

National Capital Region Emergency Preparedness Council (NCR EPC)

Quarterly Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 11, 2016 @ 2:30 p.m.

777 North Capitol Street, N.E. Suite 300; Washington, DC 20002
Ronald F. Kirby Training Center – Lobby Level

1. Welcome, Announcement(s), and Approval of Minutes

David Snyder, Vice Mayor, Falls Church; Chairman, NRC Emergency Preparedness Council

- a) Chairman Snyder opened the meeting at 2:30 p.m., at which time he invited all participants to self-introductions.
- b) Chairman Snyder requested a moment of silence in memory Paul A. Quander, former Chairman of the EPC, who departed this life on March 23, 2016.
- c) Charles Madden, Chief of Grants Management Division, DC HSEMA, was invited to present a brief UASI Update: *(FY2014 UASI, a two-year-old grant awarded by FEMA in August 2014, are expected to be 100% expended by August, 2016.)*
 - 1) C. Geldart thanked the SPG CAO HSEC for approving over allocation of funding by approximately \$10M, which proved helpful with positioning COG to improve spending levels.
 - 2) FY2015 UASI grant awards to begin September 2016 with a three-year performance period. Projects will be re-evaluated after 21-months (ending May 2016) with a goal of performance closeouts in two years instead of three. In the third and final year, performances will be re-evaluated with enough time for reprogramming, if needed.
 - 3) The FY2016 UASI grant application process is complete and was returned to FEMA April 2016; COG is awaiting issuance of award letter, expected to arrive in August 2016. In the interim, COG will continue to finalize awards and ensure that each project has very clear directives in scope, appropriate budgets, deliverables, reachable milestones, with well-defined project management plans. Award distribution is expected early September 2016.
- d) Stuart Freudberg, COG Deputy Executive Director, was invited to provide an update from the NTSB Report on L'Enfant Plaza smoke event:
 - 1) The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) held a public hearing on May 3, 2016, accompanied by a list of recommendations for WMATA and other parties.
 - 2) The Fire Chiefs received a briefing on the NTSB recommendations. The focus for this meeting was on public safety and Q&A with the NTSB staff. Additionally, NTSB offered to return and present a briefing on the Philadelphia Amtrak event, as they believe related details and findings may be of interest to first responders.
 - 3) The NTSB recommendations are advisory and the FTA oversees WMATA. WMATA began responding to NTSB recommendations in corrective action plans. COG will remain engaged in a coordinating and supporting role, and will continue the existing working group that meets to discuss underground communications.
 - 4) In response to the January 12, 2015 L'Enfant Plaza incident, WMATA agreed to host the position for fire liaison at the Rail Operation Control Center (ROCC). This position has been in effect since June, 2015. On May 2, 2016, WMATA released a public announcement for 24/7 presence of a fire liaison starting June, 2016. Bridge funding is available from WMATA through August 1, 2016; this will pay

full-cost for four full-time staff along with ten on-call backup staff for the rail operations control center; UASI funding support will also be available beginning in August. June 1, 2016 will serve as stand-up date for 24/7 staffing. COG will be responsible for appropriately administering funds from both WMATA and UASI. There will be sub-agreements established with Metrorail jurisdictions to provide additional staff support as needed. Standard operating procedures are in development, along with a schedule for coordinated staff training.

- 5) Chairman Evans spoke to the COG Board regarding WMATA's current circumstances and expressed concern for the need of predictable, dedicated, and sustainable funding sources to ensure that the system is appropriately maintained and monitored.
- 6) The COG Board will continue to support WMATA on the Safe Track activities.

