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Kansas City's Metropolitan Emergency Information System (MEIS)

SUMMARY

The Mid-America Regional Council, or MARC (<http://www.marc.org/>), which serves as the association of city and county governments and the metropolitan planning organization for the bi-state Kansas City metropolitan region, has developed a secure Web-based system to allow emergency responders to share information and coordinate planning and responses for large-scale events. MARC designed Kansas City's Metropolitan Emergency Information System (MEIS) to meet the diverse needs of a large region with multiple jurisdictions. MEIS connects approximately 100 government agencies and private institutions across eight counties and two states in the Kansas City region. The secure system allows agencies throughout the region to share data on emergency personnel, plans, and assets, as well as purchasing guidelines and fund management information.

BACKGROUND

As a voluntary association, MARC strives to strengthen the regional community through cooperation, leadership, and planning. The primary goal of the Council is to promote cooperation on issues that extend beyond the jurisdiction of a single city, county, or state in the Kansas City region. These issues include transportation, childcare, aging, environmental issues, and, more recently, homeland security.

MARC initiated development of MEIS to fill a void that emergency responders identified in dealing with crises that affect multiple jurisdictions in the Kansas City region. Phase 1 of the project, which consisted of initial system design and determination of first-priority functions, required approximately one year and was completed in late 2002. In Phase 2, MARC continued to secure the involvement of key participants; collected, entered, and began to manage data from participating agencies; and designed second-priority functions. Phase 2 culminated in the launch of MEIS in Spring 2004.

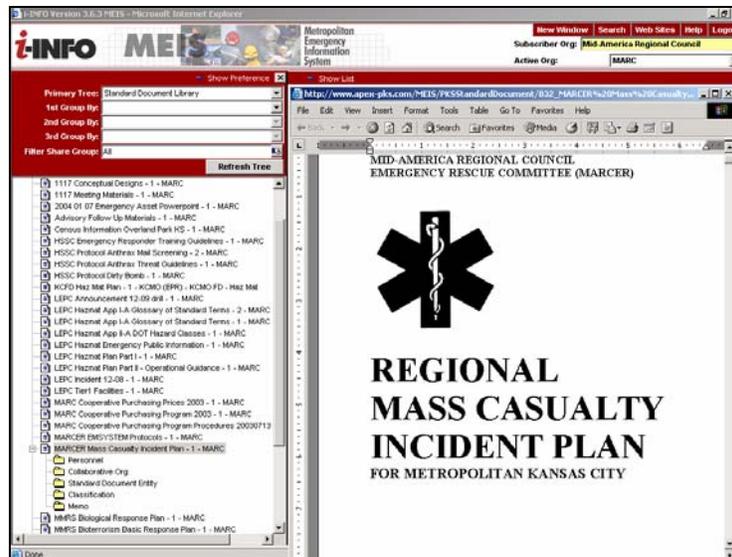
GOALS

MEIS addresses both the day-to-day and event-driven needs of the emergency responder community in the Kansas City region. On a day-to-day basis, the system offers a secure, online, interactive system that allows authorized users to share sensitive information about emergency resources to enhance coordination of emergency planning. During a large-scale event, the system will facilitate communications and coordinate response among emergency responders in multiple jurisdictions. MEIS will also promote efficiency and interoperability of equipment among local jurisdictions across the region and across disciplines.

DESCRIPTION

The Metropolitan Emergency Information System (MEIS) allows first responder agencies, private companies and others addressing emergency response in the Kansas City region to share information in a secure Web-based environment. MEIS will serve as a valuable tool for first responders to:

- Develop and maintain emergency response plans;
- Access information on emergency personnel and assets;
- Coordinate purchasing guidelines and procurement of equipment; and
- Improve fund management and communication.



MEIS Standard Document Library Viewer

Address Diverse Needs

Kansas City officials recognize that emergency planning and response in their region are issues that extend beyond the jurisdiction of a single city, county, or state. To effectively respond to large-scale events, local emergency planning, emergency response, health agencies, and partner organizations require the ability to share information, enhance surveillance and planning abilities, and coordinate response efforts. Local agencies throughout the Kansas City region, however, are of different sizes, require varied resources, and possess diverse capabilities. Therefore, MARC developed MEIS to maximize existing capabilities, coordinate the acquisition of new resources, and identify and prevent potential shortfalls in emergency response in the Kansas City region.

Coordinate Stakeholder Input

MARC established the MEIS Steering Committee to direct the design and development of MEIS. The Steering Committee has provided overall direction and leadership to MARC for the project. The committee, co-chaired by the Kansas City, Missouri, Fire Chief and the Johnson County Assistant Manager, engaged local agency participants to design the project's priorities, scope, project budget, and timelines. The Steering Committee oversees the collection and formatting of contact data, regional and local emergency plans, protocols, and other information to be posted to MEIS.

