

Homeland Security News, Dec. 26, 2007 to January 1, 2008

Training related issues - programs, technology, funding

Public Safety Training Site Taking Shape

Sometime late next year, a store will be robbed and law enforcement cadets will go to the scene. They'll catch the suspect and take him to a jail booking area where corrections officer trainees will fingerprint him and put him in one of two cells. Several weeks later they'll have to testify in court about what happened the day of the robbery. The robbery will occur in a mock village at Indian River Community College's new public safety complex where law enforcement, corrections officers, firefighters, emergency managers and anti-terror squads will be trained with the most sophisticated simulators and mock settings imaginable. "After 9/11, people realized a comprehensive approach is needed in a disaster," Paul Forage, coordinator of the emergency management program, said. "Police officers can't look from just a police view, and firefighters can't look only from a firefighter's view." The 50-acre, \$38.8 million facility brings all the different elements together so students can see a more complete picture of what different agencies do and how all the pieces fit together. "We set out to develop a training complex with as realistic a view of situations as we can," Steve Huntsberger, associate dean of public safety, said. Construction started in March, and they poured concrete earlier this month for the third floor of the Vernon Smith Public Safety Education Building, named for the chairman of Riverside Bank.

Full Article:

http://www.palmbeachpost.com/localnews/content/tcoast/epaper/2007/12/30/m1c_slsafety_1230.html

Source: Palm Beach Post, 12/30/07.

OTC adds emergency management course to spring lineup

Ozarks Technical Community College will in the spring offer a course on dealing with emergencies, with leadership from a local man who's familiar with the process. Ryan Nicholls, director of the Springfield-Greene County Office of Emergency Management, will teach the 16-week course, titled "Real Disasters: Understanding and Managing the Consequences." "We couldn't have a better person teaching it," said Shirley Lawler, associate vice president for academic affairs and work force development at OTC. "Ryan works in that background, and he's in the trenches." The course is intended to help current and future emergency management personnel prepare for disasters. Topics include writing emergency plans, putting the pieces back together after disaster strikes and fighting terrorism with Homeland Security. OTC spokesman Joel Doepker said the course would likely grow into an emergency management systems degree program for the school.

Full Article:

<http://www.sbj.net/article.asp?aID=5185055.3498453.1037205.4279231.6638437.983&aID2=79776>

Source: Springfield Business Journal, 12/20/07.

Community-based issues

Ore. fishermen ready to act when disaster strikes

The owners of more than a dozen commercial fishing boats recently signed agreements that will make their boats and crews available if a tsunami strikes. The boats have signed an agreement with Lincoln County commissioners to ferry equipment, supplies and food to emergency responders and coastal residents. Money to reimburse them for their services would come from FEMA, and channeled through the state and county offices of emergency management. Other than helicopters and airplanes, the tsunami fleet may be the only transportation available for several weeks. And with massive power outages anticipated, the diesel generators aboard boats are a critical resource, said Lincoln County Commissioner Terry Thompson, who conceived the partnership. Many boats also have watermakers, machines that can convert saltwater into potable drinking water, another vital need. "You'd be surprised what these guys can do in an emergency," said Dean Fleck, manager of Englund Marine Supply in Newport. "They're totally self-sustaining." The idea arose even before the Indonesian tsunami heightened awareness about the threat facing the Oregon coast, Thompson said. He was talking about disaster preparedness with Jim Hawley, Lincoln County's emergency services director, and realized that fishing boats are well-equipped to respond to an onshore disaster of any kind. The agreement provides boat owners with \$75 per foot of their vessels per day. A 50-foot boat, then, would earn \$3,750 daily.

Full Article: <http://www.oregonlive.com/newsflash/index.ssf?/base/news-22/1198891143225140.xml&storylist=orlocal>

Source: Associated Press, 12/29/07.