Action:

- a) Group participants request improved coordination with communications from WMATA across jurisdictions before going public. Additionally, WMATA was invited to report on ways to improve communication at the next EPC meeting.
 - o The current process used by WMATA to communicate system shutdowns and work commencements is not conducive to effective working relationships across jurisdictions. WMATA is encouraged to find better ways to be all-inclusive when communicating to all regional partners, including the federal government partners, such as the Office of Personnel Management.
 - o Notices to jurisdictions should include specifics on when and how the work will be implemented before the shutdown occurs. Timely notices will allow time for jurisdictions to put together contingency plans and better prepare for questions, consequences and impacts.
- b) Chairman Snyder will submit a formal request for a response on communicating shutdown plans going forward. The WMATA General Manager will plan to attend the next CAO Board meeting (June 1); and is actively reaching-out to jurisdictions to improved working relationships.
- c) Fire Chiefs will review and assess the NTSB recommendations directed to emergency responders and report back to the group at the next EPC meeting.
- d) Chairman Snyder requested that Dave McMillion give an overview of the Emergency Preparedness Council 2016 Priorities Status at the next meeting.
 - o The EPC 2016 priority summary is a status/ update for each of the approved EPC priorities to-date. Send all questions and comments to Mr. McMillion, who will in turn funnel to the appropriate staff liaison for a response. Additionally, please let him know of any new proposed initiatives.
- e) Chairman Snyder moved for a motion to approve the February 10, 2016 meeting minutes. A motion was made and seconded, and so the minutes were unanimously approved as written.

2. REVIEW JANUARY 20, 2016 NCR SNOW/ICE EVENT

The COG Board requested that the NCR EPC investigate challenges from the past snow events and bring back recommendations for improvements. Overall, there appeared to be a regional failure with respect to effective and timely communications to the public and respective jurisdictions, resulting in traffic problems and national media attention.

Stuart Freudberg, Deputy Executive Director, COG

- 1) The goal from this meeting is to consolidate key points resulting from the January 20, 2016 ice/snow event, outline gaps, identify areas for improvement, and report action plans back to the COG Board.
- 2) There was no regional weather coordination for this recent event even though were advanced weather forecast announcing evening snow with possible accumulation of up to one-inch. Jurisdictions did not fully mobilize; there was no real-time information dispensed, and no morning snow call with PIO and MATOC, which could have potentially avoided many of the problems. Employees were not released from work early enough to avoid traffic gridlock. There were traffic signal outages and vehicle abandonments, and the grounds were extremely cold causing snow to freeze upon making contact with the pavement.
- 3) The COG Board of Directors issued a directive to establish a steering committee (Incident Response and Management) that consist of 19 members to launch an investigation and look at past inclement weather events, starting with the January 26, 2011 storm, with a goal to better pinpoint the root causes

for what goes wrong during these types of snow and ice incidents. The committee was to report findings at the November Board 2011 meeting, followed by another update in 2013 that would outline measurements, expected outcomes, and detail what progress was made. For example, identify what triggered traffic gridlock, power outages, and related problems that made the 2011 event more severe than the January 2016 event; find commonalities.

- 4) The Incident Response Management committee (IRM) responded to the group with a number of recommendations that included a regional incident coordination program comprised of highly trained staff to monitor existing tools used to share and analyze information across jurisdictions. Regional calls from the Office of Unified Communications (OUC) located at DC HSEMA with a 24/7 operations center was established, and staffed by FEMA watch-desk employees, bringing on additional staff with the use of FY16 UASI funds. C. Geldart is working closely with the emergency managers to ensure an effective system. Additional recommendations from the IRM committee were to improve messaging for real-time information sharing, and that MATOC (a stepped-up level of information sharing) move to a 24/7 operation during disasters. Consider policy changes that will allow for better commuter personal preparedness with coordinated regional stay-put messaging, and implement employee early release procedures during times of inclement weather along with back-up power for traffic signals outages and for critical facilities.
- 5) There was a decision made not to move forward with hiring a public information officer to communicate inclement weather events. Instead, all jurisdiction PIO's will coordinate regional messaging before and during snow events, which should help with correct and timely information sharing with the public and throughout jurisdictions.

