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LESSON LEARNED

Mass Evacuation Planning: Developing a Coordinated Public Information Campaign

SUMMARY

Jurisdictions within a region should consider collaborating with localities to develop and deliver public messaging about mass evacuations during large-scale incidents. An integrated regional approach can help ensure timely and consistent messaging during incidents.

DESCRIPTION

On May 27, 2010, the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) conducted a tabletop exercise (TTX) in Hampton, Virginia, that evaluated citizen evacuation and shelter-in-place, and mass care capabilities. The scenario consisted of a category 3 hurricane expected to make landfall in the Hampton Roads area, resulting in an estimated 10 inches of rainfall and a potential storm surge of 13 feet. Nearly 100 participants from federal, state, and local organizations participated in the TTX.

Hampton is one of seven cities that compose Hampton Roads, a metropolitan statistical area in southeastern Virginia. The area's hundreds of miles of beaches and numerous historical sites attract 1 million visitors per year.

Exercise participants noted that the Hampton Roads region needed a more comprehensive approach to emergency public information during a mass evacuation. Participants acknowledged that VDEM effectively communicates with local decision makers and emergency managers. However, there are gaps in communications among the VDEM Public Affairs Office, local public information officers (PIOs), and the media. In addition, local emergency managers coordinate and collaborate among themselves, but each jurisdiction's public messaging for evacuation is conducted independently. This independent approach to emergency public information about mass evacuation results in messaging that is not effectively integrated and coordinated.

TTX participants observed that a regional approach to emergency public information would lead to a more consistent information campaign for the general public. The TTX after-action report (AAR) identified several steps that the Hampton Roads region can take to improve public messaging. The AAR recommended that state and local PIOs conduct an exercise with members of the media to address the need for proactive and coordinated public information during large-scale incidents. The AAR also suggested that PIOs from the region continue to meet regularly to identify policies and processes for supporting emergency response efforts. Finally, the AAR recommended that local PIOs be aware of their jurisdictions' emergency operations plans and other important policies.

Jurisdictions within a region should consider collaborating with localities to develop and deliver public messaging about mass evacuations during large-scale incidents. An integrated regional approach can help ensure timely and consistent messaging during incidents.

CITATION

Virginia Department of Emergency Management. *Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) Region 5 Hampton Roads Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Tabletop Exercise After- Action Report (AAR)/Improvement Plan (IP)*. 27 May 2010.
<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=46558>

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