Governors Report National Guard Overstretch, Poor Relationship With DHS

A majority of states are reporting a significant depletion of their National Guard forces to respond to local man-made and natural disasters, according to a survey by the National Governors Association. The survey said that one-third of the states "have at least 75 percent of their National Guard forces available and less than 40 percent said they have at least half their Guard forces on hand," a shortfall that "has prompted nearly every state to initiate mutual aid agreements to share National Guard resources, including equipment and personnel, to deal with emergencies." The report also said the information-sharing relationship between states and the Department of Homeland Security "remains a work in progress." DHS officials disagreed, citing "drafting of new identification regulations called Real ID and chemical security rules."

Full Article:

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071228/NATION/622372838/1002>

Source: Washington Times, 12/28/07.

Best practices

Lessons learned during blackouts are helping shape response to next emergency

When ice storms and summer winds knocked out power across the area last year, nursing

homes overwhelmed the emergency medical system. The 250 nursing care facilities in the metropolitan area are not required to have backup generators that can power heating and cooling systems. When the storms hit, some had nowhere to turn but to hospitals, said Rob Wylie, chief of the Cottleville Fire Protection District and president of the Greater St. Louis Area Fire Chiefs Association. "We almost collapsed the EMS system," Wylie said, adding that it showed just how great the need is for better contingency plans. Some hospitals, including St. Louis University and St. John's Mercy Medical Center, opened closed units for residents of nursing homes that lacked power. Others housed residents in meeting rooms or empty patient rooms. Several hospitals were operating on emergency power themselves. Emergency agencies were overloaded. In one case, airmen from Scott Air Force Base were called on to help move residents back to their nursing homes. As bad as the blackouts were, hospital conditions stayed relatively calm compared to what could happen in a massive earthquake or disease outbreak. "If the hospital is suddenly burdened because of a pandemic, we certainly don't want to have to act as a shelter while we're trying to attend to acute medical and surgical needs," said Dr. Robert Griesbaum, chairman of the emergency management task force at St. Anthony's Medical Center. "We're a long way from being where we should be with emergency preparedness. It's a real opportunity to help reduce our vulnerabilities."

Full Article:

<http://www.stltoday.com/stltoday/news/stories.nsf/sciencemedicine/story/1F82C557CDC A3BE5862573C20019289C?OpenDocument>

Source: St. Louis Post Dispatch, 12/31/07.

Guard has new cellular system

The Louisiana National Guard, which lost much of its ability to communicate with its own personnel and other agencies for nearly three days after Katrina, has selected a communications system it says will survive the next disaster. The system uses basic Blackberry devices and broadband frequencies that about 300 senior-ranking Guardsmen are using on a daily basis through a commercial cellular phone service provider. During a disaster, if cell phone service is knocked out as it was after Hurricane Katrina, those devices remain operable through a temporary communications network that could be set up in the disaster area. The network, called Interoperable Communications Extensions System, or ICE-S, also lets troops communicate with local police, firefighters and other governmental agencies who need to talk to each other in coordinating the emergency response, said Army Col. Ronnie Johnson, the Louisiana National Guard's communications chief. "It is a tremendous system that gives you the ability to rapidly re-establish communications," Johnson said. Louisiana's is one of nine National Guards nationwide using the system, but it's the only one putting it to daily use, Rivada spokesman Dale Curtis said. While about 300 Guardsmen use the system daily at a cost of \$700,000 annually, the Guard has more than 1,000 Blackberries on hand that can be distributed as needed during a disaster to other Guardsmen or to civilian agencies, such as the New Orleans Police Department.

Full Article: <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-26/1198995684155080.xml&coll=1>

Source: New Orleans Times Picayune, 12/30/07.