Branco Vlacich, Maintenance Administrator, Northern Virginia District Virginia Department of Transportation

- 1) Presented overview of deployment plans and processes for how VDOT handles inclement weather in Northern Virginia; with the exception of secondary roads, VDOT is responsible for all roads in Fairfax, Prince William, Loudoun, and Arlington, to include express lanes. There are over 4,500 pieces of equipment with 97% of the equipment and crews outsourced and not readily available and on-hand. Most services are under contract with substantial resources available to VDOT when needed.
- 2) VDOT monitors the weather four-times per day making decisions for mobilization based on information obtained from weather forecast. VDOT contractors are issued identical snow maps to be sure that everyone is on the same page during events and requires 18-24 hour notifications for large events and 12-18 hour notices for small events.
- 3) When the confidence is high of an event, roads are pre-treated, but the danger for pre-treating is anti-icing turns into ice, which can cause safety hazards.
- 4) Once a decision has been made to mobilize resources, a written notification is sent to all affected jurisdictions, and up to 18 locations will begin to make contact with individual contractors who in-turn will mobilize respective employees and centralized truck safety inspections. The VDOC will assume responsibility for loading trucks, dispatch them to specific locations, and plowing begins once 2-inches of snow hits the pavement. Trucks are not dispatched during rush hour as traffic congestion has proven to be a critical factor.
- 5) Lessons learned:
 - Mobilization is based on confidence in the forecast; smaller storm events are a challenge because of unpredictability.
 - OPM and Metro collaboration has improved and are dispatching resources more appropriately.
 - Challenge is deploying resources when needed; deploying 4,000 trucks can cost anywhere between \$200,000 to \$1M per hour.
 - A 12-hour window is crucial for appropriate deployment; better to have equipment and resources pre-staged in front of an event anything less increases the chances of trucks not being where they need to be.
 - Identify ways forecast can have greater accuracy; the national weather service has done a good job with long-term events, and weather forecasts have improved from the past.
 - Will plan to partner with DOTs and the National Weather Service this fall or late summer to host a tabletop exercise to improve planning and what other actions to need to be taken; perhaps develop multi-colored standards.
 - DOTs will probe a little deeper into forecasts to determine accuracy and the likelihood that

forecast may change – take a closer look at risk-assessment for each forecast; what is the likelihood that forecast may change; is there a way to improve confidence level in forecast to help reduce cost.

Bud Frank, Director, Homeland Security Advisor, Maryland Department of Transportation

- 1) Maryland follows many of the same steps as VDOT and faces many of the same challenges.
- 2) There is dependence on contractors during inclement weather events.
- 3) Timing is critical for the safety and convenience of commuter travel. There have been times when staff and equipment on standby had to be recalled due to heavy traffic conditions and contractor support on-hold were not dispatched because they too would have been stuck on the roadways.
- 4) Too cold of temperatures decreases the effectiveness of road treatments. Temperatures ranging from 30-35 degrees do not do well with breaking-up snow and ice; roads become too slick.
- 5) MDOT attempts to put out as much equipment as possible, without going overboard given the forecast; the budget and workers are heavily considered.
- 6) MDOT will work to improve messaging to the public and try to minimize traffic on the highway by working more closely with metro and OPM.

Christopher Shorter, Director, Department of Public Works, District of Columbia

- 1) DC utilizes both staff and fleet contractors for deployment during inclement weather forecasts.
- 2) There is a need for at least 12-24-hours notification required to effectively dispatch staff and contractors. During Jan 2016 event, there was a partial deployment in the district, and not enough time was allowed for effective mobilization. The district did not go into full deployment until later in the day, after weather conditions worsened; the city instead worked to clear the roads in preparation for the next day travel, which turned into an all-night operation. The past event was a mid-day commute, which severely disrupted traffic, hindering road clearings.
- 3) Lessons learned:
 - o Regional coordination will place calls when there is a significant change in forecasting. These calls have improved deployment strategy decisions.
 - o Develop standard operating procedures for same day deployments.
 - o MATOC continues to work diligently on timely jurisdictional awareness.
 - o Will work to communicate with the Mayor's office, DC HSEMA and other partners for early notification of inclement weather forecast and develop an alert system for jurisdictions when there is a change that will affect morning or evening commute.
- 4) DC operations need to be positioned to update staff and union officials at least 12-24-hours in advance of an event.
- 5) Where possible, DC will work to keep staff on-hand and on-call depending on forecast; once staff leaves work it is difficult to get them to return because they are usually faced with the same traffic issues as the public. To remedy this problem, DC will work to develop a blanket purchase orders in advance of the season so that contractors are on-call, ready for deployment when staff are not available.

