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Mutual Aid Agreements: Understanding Partner Capabilities

SUMMARY

It is essential to understand the resources and capabilities of mutual aid partners. Before creating a mutual aid agreement, potential partners should exchange information on capabilities, resources, and equipment interoperability.

DESCRIPTION

In the past, the New York City Fire Department (FDNY) has rarely required mutual aid due to the department's size and wide range of capabilities. FDNY found that its capabilities were stretched thin, however, during the response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. The Department had particular difficulty providing normal levels of service to the city while responding effectively to the incident scene.

Soon after the attack, FDNY requested mutual aid from units in Nassau and Westchester counties. The department had no formal mechanism for requesting, receiving, or managing mutual aid because, historically, requests had been so rare. FDNY could not properly evaluate the usefulness of assisting units because it did not have information on their capabilities. The Department also had difficulty integrating units into the response because they had not previously trained with mutual aid partners.

According to the McKinsey after-action report (AAR), FDNY and potential partners must ensure that their equipment and procedures are interoperable for mutual aid agreements to be effective. The AAR recommends that FDNY assess partner capabilities prior to concluding mutual aid agreements. Among the information that should be exchanged:

- Resource availability;
- Training levels;
- Special operations capabilities; and
- Equipment interoperability.

This information will help FDNY improve interoperability with future mutual aid partners, according to the McKinsey Report. The AAR also recommends that FDNY conduct joint exercises with potential mutual aid partners to better understand their capabilities as well as to promote interoperability and communication.

CITATION

McKinsey & Company. *Increasing FDNY's Preparedness*. August 19, 2002.
(http://www.nyc.gov/html/fdny/html/mck_report/toc.html)

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