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LESSON LEARNED

Multi-Agency Coordination: State-Led Efforts to Coordinate Mass Care Response

SUMMARY

In 2009, the State of Florida hosted one of the largest, most complex disaster response exercises in history, simulating landfall of a major hurricane across multiple major population centers in Florida. The exercise demonstrated the value of coordinating Mass Care response between various federal, state, county, local, and tribal agencies, as well as private sector partners and volunteer agencies. State emergency officials noted the value of state-led daily meetings and conference calls with all parties to harness the expertise of all involved in assessing requirements for Mass Care Services and directing available resources to meet those needs.

DESCRIPTION

Between May 28 and June 3, 2009, the State of Florida worked in cooperation with federal agencies, voluntary agencies, and private sector vendors to conduct a hurricane exercise to test the state's catastrophic event response capabilities and emergency plans. The exercise simulated [Hurricane Suiter](#), a Category 4 hurricane that struck Miami, crossed the peninsula of the state, entered into the Gulf of Mexico, and struck Ft. Meyers, Florida as a Category 3 hurricane.¹ The complex exercise involved over four hundred participants.² The emergency response agencies from all 67 counties in Florida participated in the exercise, engaging the state's 18 emergency support functions.³

According to the After Action Report (AAR) produced by the Florida Department of Emergency Response, the exercise tested two newly developed state Mass Care Services care plans focused on sheltering and feeding operations.⁴ The plans were subjected to one of the "most intense and demanding" exercises in state history.⁵ According to the state agricultural response team, the hurricane would have caused 670 deaths, forced three million residents to evacuate, damaged 4 million homes, and resulted in total damages of \$161 billion.⁶ Projections had the storm forcing 800,000 individuals into public shelters, necessitating the use of 50,000 law enforcement personnel to maintain security at those shelters.⁷ One county faced 100 percent power outages and over 50 roads rendered impassable.⁸



The program track for the Hurricane Suiter Exercise replicated the track of the disastrous 1926 storm that raced across south Florida, crossed the Gulf of Mexico, and struck Pensacola.
Source: *Florida State Agricultural Response Team*

The Hurricane Suiter exercise demonstrated the necessity of coordination between multiple entities to ensure the provision of Mass Care Services and validated the new Mass Care

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plans.⁹ Proper coordination during the exercise was required to direct the various participants and effectively utilize the resources needed to match the wide-spread severe damage. Voluntary agencies providing Mass Care support were capable of directing resources to meet the needs of survivors, but the scope of the damage exceeded the finite resources of those agencies.¹⁰ Multi-agency coordination was necessary for additional government resources to supplement those efforts.¹¹

This Lessons Learned document focuses on the benefit of state-led coordination between the various agencies at all levels of government, as well as the voluntary agencies and private sector partners involved in delivering Mass Care Services. By integrating these coordination measures into emergency management plans, processes, and procedures, emergency response officials can ensure that resources are allocated and distributed to match survivor and responder needs. Additionally, establishing coordination mechanisms in advance of disasters helps ensure that all parties are working together to deliver Mass Care Services.

STATE-LED COORDINATION AMONG EMERGENCY RESPONDERS AND VOLUNTEERS

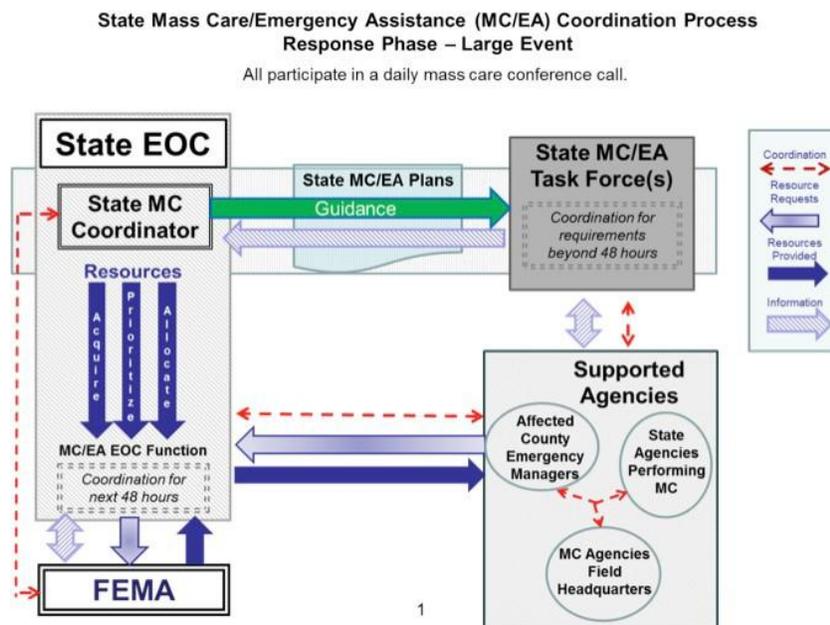
Effective Mass Care response to a catastrophic event requires input and work from a diverse group of government agencies, private sector partners, and voluntary agencies. According to one county emergency management official, "Communication is probably the most important thing we do, working together, making sure we're all responding together as a unit."¹² The dynamic and fluid nature of catastrophic events requires that this coordination takes place on a regular basis to ensure timely deployment of resources.