Action:

- a) Send question to Mr. McMillion or Mr. Freudberg who will pass along to the appropriate transportation person(s).
- b) Prepare contingency plans for when the roads are cold, pavement, plus precipitation, and rush hour all factors into trouble on the roads and traffic gridlock.
- c) Coordinate different ways for continual communications to residents as inclement weather evolves.
- d) There needs to be improved and clearer pointed messaging to the public to stay off the roads as much as possible. Develop personal preparedness plans; develop alert-system for schools so plans can be implemented for early pickup and dismissal; schools should communicate to public of contingency plans, early/late dismissals (keep in mind that schools dismiss around 2:30 p.m.).
- e) Public education and expectations are key; think about the next workday, put people first, can people telework, is there flextime or work schedule adjustments available, and are there stay-at-home options for the day following an event so that roads can be treated.
- f) Coordinate regionally for sending people home early. Better, communicate to public that if traffic gets too bad for passing plan to wait out the storm, perhaps get a hotel, visit a restaurant. Start

public communication at the very beginning of the season with repeated messaging through-out to help drill the importance of staying off-the roads and coming up with personal contingency plans during inclement weather forecasts.

- g) Better coordinate messaging and response in real-time; get the right people on the phone; who should hold responsibility for coordinating messaging. However, be careful of too many false inclement forecast messaging; there is a risk that public will stop paying attention.
- h) The National Weather Service should consider characterizing forecast differently; maybe messaging should indicate catastrophic event as oppose to noting degrees and temperature changes.
- i) Coordinate better with the local news stations or afternoon news (4:00-6:00pm). Social media is an option for messaging; messaging needs to happen the day of an event. Engage organizations for endorsement of messaging and empower immediate supervisors to act and release workers based on forecast. Invest in Board of Trade (can announce during annual meeting the desired responsibilities for public messaging as an employer or first-line supervisor as being helpful with influencing outcome) and other organizations that have a voice around the NCR.
- j) Remember that WMATA needs approximately a four-hour advance notice to change the time in which rush hour will start. Appropriate communication with WMATA is imperative when releasing employees early so that they are not left stuck in subway stations or at bus stops.
- k) EPC to report to the COG Board in June the lessons learned from inclement weather events, what critical elements were involved, what lessons were learned, and what processes are being implemented for improvement.

Ammendment from September 14, 2016 EPC Committee meeting from Chairman Snyder:

- o *Modification to the May 11, 2016 minutes related to the discussion of the snow storm: warnings to the public not purely be based on the interest of snow, but rather conditions of the highway and whether or not something will happen during rush-hour that will affect commuter experience during rush-hour inclement weather.*

3. NCR PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATION SCENARIO-BASED DISCUSSION

Christopher Strong, Warning Coordination Meteorologist, National Weather Service, Baltimore Washington
Ed McDonough, Chair of RESF 15 External Affairs, Public Information Officer, Maryland Emergency Management Agency

Jeremy Lasich, Vice Chair, RESF 15 External Affairs, Deputy Director, Office of Public Affairs, Fairfax County
Nicole Chapple, Vice Chair, RESF 15 External Affairs, Assistant Director, External Affairs & Policy, DC Homeland Security Emergency Management Agency

