

Disaster Preparedness and JTF-HD

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The All-Hazard Awareness in Oceania session, moderated by Col. Stanley E. Toy, provided a concise and accurate overview of the disaster and security preparedness efforts of Joint Task Force Homeland Defense (JTF-HD). The session highlighted everything from JTF-HD's Subject Matter Expert Exchange teams to its role in disaster preparedness exercises such as Makani Pahili and Lightning Rescue. Efforts such as these are crucial to meeting the trials of the future.

From terrorism and wars to hurricanes and floods, the last decade has thrown numerous challenges our way. Because these disasters are increasingly costly, disaster preparedness and management has never been so important. This year alone saw several hundred lives taken and an estimated \$59 billion in total damages caused by flooding in the Midwest and Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. We can learn much from past disasters, but we need not wait for another to ensure that we are prepared for the future. As John F. Kennedy once said, "The time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining." It was with this attitude that Congress first addressed the issue of disaster management more than two centuries ago.

Federal management of disasters can be traced back to the beginning of the 19th century, when Congress passed the Congressional Act of 1803. The law was passed in reaction to a fire that ravished Portsmouth, New Hampshire, overwhelming state and local response and recovery resources. From the fire in 1803 to the mid-20th century, hundreds of other bills were passed in response to various disasters across the nation, and by 1979 the federal government had over 100 agencies dealing with disasters. In that year, President Jimmy Carter merged many of the agencies into the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in order to centralize federal emergency functions.

Not long after the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C. in 2001, FEMA was integrated with 22 other agencies and offices into the Department of Homeland Security by the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to further centralize federal emergency functions. And perhaps the most important disaster management legislation passed in the last few years is the Post-Katrina Emergency Reform Act (passed in 2006), which significantly reorganized FEMA and closed gaps that were revealed during the response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

One of the most important developments in recent years with disaster management has been the creation of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). The NIMS provides a consistent,

comprehensive template (including a set of standardized organizational structures) to ensure interoperability and compatibility between government, private-sector, and nongovernmental organizations (NGO), and is applicable at all jurisdictional levels. It is a national approach to incident management that was created by Homeland Security Presidential Directive-5 (HSPD-5), which requires adoption of the NIMS at the state and local level as a condition for federal assistance.

The NIMS was built on the concept of the Incident Command System (ICS), which was developed during the 1970s in response to a devastating wildfire in California where many of the response agencies encountered numerous communication and coordination problems. To improve multi-jurisdictional fire fighting operations, the ICS standardized terminology and procedures and outlined job responsibilities and organizational structure. Likewise, the NIMS standardizes procedures and structures, but where the ICS is focused on interoperability on a smaller level for specific incidents, the NIMS facilitates interoperability between all levels nationwide. In fact, the current ICS is one of many components of the NIMS.

Building in turn on the NIMS, the National Response Framework (NRF) is “a guide to how the Nation conducts all-hazards response,” and was written primarily for elected and appointed government officials and NGO leaders. The NRF is a companion document of the NIMS where the NRF defines specific roles and techniques of incident management ranging from small local hazards, to large-scale disasters.

The NRF is an improved version of the National Response Plan (NRP), which incorporated elements of the older Federal Response Plan (FRP). Created in 1992, the FRP mainly addressed federal roles and responsibilities. After the terrorist attacks in 2001, demand for a better understanding of incident management and response principles led to the creation of the NRP, which replaced the FRP. After making further improvements in incident management techniques and recognizing that the NRP was more of a framework than a plan, it was updated and renamed the National Response Framework (NRF).

Among the countless agencies and organizations conforming to the NRF is Joint Task Force Homeland Defense (JTF-HD), an organization whose purpose is defeating terrorist threats to the Homeland (which for JTF-HD is defined as Hawaii and U.S. Territories and Possessions within the Pacific

Command area of responsibility) and conducting Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) operations for all hazards.

An important caveat of receiving DSCA and other federal assistance during disasters, however, is that certain requirements, such as a declaration of emergency by the president, must be met, pursuant to the Stafford Act. In addition, JTF-HD must meet further requirements, as outlined in Department of Defense Directive 3025.15 Military Assistance to Civil Authorities, to conduct DSCA operations. But this doesn't prevent JTF-HD from conducting various other operations in order to facilitate interagency operability and fulfill its mission.

Based in Fort Shafter, Hawaii, JTF-HD began in 2004 and is comprised of all branches of the military, with the Army playing the lead role. Consistent with NRF principles, JTF-HD facilitates a tiered response, where incidents are managed at the lowest jurisdictional level possible, by organizing Subject Matter Expert Exchange (SMEE) seminars as part of a five step process to improve incident management of its state and local counterparts. This process includes site and facility surveys, which lead to a disaster plan review; gap analyses, which pinpoint resource and skill shortages; and major exercises, which test the disaster plan.

JTF-HD currently assists in planning and conducting two annual exercises: Makani Pahili and Lightning Rescue. Makani Pahili, which means "great winds" in Hawaiian, is hosted by Hawaii and prepares responders for the hurricane season by simulating a hurricane hitting the Hawaiian Islands. The importance of such hurricane preparation was made clear to Hawaiian authorities in 1992 when Hurricane Iniki slammed into the island of Kauai, causing nearly \$3 billion in damage.

The Lightning Rescue exercise prepares responders for the threat of pandemic influenza by simulating an inbound airliner carrying passengers that are suspected of being exposed to the Avian Flu. This year's exercise included over 40 different organizations and 50 role players, and involved fire, medical, police and military personnel whose goal was to prevent the epidemic from spreading to other parts of the United States.

JTF-HD's Makani Pahili and Lightning Rescue exercises, along with its SMEE seminars and other operations, prepare responders for disasters and facilitate interoperability between the organizations and agencies that play roles in the incident management process. JTF-HD sets a prime example of how in

the last decade, as a result of devastating disasters such as Hurricane Iniki and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, improvement of our nation's incident management systems has been substantial.

From the hodge-podge of uncoordinated agencies and organizations of the 19th century to the all-encompassing Department of Homeland Security and the standardized National Incident Management System, disaster preparedness and management strategy in the United States has improved dramatically. But incidents such as Hurricane Katrina, the costliest disaster in United States history, highlight the fact that we can never be too prepared. The examples set by groups like JTF-HD will undoubtedly ensure that our communities and our nation will be as prepared as possible for the challenges of the future.

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