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## LESSON LEARNED

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### Emergency Operations Centers: Developing a Surge Plan for Information Technology Support Staff

#### SUMMARY

Emergency operations centers (EOC) should consider developing an information technology (IT) support staff surge plan for use in large-scale or extended duration incidents.

#### DESCRIPTION

During the summer of 2008, the state of Iowa experienced a series of severe storms that produced several tornadoes and a large amount of rainfall. The heaviest period of storms began on May 25, 2008, and lasted until June 25. Rains caused flooding that overtopped levees and dams and inundated Iowa localities near rivers. Over a 4-week period, flood waters moved across Iowa, which required the state to undertake extensive preparedness, response, and recovery operations. Overall, the 2008 summer storms resulted in 17 fatalities, forced the evacuation of approximately 38,000 Iowans, and impacted over 21,000 housing units.

The Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division (HSEMD) activated the Iowa state emergency operations center (SEOC) shortly after a tornado struck the town of Parkersburg on May 25; the SEOC remained activated throughout the summer storms period. Federal, state, and private sector agencies deployed representatives to the SEOC to assist in coordinating operations throughout the state.

The 2008 storms were comparable to the 1993 floods as the most destructive natural disasters in Iowa's history.

The 2008 summer storms required a greater use of and reliance on IT systems than previous activations due to the scope of the incident and the demands of the expanded personnel at the SEOC. The SEOC's technology needs overwhelmed its IT staff. The IT staff members had to equip rooms for the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers while also assisting approximately 200 SEOC personnel with WebEOC and other applications. IT support personnel had to balance their official support assignments with other tasks, such as geographic information systems (GIS) and technical support responsibilities. SEOC personnel frequently asked IT support personnel to provide technical support for WebEOC or to assist with technology tools in addition to their mapping and modeling duties. Consequently, support personnel were frequently pulled away from their primary assigned responsibilities. SEOC IT staff members obtained additional GIS capabilities from the Department of Public Defense and other agencies, such as the Department of Natural Resources, through pre-existing partnerships.

The summer storms after-action report recommended that the SEOC "explore additional opportunities to enhance its IT capabilities for future operations through additional collaboration with the Department of Administrative Services Information Technology

Enterprise staff.” It noted that during large-scale or prolonged activations, response partners may need to utilize their own IT staff members to augment and support the HSEMD IT staff in the SEOC.

EOCs should consider developing an IT support staff surge plan for use in large-scale or extended duration incidents.

#### **CITATION**

Lessons Learned Information Sharing. *Iowa 2008 Summer Storms After-Action Report*. 27 Apr 2009.

<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=36042>

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