- a) The NCR Public Communications Coordination (PCC) meets monthly to provide structure for communications. NCR PCC supports over 100 different organizations such as fire, police, most public safety entities, emergency managers, and the department of transportation. In the District, the Mayor's office has its own communications team and Federal partners assign staff from various agencies; the ONCRC has just hired a new PIO.
- b) Year 2015 focus is to re-visit the mission, reinvigorate the group, identify gaps, while staying with the same one common message comprised of many voices; support the work of the regions. Regional sites and UASI funds used last year where put focus on a capitalalert.gov website that allows anyone in the region to access and get guidance on specific jurisdictional information for particular locality. Residence can visit this one website to obtain information about multiple jurisdictions, and the capitalalert.gov website has been so successful that additional licenses are being purchased to support increased need.
- c) The developed regional crisis communications plan has been particularly helpful with social media and putting together talking points for jurisdictions that can be edited and framed for region specific messaging, and is useful with getting information out residents more quickly
- d) A regional crisis communication plan is being developed and will be used as a guide to determine how regions will do messaging, as there is no one person assigned to do all messaging for the region. The Maryland Emergency Response system was able to get some contract support to assist with developing messaging plan that defines regional roles and responsibilities. Public information

officer coordinator will initiate conference calls and bring information together; this can be anyone working in-group or someone in a jurisdiction with a need.

- e) The group convenes a call to discuss particulars for public messaging and identify what alert systems will be used, and determine if assistance is needed from other regions to push-out information to residence. Currently, there is not enough staff available to put necessary information together for effective messaging to the public, particular in the smaller regions. To help remedy this problem, the RCC has developed templates derived from hazards in the region. The template consists of 10 tools in a 65-page guide that can be used to assist people as they navigate through events, much of the information is general, but still helpful. The guide includes a checklist that was developed from public feedback, it has a lot of contact information such as local, and regional news media, twitter handle et al. The challenged is identifying ways to keep the information up-to-date.
- f) There is a need to capitalize on alerts; identify one avenue for communication where anyone in region can go to get information about a desired location. Look at ways to engage residents via social media as they commute to and from work, especially while in cars when residents are not listening to the radio because many have iPod with specific music selections and are not paying attention to e-mails.
- g) Pre-messaging to commuters may improve alerts “know before you go.” Recommend staying with existing tools for messaging, but plan to repeat messages more often. A \$250K grant awarded for FY16 that will be useful with creating region-wide preparedness message. Suggest that America’s Prepare-a-thon may be a good time to launch messaging efforts.

Action:

- a) Send e-mail to committee prompting additional comments
- b) Send handouts with notes
- c) The VA United Way has its own messaging for members and can reach 77,000; willing to offer assistance with messaging

4. New Business / Open Discussion

- a) The annual report to congress on readiness of national capital region has been submitted, which will be made available through the COG website. The bottom-line is that NCR continues to make progress with respect to strategic plan with major achievements this past fiscal year. Program management office was highlighted as well interims of steps being taken to managing UASI funding and grants.
- b) FTA has submitted order to WMATA to 3-areas before implementing Safe-track may be delayed.
- c) Problem on blue/orange/silver line at stadium armory causing delays this afternoon.

The next NCR EPC meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 14 Ronald F. Kirby Training Center (Lobby Level) at MWCOG from 2:30 PM to 4:30 PM.

Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:30 PM.

Attachments

1. Meeting Agenda
2. Summary of Proposed Emergency Preparedness Council 2016 Priorities
3. National Transportation Safety Board Public Meeting of May 3, 2016
4. NCR Urban Areas Security Initiative Grants Update
5. NCR Program Management Office Update
6. Draft National Capital Region Crisis Communications Guide
7. NCR Public Communications Coordination Discussion
8. Applicability of Prior Incident Management and Response Recommendations to the 2016 Event
9. VDOT response to January 20, 2016 Snow Event
10. Maryland Department of Transportation Response to January 2016 Snow Event
11. District of Columbia DOT Response to January 2016 Snow Event

A list of reference materials and detailed reports can be obtained from the on-line library link:
http://www.mwcog.org/committee/committee/documents.asp?COMMITTEE_ID=40 / Username: ncrepc - Password: epc2016

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