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LESSON LEARNED

Mass Care Response: Codifying Resource Request Protocols Across Partner Jurisdictions

SUMMARY

The *Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov)* team identifies lessons learned from the whole community and documents these practices to promote whole community learning. The After-Action Report (AAR) on the response to the August 2011 Tropical Storm Irene in Franklin County, Massachusetts, revealed that responders did not employ common protocols or procedures for requesting resources from other responders. The jurisdiction developed processes and forms to create a uniform resource request system that includes back-up request procedures, should the primary systems fail.

DESCRIPTION

Tropical Storm Irene hit Western Massachusetts on August 28, 2011 with 80 mile per hour winds and 10 inches of rain reported in some communities. The storm caused significant flooding in the Connecticut River Valley and left 657,000 homes and businesses without power.¹ The Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council, a fifteen member volunteer council composed of stakeholders from ten first responder disciplines in Western Massachusetts, commissioned After Action Reports/Improvement Plans (AAR/IPs) for each of their four member counties, including Franklin County.²

This Lessons Learned document draws from Franklin County's response and focuses on the importance of establishing and using common protocols and procedures for requesting resources during a response. Responders noted that resource requests during the response to Tropical Storm Irene came from different people within organizations to different people in receiving organizations. These requests were sent via different formats and protocols, which led to duplication and conflicting requests. Responders recommended creating both primary and secondary resource request protocols.



Arthur A. Smith Covered Bridge, Colrain, Massachusetts
(Source: Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council. [Tropical Storm Irene: After Action Report/Improvement Plan](#). April 30, 2012.)

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UNIFORM RESOURCE REQUEST PROTOCOLS AND PROCEDURES

During response operations, Franklin County lacked a standardized county-level resource management system. As a result, some local communities sent resource requests directly to the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA). However, without a standard protocol, these local communities often requested resources from different components within MEMA, including the State Operations Center, the MEMA regional office, and specific MEMA staff.³ Additionally, at the local level some requests originated from Emergency Operation Centers, public safety dispatch centers, and incident commanders in the field.⁴ These requests were also made through various means, including telephone, fax, radio, and web-based disaster management programs.⁵ The variety in requesting mechanisms, receiving components, and means of requesting emergency response resources created duplicate and conflicting resource requests during the response.⁶ This duplication required time and resources to de-conflict the requests that could otherwise have been dedicated to the response effort.

Responders identified their interactions with the National Guard as revealing of the problems created by the lack of a uniform protocol for resource requests. As the magnitude of the response increased, more resources were required from non-local stakeholders, such as the National Guard, which increased the duplication and conflict within resource requests since a codified protocol had not been established. The AAR/IP indicates that local responders did not have clear situational awareness either of the potential resources available from the National Guard or of the processes in place to request response resources from it.⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS

Franklin County responders developed two general recommendations to address the issue of a lack of unified, codified resource request protocols and procedures. First, response decision makers should develop and socialize universal procedures and protocols.⁸ Second, these procedures and protocols should also include a back-up resource request system in the event that the primary system fails.⁹ In July 2013, the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council addressed this recommendation by releasing the [Resource Guide for Available Emergency Equipment and Supplies in Western Massachusetts](#), which describes both the specific resources offered by different member jurisdictions and the processes and forms required to request those resources.¹⁰

In addition, responders made specific recommendations regarding requesting resources from the National Guard. First, response decision makers should clarify National Guard capabilities and resources available to local responders and, second, provide information to these local responders on the established protocols and procedures in place to request resources from the National Guard.¹¹

CITATIONS

¹ Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council. *Tropical Storm Irene: After Action Report/Improvement Plan*. April 30, 2012. https://www.ilis.dhs.gov/system/files/AAR_IP_CombinationFinal_1_.pdf.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council. *Resource Guide for Available Emergency Equipment and Supplies in Western Massachusetts*. July 2013.
<https://www.ilis.dhs.gov/content/resource-guide-western-massachusetts-0>.

¹¹ *Tropical Storm Irene: After Action Report/Improvement Plan*.
https://www.ilis.dhs.gov/system/files/AAR_IP_CombinationFinal_1_.pdf.