Qaeda threat information particularly during October.

(<http://www.nysun.com/foreign/spies-warn-that-al-qaeda-aims-for-october-surprise/86326>)

This week, the Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC) received an “increased vigilance” advisory from the Maryland Fire Chiefs—Statewide Alert Network. In this document, Chief David Smarte, Maryland Fire Chiefs Association President, explained “it is important that all fire, EMS, and rescue departments increase vigilance, and implement some important security and safety issues within their respective departments.” Chief Smarte provided some recommendations, which are summarized by the EMR-ISAC as follows:

- Remain aware of persons entering stations asking for information, directions, or to use rest rooms.
- Ensure visitors are provided an escort whenever inside the station.
- Avoid questions concerning response assignments, times, staffing, or anything that provides information which could be used for criminal or dubious purposes.
- Close all station and engine bay doors when no personnel are present in the immediate area.
- Prohibit the practice of leaving equipment running when unattended.
- Stop the practice of leaving keys in the ignition when unattended.
- Report immediately any missing or stolen items, such as vehicles, license plates, uniforms, badges, patches, ID cards, turnout gear, breathing apparatus, communications equipment, keys, etc.
- Report quickly anyone or anything suspicious or extraordinary.

For further information about these suggestions, contact Chief Smarte at mfcapres@mdchief.org.

Mass Psychogenic Illness

Literature of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) and the American Psychiatric Association (APA) purport that Mass Psychogenic Illness (MPI) occurs “when a group of people start feeling sick at the same time even though there is no physical or environmental reason for them to be sick.” It is characterized by symptoms, which appear among a group of persons “with shared beliefs regarding those symptoms, that suggest organic illness but have no identifiable environmental cause and little clinical or laboratory evidence of disease.”

AAFP writers explain that when an environmental trigger makes a group of people believe they have been exposed to something dangerous, many of them may begin to exhibit signs of sickness at the same time. “They might experience headache, dizziness, faintness, weakness or a choking feeling.” In some cases, one person gets sick and then other people in the group also start feeling sick. “People who feel sick in an MPI outbreak genuinely believe it is possible they have been exposed to something harmful.” However, the symptoms are actually caused by the stress or anxiety resulting from the irrational belief.

The literature suggests that MPI can potentially degrade the continuity of operations and response-ability of Emergency Services Sector (ESS) departments and agencies. Emergency personnel responding to incidents involving suspected contagions can experience elevated stress, get “caught up” in the situation, and develop the same reported symptoms of illness. It is possible that Mass Psychogenic Illness among first responders can impede duty performance, diminish organizational efficiency, and jeopardize mission accomplishment.

To terminate an outbreak of MPI within an ESS organization, the Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC) offers the counsel of Timothy F. Jones, M.D., Tennessee Department of Health. He advises that authorities take the following actions: promptly label the illness as MPI, get affected responders away from where it started, medically examine the stricken followed by doctor assurances that the victim does not have a dangerous illness; and deliver reassurances throughout the department and community that the illness was benign and without any long-term effects.

See the following AAFP links for more information about mass psychogenic illness:

- <http://www.aafp.org/afp/20001215/2655ph.html>.
- <http://www.aafp.org/afp/20001215/2649.html>.

ESS Survival at Propane Emergencies

Two members of the Emergency Services Sector (ESS) and two technicians died in January 2007 after a propane release and subsequent explosion leveled a store where an outside tank was improperly situated. In its newly released draft investigation report, the U.S. Chemical Safety Board (CSB) emphasizes the need for immediate evacuation, enhanced training for responders and propane technicians, and guidance for 9-1-1 operators.

The Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC) reviewed the CSB document with proposals for responders. The paper revealed the explosion occurred at the Little General Store in Ghent, West Virginia, where all victims remained in the immediate vicinity of a propane release from a storage tank behind the store and did not evacuate the area. The accident happened as a junior propane technician with 90 days on the job and no formal training, prepared to transfer propane from an old tank to a new one. The CSB found that the tank had been installed against the back wall of the store by the propane supplier in violation of Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations and the West Virginia state fire code, which require 500-gallon tanks to be placed at least 10 feet away from buildings.

According to CSB’s lead investigator, “There are about 17 ½ million propane installations in the United States. Firefighters respond to propane emergencies nearly every day. Propane technicians, firefighters, and 9-1-1 operators have to be prepared for these emergencies.” The CSB also found that approximately 35 states have no requirements for training or qualification of propane technicians.

With respect to emergency dispatcher guidance, CSB’s investigator said that 9-1-1 operators typically use a set of guide cards to acquire pertinent information from callers and give appropriate instructions while dispatching responders to calls for help. However, there is no card specific to propane emergencies. “Such a guide card” he said, “would prompt operators to ask about the size and nature of propane leaks and potential dangers, and increase the likelihood of timely evacuations while firefighters determine the extent of the threat.”

The CSB, an independent federal agency charged with investigating industrial chemical accidents, makes safety recommendations to companies, industry organizations, labor groups, and regulatory agencies. Its web site offers safety publications, investigation reports, and downloadable videos, including an upcoming video of the Little General Store explosion, at <http://www.csb.gov>. The Propane Education and Research Council (PERC) offers extensive propane safety training and materials, including the Propane Emergencies Program targeted to first responders. Available from PERC beginning this month are \$5,000 grants to state propane gas associations to use for propane emergencies materials, training classes, or outreach. A listing of state propane gas associations is available at <http://www.npga.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=544>. To examine the Propane Emergencies Program materials, visit <http://www.npga.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=577>.

CIP Process Tool

The Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC) Critical Infrastructure Protection (CIP) Process Job Aid provides a model process for the systematic protection of critical infrastructures. The CIP process consists of five steps: identifying critical infrastructures, determining the threat, analyzing the vulnerabilities, assessing risk, and applying protective or resiliency measures. Those interested in examining this process can see or download the Job Aid at <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/fa-313.pdf>.

Regarding the fourth step of the process (i.e., assessing risk), a new Web-based tool from the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) offers a central source of data and tools for Emergency Services Sector (ESS) personnel involved in risk assessment and mitigation planning.

NIST's publication and corresponding Web-based tool are organized around the topics of risk assessment, risk management, and economic evaluation. The risk assessment portion includes hazard data for all natural and man-made threats. Risk management resources include software for estimating costs and losses (mitigation costs and event-related losses), risk management guidance documents for the building and community levels, and risk management software, all intended to help owners, managers, and designers develop a cost-effective risk mitigation plan. For planners faced with evaluating how to efficiently allocate scarce financial resources, the compendium presents evaluation methods, industry standards, and software for implementing industry standards, economic modeling resources, and analysis strategies for treating uncertainty.

The first of five appendices is an overview of the three-step protocol for developing a cost-effective risk mitigation plan. To register and download the free Web-based tool, go to <http://www2.bfml.nist.gov/util/register.asp?type=software&CH=13>. To receive a single, complimentary printed copy of NIST Special Publication 1082 (A Guide to Printed and Electronic Resources for Developing a Cost-Effective Risk Mitigation Plan for New and Existing Constructed Facilities), send an e-mail request with mailing instructions to nistsp1082@nist.gov.

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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