Advanced Technology Helps Firefighters Talk to Each Other in Maine

The National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) and the Maine Fire Chiefs' Association (MFCA) have embarked on a program to provide advanced technology to allow fire departments in strategic communities to achieve voice interoperability and improve incident commander operations at the scene of an emergency. The project is made possible by Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) from the US Department of Homeland Security for the Regional Interoperable Communications Initiative (RICI) launched jointly by NASFM and MFCA. The AFG program awarded two \$800,000 grants to communities in Maine to implement the RICI program. Traditionally, interoperable communications has not been possible with communications devices used by public safety officials from different responding agencies, because their radios tend to operate on different frequencies and protocols. The RICI program was developed to seek technology alternatives to avoid the problem of replacing all communications equipment so that they are on the same system, which could run into the millions of dollars for a single community. The technology selected for the RICI program is BAE Systems' First InterComm system, which is new to the commercial market. Michael Greene, Director of Homeland Security Solutions for BAE Systems explained, "This system was initially developed for the defense industry and has been carefully adapted to serve the specific needs of emergency responders." The First InterComm technology is installed in first-responder vehicles and allows radios on different frequencies to communicate with each other at the incident scene without requiring major communications equipment replacements or investments.

Full Article:

http://www.forbes.com/prnewswire/feeds/prnewswire/2007/12/27/prnewswire200712271615PR_NEWS_USPR_____DC10657.html

Source: PR Newswire, 12/27/07.

Reports and surveys

2007 A Record Year for Disasters

Tornadoes, floods, freak winter ice storms, wildfires, and public violence throughout the U.S. all kept disaster responders busy in 2007. And with recovery still ongoing in many areas, opportunities abound for volunteers to sign on to help. While many disasters have faded from the headlines, the need for volunteers continues, according to responding organizations. Volunteers continue to be needed along the Gulf Coast to help in the ongoing recovery from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, as well as in response to catastrophes from New York to California (a list of volunteer opportunities can be found at www.disastervolunteers.org). Few U.S. disasters captured and riveted the nation's attention in 2007, unlike in 2005 when Katrina and Rita decimated the Gulf Coast. Worldwide it was a record year with at least 950 major disasters recorded. In fact, the U.S. got off relatively easily during the 2007 Atlantic hurricane season, with only one storm, Hurricane Humberto, making landfall in Texas in September. The Category 1 hurricane formed from a tropical depression within 18 hours. Despite the lack of hurricane activity in the U.S., there were still numerous disasters from coast to coast, ranging from widespread drought in the Southeast to devastating wildfires in Southern

California. The drought was among Time magazine's top 10 natural disaster stories for 2007. Near the end of 2007, there were 63 major federal disaster declarations issued nationwide, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency. That number could change as some requests were still coming in – such as for December ice storm damage in the Midwest – and some were pending. The number of declarations for 2007 was up from 52 one year earlier and from 48 in 2005, FEMA said. A total of 32 states, stretching from Maine to California, received major federal disaster declarations, freeing up federal assistance for recovery efforts. Some states, hit multiple times by various catastrophes, received more than one disaster declaration during the year.

Full Article: <http://www.disasternews.net/news/article.php?articleid=3578>

Source: Disaster News Network, 12/31/07.

Fertilizer law seen as weak on security

More than 12 years after Timothy J. McVeigh used ammonium nitrate fertilizer to blow up the Oklahoma City federal building, Congress quietly passed legislation this month to regulate sales of the explosive. But the Secure Handling of Ammonium Nitrate Act of 2007, part of an appropriations measure signed Wednesday by President Bush, falls far short of the strict law that some in the counter-terrorism community and federal law enforcement were hoping for. Because of last-minute revisions to the legislation, many federal officials and outside experts -- and even some members of Congress -- are uncertain exactly what it mandates. DHS "is still reviewing the new law and considering how to harmonize it with existing chemical facility rules," an agency spokeswoman said Saturday. The measure requires licensing for ammonium nitrate facilities, registration for purchasers, and a framework for establishing what forms of ammonium nitrate will be regulated -- but leaves the specifics up to bureaucrats to decide later. Clamping down on ammonium nitrate has taken years longer than it did to tighten controls on other explosives, nuclear materials, airport security and a range of other potential security weaknesses. About 8 billion pounds of ammonium nitrate is used in the U.S. annually, split about evenly between the agriculture and explosives industries, according to business and government figures. Which forms of ammonium nitrate to regulate has been a sticking point. ATF and Defense Department officials have pushed for stricter rules on any potentially explosive blends of fertilizer, seeking to require that buyers show a state-issued driver's license, among other measures. The main sponsor of the bill was House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.). Mississippi is one of the nation's largest producers of ammonium nitrate, according to the Fertilizer Institute, a trade group based in Washington.

