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LESSON LEARNED

Family Reunification: Developing a Coordinated Regional Approach and Plan for Large-Scale Incidents and Special Events

SUMMARY

Emergency managers should develop a coordinated plan with a regional approach for family reunification during large-scale incidents or special events that have a multi-jurisdictional impact.

DESCRIPTION

After the historic 2008 election of Barack Obama as the first African-American president, planners anticipated that the 56th Presidential Inauguration would draw record crowds to the District of Columbia for the 3-day program of events. The extraordinary scope of the Inauguration required multiple agencies and jurisdictions to coordinate their planning, response, and support efforts. The Department of Homeland Security designated the Inauguration as a National Special Security Event (NSSE), which made the US Secret Service the lead federal agency for planning, coordinating, and implementing security operations. The District's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency served as the lead District agency for planning and coordinating District resources for the Inauguration.

Recent NSSEs include President Gerald Ford's state funeral in 2007 and the 2008 Republican and Democratic national conventions.

The National Capitol Region (NCR) planners projected that as many as 5 million people might attend the Inaugural events. The large number of potential attendees necessitated individual NCR partners to consider developing or updating reunification plans. However, some NCR partners were unclear about the family reunification protocols they should adopt for the Inauguration. They sought suggestions from the mass care regional emergency support function (R-ESF-6) but did not receive clarification until the day before the Inauguration. This hindered the ability of some jurisdictions to restructure pre-existing reunification plans for the Inauguration. The NCR did not develop a region-wide family reunification plan.

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC) uses regional emergency support functions (R-ESF) to promote regional collaboration during event planning and incident response. Each R-ESF coordinates a specific function for the region within the NCR. For more information on the NCR's 15 R-ESFs, please refer to the [MWCOC Regional Emergency Coordination Plan](#).

During Inauguration planning sessions, R-ESF-6 partners agreed that US Park Police (USPP) would take individuals who had become separated from their families on the National Mall to first-aid tents. However, on Inauguration Day, the demand for medical services overwhelmed many of the aid stations on the National Mall. This required USPP to take lost individuals to Metropolitan Police Department stations instead. Unfortunately, USPP did not

communicate the change in drop-off location to those attending and supporting the Inaugural events. Further, emergency medical services personnel transported individuals requiring significant medical attention to nearby hospitals. No arrangements were made to transport these individuals back to the National Mall or to reunite them with their families at another location. NCR partners would likely have encountered significant reunification issues had a mass casualty incident occurred during the Inaugural period.

For more information on National Mall aid stations during the Inauguration, please refer to the *Lessons Learned Information Sharing* Lesson Learned, [Special Event Planning: Ensuring that First-Aid Stations are Well Stocked](#).

The NCR's *2009 Presidential Inauguration Regional After-Action Report (AAR) Summary* recommends that NCR partners develop an integrated regional approach for family reunification during special events and large-scale incidents. The AAR suggests that NCR partners consider using a single database to contain all necessary family reunification information or developing a means to allow the R-ESF-6 team to search each jurisdiction's database quickly.

Emergency managers should develop a coordinated plan with a regional approach for family reunification during large-scale incidents or special events that have a multi-jurisdictional impact.

CITATIONS

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