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Continuity of Operations: Developing a Skills Database of Non-Emergency Personnel

SUMMARY

Non-emergency personnel often have skills that can be used for various critical tasks in emergency response and recovery. Public and private sector emergency planners often overlook these workers as potential sources of assistance during a crisis. Emergency planners should compile a database of personnel and their essential skills to facilitate the mobilization of skilled workers during an emergency.

DESCRIPTION

Many non-emergency public employees have skills useful in emergency response and recovery. These employees represent an untapped resource in cities with large public workforces. In addition, private sector workers such as plumbers and electricians are also useful but sometimes ignored resources for emergency managers.

During the August 2003 blackout affecting much of the Eastern United States and Canada, New York City did not utilize all available human resources in its response and recovery efforts. According to the New York City Emergency Response Task Force, City officials overlooked non-emergency public and private sector employees even though their services could have been valuable.

To combat this problem, the Task Force recommended that the City work with the private sector to compile a database of personnel with essential skills. This database would identify employees capable of performing various critical tasks that might be needed during an emergency.

The Task Force's report also recommended that the City explore using public employees to supplement emergency workers in key areas such as traffic control and victim assistance. According to the report, "Similar personnel policies exist in San Francisco, where all public employees are designated as disaster service workers. In the event of an emergency, staff can be assigned to any disaster service activity that promotes the protection of public health and safety."

CITATION

New York City Emergency Response Task Force. *Enhancing New York City's Emergency Preparedness*. October 28, 2003.
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