Full Article: <http://www.accountability-central.com/single-view-default/single-view-lexis-nexis/article/the-nation-fertilizer-law-seen-as-weak-on-security-new-regulations-for-ammonium-nitrate-which-has/>

Source: LA Times, 12/31/07.

GAO Finds Disaster Assistance Flows to the Uninsured, Underinsured

The federal government provided roughly \$26 billion to renters and homeowners who lacked adequate insurance to recover from hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma, a new analysis by the U.S. Government Accountability Office finds. According to the GAO, aid to the uninsured and underinsured represents between 25% and 33% of all federal

emergency appropriations tied to the 2005 hurricanes, which totaled \$88 billion as of May 2007. But the agency warns that "given the unsustainable fiscal path of federal and state governments, they will be challenged to maintain their current fiscal role." Delivered as a report to Rep. Spencer Bacchus, R-Ala., the ranking member of the House Financial Services Committee, the study outlines seven public policy options for changing the federal role in natural catastrophe insurance. Included among the options are mandating an "all perils" policy that would cover all events; federal loan or reinsurance programs for state catastrophe funds; and changes to the tax code to allow either companies or individuals to better prepare for catastrophic events. The GAO made clear that taxpayers already are bearing significant costs related to underinsurance even without a formal federal insurance program in place. The report cites research by the Department of Housing and Urban Development finding roughly 78,000 of the 192,820 owner-occupied homes that suffered major damage in the 2005 hurricanes lacked adequate insurance to cover their losses. Among the 60,196 owner-occupied homes with severe wind damage, 38%, or nearly 23,000, lacked wind coverage, the GAO reports.

Full Article:

http://www.insurancenewsnet.com/article.asp?a=top_pc&neID=20071228200.1_6c1a0014ff4b5774

Source: Bestwire, 12/28/07.

Study: US Healthcare System Needs Help

Despite the federal government appropriating nearly \$8 billion for disaster preparedness since 2002, the U.S. health care system is poorly equipped to respond to a major disaster with disaster planning remaining "sporadic" and "disconnected," according to a national study. "When a disaster hits, Americans rely on a fragmented health care system to miraculously mount a timely, cohesive, and effective recovery effort," said the report by PricewaterhouseCoopers' Health Research Institute. "Yet, the carefully orchestrated and sequenced medical responses to disasters lean on a disjointed health system." The report, based on interviews with top health industry leaders and 1,000 adults, said that while "significant progress" has been made since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, "gaps continue to exist." Another report by the Trust for America's Health (TFAH) found that while progress has been made, more work remains to be done on the nation's emergency health preparedness effort. The report was issued after the PricewaterhouseCoopers' study. The TFAH report evaluated all 50 states on 10 key indicators. Thirty-five state scored eight or higher, with seven states – Illinois, Kentucky, Nebraska, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Virginia – scoring a perfect 10. Six states – Arkansas, Iowa, Mississippi, Nevada, Wisconsin and Wyoming – scored the lowest with six out of 10. The report found that seven states and the District of Columbia do not have the capabilities to test for biological threats; seven states have not purchased any antivirals to use during a pandemic flu, which TFAH said "places the entire nation at risk," and 21 states do not have statutes for adequate liability protection for healthcare volunteers during emergencies.

Full Article: <http://www.disasternews.net/news/article.php?articleid=3513>

Source: Disaster News Network, 12/28/07.

