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INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

Oklahoma's Regional Response System

SUMMARY

Oklahoma created the Regional Response System (RRS)—a collection of specialized units and equipment—to provide all-hazards response throughout the state within two hours of an incident. RRS units have responded to dozens of incidents, including the May 20, 2013 tornado near Oklahoma City.

DESCRIPTION

Oklahoma has a diverse risk profile, geographically dispersed population, and limited local emergency management resources. Nationally the state ranks 3rd in the number of Federal disaster declarations, 50th in state emergency management appropriations, and 49th in number of full-time emergency managers. To address these challenges, the Oklahoma Office of Homeland Security (OKOHS) created a statewide system of specialized units capable of responding to chemical, biological, radioactive, nuclear, and explosive incidents; agriculture emergencies; technical rescue incidents; and natural disasters. RRS units are strategically placed throughout Oklahoma so they can respond to incidents in any area of the state—even the most rural regions—within two hours. Local governments provide personnel and maintain the equipment, and OKOHS manages RRS deployments based on the size of the incident and the capabilities required. RRS all-hazards units include bomb squads, Technical Rescue Teams, communications units, and Regional Emergency Medical Services System (REMSS) units. In addition, OKOHS provides RRS personnel specialized response training for their discipline.

When an EF 5 tornado struck communities in Newcastle, Oklahoma City, and Moore on May 20, 2013, the state dispatched RRS assets—including Technical Rescue Teams, communications assets, and REMSS units—to aid response and recovery operations. Five Technical Rescue Teams searched two schools (Briarwood and Plaza Towers Elementary)



Figure 1: Urban Search and Rescue team members search house to house for survivors in Moore, Oklahoma

RRS Capabilities

- Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosives
- Technical Rescue
- Communications
- Urban Search & Rescue
- Logistics
- Decontamination
- Bomb Squads
- Regional Emergency Medical Services System
- Agriculture Response

Figure 2: RRS is comprised of 117 units with nine distinct capabilities.

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that the tornado hit while class was in session. The Communications Leader established an incident communications plan to repair communications breakdowns caused by many agencies communicating with incident command over multiple frequencies.

Oklahoma activated 33 REMSS teams on the afternoon of May 20, which allowed the units to respond immediately after the tornado touched down in the Oklahoma City metropolitan region. A REMSS unit arrived on-scene at the destroyed Moore Medical Center 10 minutes after the tornado passed through the area and established response operations at the nearby Warren Theater. During the eight-hour response operation, REMSS units also provided generator power to the medical station, lighting for citizens and responders in the area, and medical supplies for patient treatment and transportation.

INVESTMENT INFORMATION

Oklahoma invested more than \$35 million in homeland security grant funds in equipment for 117 response units and delivered over 1,500 training courses to more than 27,000 responders. RRS is funded by the State Homeland Security Grant Program, Urban Areas Security Initiative, Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Grant Program, and Metropolitan Medical Response System Grant Program.

REFERENCES

Oklahoma Regional Response System

http://www.ok.gov/homeland/Regional_Response_System/

Urban Search and Rescue Team Photograph

<http://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/images/70583>