Over the last several years, Florida has taken deliberate steps to further integrate coordination activities into its Mass Care plans. During the 2005 hurricane season, the state began holding conference calls with stakeholders to coordinate Mass Care emergency response.¹³ This coordination was so effective, particularly during Hurricane Wilma in 2005, that the state incorporated the Mass Care Services conference call into the Multi-Agency Feeding Plan.¹⁴ By following this plan, participants executed successful multi-agency coordination during the Hurricane Suiter exercise.¹⁵

During the Hurricane Suiter exercise, the state determined that it "must take an active role" in providing frequent coordination.¹⁶ State representatives at the Emergency Operations Center integrated this active coordination into emergency plans by hosting two complementary meetings. In the first meeting, daily state-led conference calls with all involved parties helped ensure that everyone was working together to further mutual objectives. The calls helped the state determine the needs of the impacted population and the capacities of various agencies providing Mass Care Services by engaging the "collective expertise" of all involved participants.¹⁷

State-level emergency officials used information from the daily conference calls to identify shortfalls in resources or distribution of Mass Care Services.¹⁸ This process fed into the second meeting hosted by the state. The State Mass Care Services Team held daily coordination meetings with state and federal logistics teams, working to provide the resources needed to meet the shortfalls. The meeting enabled the Mass Care Services Team to determine what state resources could be directed to meet shortfalls and what federal assistance could be provided when state resources were insufficient.¹⁹ The officials then sought to secure the resources necessary to address shortfalls by directing state assets, making requests for assistance from jurisdictions with resource surpluses, or submitting requests to appropriate federal agencies.²⁰

After the Hurricane Suiter Exercise, state emergency officials continued to build coordination activities into Mass Care Services plans and processes. By 2013, the Florida State Emergency Response Team had developed a clear Mass Care Services and Emergency Assistance coordination process to serve as part of response plans for large events.²¹ This process integrated the coordination recommendations from the Hurricane Suiter exercise.



The Florida State Emergency Response Team developed the diagram shown in Figure 1. This diagram illustrates the coordination process among

Figure 1: Florida’s State Emergency Response Team developed this illustration of its Mass Care Services coordination process. Source: Florida State Emergency Response Team – Mass Care Presentation

agencies involved in a large scale event requiring Mass Care Services and Emergency Assistance. The State Mass Care Coordinator plays a critical role in coordinating the request and delivery of resources from federal agencies, such as FEMA, to support state and local agencies. The Mass Care Coordinator prioritizes, acquires, and allocates federal resources through the State Emergency Operations Center. The Mass Care Coordinator also provides guidance to task forces who plan and coordinate Mass Care Services and Emergency Assistance requirements beyond 48 hours after the event. In turn, the task forces keep the Mass Care Coordinator up to date on the status of all affected by the event. The entities depicted in the diagram maintain consistent communication flow to keep all informed.²²

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Florida State Emergency Response Team’s AAR contains two recommendations for creating plans with the coordination necessary to integrate the efforts of the various government agencies, private sector, and voluntary agencies in providing Mass Care Services. First, it is “vital” to conduct “a daily state-led conference call with the various voluntary agencies, private sector vendors, state agencies, and federal partners involved in the delivery of Mass Care.”²³ The calls provided the information and coordination needed to assess response capacity, resource availability, and need, while promoting unified response to emergencies and problems.

The second recommendation stated in the AAR was to have daily coordination meetings at the State Emergency Operations Center between the State Mass Care Services Team and the unified state/federal logistics team.²⁴ For the Florida State Mass Care Services Team, holding those daily meetings was “critical to ensuring that the resources allocated to the mass care effort are equal to the size of the task.”²⁵

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² Ibid.

³ State of Florida, Department of Emergency Management, State Emergency Response Team. Press Release – May 27, 2009. <http://www.floridadisaster.org/eoc/PressReleases2008/09HurrexAdvFINALpdf.pdf>

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⁵ Ibid.

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¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² WKRG News website. June 2, 2009. <http://www.wkrg.com/story/21624875/hurricane-exercise>

¹³ State of Florida – State Emergency Response Team. *Hurricane Suiter – Emergency Support Function 6, Mass Care & Emergency Assistance After Action Report*. June 24, 2009. <https://www.flis.dhs.gov/content/2009-hurricane-suiter-exercise-mass-care-after-action-report>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Interview with Michael Whitehead, Florida State Mass Care Coordinator. September 6, 2013.

²² Ibid.

²³ State of Florida – State Emergency Response Team. *Hurricane Suiter – Emergency Support Function 6, Mass Care & Emergency Assistance After Action Report*. June 24, 2009. <https://www.llis.dhs.gov/content/2009-hurricane-suiter-exercise-mass-care-after-action-report>

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

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