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GOOD STORY

New Jersey's Business Force

SUMMARY

The New Jersey Business Force (NJBF) is a private, non-profit enterprise dedicated to emergency preparedness and homeland security through the development of public-private partnerships between the State of New Jersey and leading New Jersey-based companies. Sponsored by Business Executives for National Security (BENS), NJBF complements state and local government homeland security efforts by providing assistance and resources in areas where the private sector has expertise and resources.

BACKGROUND

Business Executives for National Security (BENS) was founded in 1982 as a non-partisan, non-profit group of private sector leaders focused on improving national security. BENS seeks to adapt successful models from the private sector and the business experience of its members to develop solutions to national security challenges.

In March 2003, twelve New Jersey companies, with the assistance of BENS, formed the NJBF based on the belief that government and business must work together in order to minimize the consequences of future terrorist attacks. Since that time, the organization has grown to 30 companies. Government agencies in New Jersey, such as the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and the Department of Health, have partnered with NJBF since its inception. NJBF, however, is autonomous and is supported by member companies who recognize the importance of enhanced homeland security for their own business continuity.

The Department of Homeland Security's Office for Domestic Preparedness approved a grant to expand the NJBF model to other cities. Through this grant, BENS will work with other cities to develop their own public-private partnerships based on the NJBF construct. In the past year, the business force model has been adopted in Atlanta, Georgia; Kansas City, Missouri; and San Francisco, California.

GOALS

The NJBF's goal is to harness the capabilities of the private sector to support state government homeland security efforts. The organization seeks out cooperative programs and initiatives that enhance homeland security and emergency preparedness statewide.

DESCRIPTION

Through information and resource sharing, NJBF initiatives will link public and private emergency/disaster response capabilities. The NJBF programs concentrate on five major areas:

- Information sharing between government and business;
- Public-private resource sharing;
- Medical supply distribution planning;
- Emergency response volunteer training; and
- Continuing partnerships with New Jersey state agencies.

Information Sharing

Member businesses share information through the New Jersey Business Force Information Sharing system. They receive incident and warning information through the system based upon pre-designated criteria, such as the severity of the emergency and proximity to the company's facilities. Companies also specify the means by which they receive the information, such as cellular phones, pagers, and/or email. For example, a business can opt to receive information only on incidents that occur within a three mile radius of its various facilities, and then choose to receive this information solely via pagers. This capability allows businesses to screen out unwanted notifications and receive only information relevant to them.

The technology also facilitates two-way communication and collaboration, allowing member businesses to communicate with the public sector as well as with each other. If a company has information on a nearby incident, for example, it can notify other businesses and the public sector through the information sharing system providing real-time updates.

Public-Private Resource Sharing

NJBF has worked closely with the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management (NJOEM) to develop an automated version of OEM's resource database. The database, which was donated by a NJBF member business, houses information on federal, state, and local resources available for statewide emergency response. The NJBF's Business Response Network program has added private sector resources to the database, making it unique among state resource inventories. NJBF member businesses voluntarily input data on their own emergency response capabilities, such as:

- Transportation;
- Warehouses and Facilities;
- Communications;
- Medical supplies; and
- Construction equipment.

The information is searchable by geographic location, giving emergency managers the ability to determine quickly the availability of both public and private resources near an incident. New Jersey State Police, for example, can access the database from patrol cars as they respond to incident, allowing for the quick provision and deployment of needed public and private resources.

Requests for private sector resources must come from the NJOEM headquarters in order to ensure response coordination and single-point ordering of resources. As a result, businesses are assured their resources will be used only when absolutely necessary and coordinated with the State's overall response.

Medical Supply Distribution Planning

The NJBF is currently developing plans and methods for assisting the state government in rapidly distributing medical supplies to hospitals and the general public during a public health emergency. The NJBF is working with the New Jersey Department of Health to explore ways in which the capabilities of the transportation, trucking, shipping, and freight industries can be harnessed to support emergency managers.

To assist in the development of a plan, the NJBF has hosted two tabletop exercises designed to explore how private sector resources can be integrated into the New Jersey Department of Health's medical supply distribution plans. NJBF's goal in conducting these exercises is to develop a workable plan for private sector involvement in mass state-wide medical supply distribution. A full-scale exercise planned for later this year will examine potential obstacles such as liability and insurance issues

Emergency Response Volunteer Training

Some New Jersey counties require that volunteers participating in emergency response qualify as official New Jersey emergency management volunteers. Official volunteers are required to take courses in:

- Basic incident command; and
- Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) awareness.

The NJBF has led efforts to train employees of member businesses in these counties so that they may qualify as official volunteers. Like emergency responders, official emergency management volunteers receive liability and workmen's compensation coverage under state statutes. This coverage eases the integration of private sector volunteers into emergency response.

Continuing Partnerships

NJBF meets an average of once every six weeks to discuss ongoing programs and partnerships. NJOEM officials attend all meetings where issues of emergency response are discussed. The Business Force continues to seek out new and creative ways to partner with the public sector and improve homeland security. For example, NJBF is developing a partnership with the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety (NJDFS) to allow the cooperative fire brigade of twenty petrochemical companies to assist the NJDFS in the event of a large fire or explosion.

REQUIREMENTS

Keys to Success

- **Identify Key Stakeholders.** Private sector enthusiasm for public-private partnerships can vary greatly. Critical to the success of NJBF is BENS's ability to identify those business leaders that see the benefits of partnership and enhanced preparedness. These leaders have led the way to the business force and have been instrumental in recruiting new businesses.
- **Education.** The NJBF has sought to demystify the public sector for the private sector, and vice versa, through education and training. In reality the NJBF has in general found the private sector willing and active potential partners in homeland security; however, the public sector is often not as willing. Cultural barriers to public-private partnerships are significant. The ultimate value of organizations such as NJBF may be the dissolution of these cultural barriers.

Resources

The costs of the Business Force are borne entirely by member businesses through dues and in-kind donations. Recently, BENS has benefited from an Office of Domestic Preparedness grant intended to expand the Business Force concept to other jurisdictions.

Training

There is no formal training required for businesses or employees to join the NJBF. Member companies may participate in incident command and weapons of mass destruction awareness training in order to qualify their employees as emergency management volunteers.

Links

- Business Executives for National Security: <http://www.bens.org>
- New Jersey Business Force: <http://www.njbusinessforce.org>
- New Jersey Homeland Security: <http://www.state.nj.us/njhomelandsecurity>
- New Jersey State Police Office for Emergency Management: <http://www.state.nj.us/njoem>

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