FEMA replaces top public affairs official after fake newser

FEMA has hired a new director of public affairs to replace the official who was in charge during a fake news conference in October. Jonathan Thompson, most recently a deputy assistant defense secretary for public affairs, strategy and operations, will be FEMA's new director of external affairs, FEMA Administrator R. David Paulison said in a recent memo to employees. Thompson has 20 years of experience in managing communications for private companies and government agencies. "I know his background in government and private sector communications will enhance our external affairs operations," Paulison said in the memo, obtained Thursday by The Associated Press. The former external affairs director, Pat Philbin, already had accepted a job with the director of national intelligence at the time of the staged news conference. Once it was discovered that the news conference was fake, the director of national intelligence decided not to hire Philbin. On Oct. 23, reporters were given 15 minutes' notice for what turned into a staged question-and-answer briefing with FEMA's deputy administrator about the California wildfires. No genuine journalists attended, although they were given a conference call number they could use to listen in but not ask questions. A half-dozen questions were asked at the event all by FEMA staff members posing as reporters. The White House and Homeland Security officials criticized the fake briefing. FEMA is an agency within the Homeland Security Department.

Full Article: <http://www.nola.com/newsflash/louisiana/index.ssf?/base/news-36/119880355062700.xml&storylist=louisiana>

Source: Associated Press, 12/28/08.

Cyanide antidote could save firefighters, treat terror attack victims

Cyanide poisoning may seem like the stuff of Cold War spy novels. But it's a danger firefighters face daily and a dreaded fear in the fight against terrorism. Whatever the scenario, University of Minnesota scientists say they have discovered a faster antidote to cyanide poisoning that could save lives. Researchers say they have produced a treatment, effective on mice, that neutralizes the cyanide, can be administered within three minutes and can bring recovery much faster than standard drugs. They hope to start human trials within three years. Cyanide is a toxic compound that cripples the body's ability to use oxygen. Poisoning can trigger headaches, a loss of motor function, coma and death. It's particularly dangerous when released in building fires or other confined spaces. Heavy cyanide exposure can kill within minutes, said Steven Patterson, associate director of the university's Center for Drug Design and principal investigator in the cyanide research, which appears in today's issue of the Journal of Medicinal Chemistry. U professor Herbert Nagasawa conceived the idea of the antidote in the late 1980s, Patterson said. It got new life after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, when the idea of chemical terrorism became frighteningly real. Last year, the university received a \$2.5 million federal grant to study possible antidotes. The body is naturally able to detoxify the small amounts of cyanide that surface in pitted fruits and other foods. Patterson said the new antidote works with the body's natural protections to convert cyanide to a nontoxic substance.

Full Article: http://www.twincities.com/localnews/ci_7816706?nclick_check=1

Source: Pioneer Press, 12/27/07.

Funding programs

Tax dollars to help rebuild Hillsboro Beach's private shore

Hillsboro Beach will use state tax dollars to restore the north end of its private beach before the sea turtle nesting season begins in March. The 3.2-mile-long barrier island is an exclusive enclave with no public parking, lifeguards, restrooms or walkways that would enable day-trippers to enjoy its ocean access. Hillsboro Beach plans a truck haul of 13,000 cubic yards of sand that will widen its northern border from the Port de Mer condos to a point 430 feet south, a project estimated to cost \$625,000. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection is kicking in \$156,250, but the town possibly could have recouped up to 50 percent of the beach-widening costs from the state if its stretch of sand was accessible to the public. "Yes, there is limited access, but anyone can walk along the shore," said Town Clerk Matthew Lippman. "From a public perception, there are issues. There is a lot of private property here. But it's against the law to deny access to state-owned beaches." After 2004's Hurricane Frances struck the coast, Hillsboro Beach applied the next year to FEMA for public assistance to restore the beach and dunes to pre-storm conditions. FEMA provided \$2.1 million to the town via an account that is managed by the Florida Division of Emergency Management. Hillsboro Beach will not draw upon the funds until the work is completed and may request that truck-haul costs and future project expenses be covered by the FEMA allocation. Though one of FEMA's criteria for providing assistance is that a site must be available to the public, neither a FEMA spokesman nor Hillsboro Beach officials could say why the battered but private beachfront qualified for the money. "There really are no private beaches in Florida," said Pamela Keil, deputy external affairs officer of the Division of Emergency Management. "Apparently they met the guidelines for FEMA reimbursement."

Full Article: <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/local/broward/sfl-flbhillsboro1231sbdec31,0,2990829.story>

Source: South Florida Sun Sentinel, 12/31/07.