In designing the MEIS system, the Steering Committee surveyed a wide range of local agencies throughout the region to determine which functions were of the highest priority for

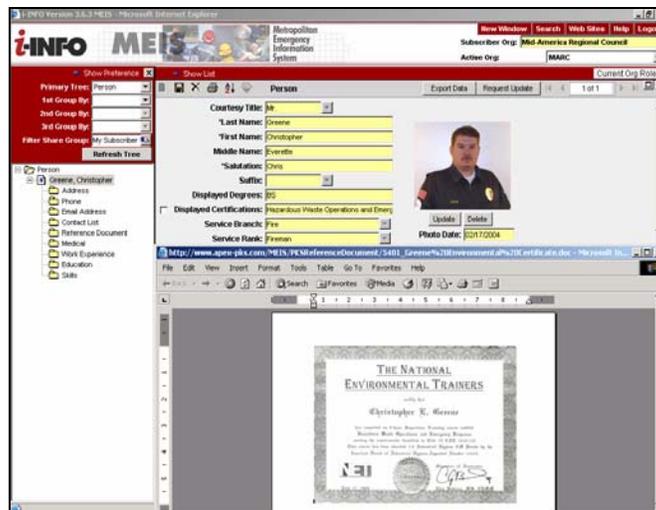
emergency responders. MARC sought the involvement of:

- Emergency management offices;
- Fire departments and fire protection districts;
- Police and sheriffs departments;
- Public health departments;
- Hospitals;
- Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agencies;
- State and federal agencies (FBI, FEMA, SEMA, state public health);
- Private companies providing critical services or offering emergency support; and
- Not-for-profit organizations providing emergency relief/support.

Designate First-Priority Functions

Based on the input it received from emergency responders in the region, MARC designated the following first-priority functions for MEIS. These functions became available upon system launch in Spring 2004:

- **Emergency Reference Library:** This function provides a robust capability for the storage, retrieval, check-in, check-out, viewing, markup, collaboration, and release of emergency plans, checklists, training and exercise materials, etc. The system accommodates large format documents (e.g. drawings, images, photos, and maps) and files (e.g. databases and spreadsheets). It also allows viewing of 3D images, drawings, maps, and links to predefined websites.
- **Emergency Contacts:** This function allows local agencies to share information, including key personnel and data on their skills, education, training, certifications, and specialties. The system keeps information updated by sending out forms to responders, volunteers, and others to urge them to keep their own records updated. It also includes an interface to the *PASS* (**P**ersonnel **A**ccountability **S**ecurity **S**ystem), which will verify credentials and keep track of emergency personnel at the scene of major incidents.

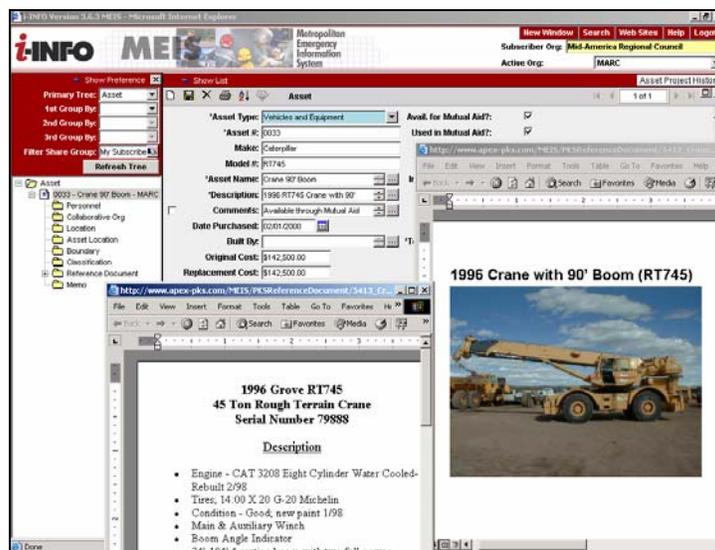


MEIS Person Knowledge Base

- **Purchasing Guidelines/Support:** This function allows the creation of equipment and asset libraries to support the purchase of equipment by local agencies that build

regional capabilities. The system provides the ability to attach supporting documentation such as equipment guidelines, evaluation criteria and ratings, bid documents, detailed descriptions, photos, diagrams, and specifications.

- **Fund Management:** This function provides the ability to manage funds from internal, private, and state/federal sources. A user can attach funding application documents and communications, as well as track important application and reporting deadline dates so funding opportunities or filing requirements are not missed.
- **Emergency Assets:** This function provides the ability for public or private agencies to enter, manage, and report on the emergency assets, including facilities, equipment, and skilled teams available to be shared under formal or informal mutual aid agreements. This function is intended to improve public agency access to public and private resources for mutual aid purposes.



MEIS Asset Knowledge Base

A Modular System Allows for Expansion

The MEIS system is modular and can incorporate additional functions as needs arise and as resources become available. MARC has designated the following second-priority functions to be implemented in the future:

- **Patient Tracking:** This function supports collection of patient information to provide centralized and standardized information for hospitals and emergency medical service providers in the region to track all patients during and immediately following a major incident. The system provides real-time information sharing with local health departments about casualties and key symptoms. It also allows external authorized agencies such as the American Red Cross to assist families in locating relatives.
- **Mass Communication:** This function allows users to create communications groups and send alert messages simultaneously by email and to wireless devices.
- **Hazard and Incident Info:** This function allows public or private sector organizations to define and document those resources needed to respond to various

types of incidents.

- **Mutual Aid:** This function facilitates the creation and management of mutual aid agreements, including a description and the nature of the mutual aid arrangement, identification of the parties involved, and the assets available to be shared. Currently, no comprehensive inventory of mutual aid agreements exists in the Kansas City region and this could be invaluable during emergencies and for recovery efforts.
- **Assistance Requests:** This function provides a mechanism for documenting needs resulting from a large-scale event; organizes information on estimated damages and recovery costs; and supports rollup reporting of those estimates by any state, county, city, or district. This information supports requests for aid and tracking of state and national disaster relief funds for the community.
- **Relief Support:** This function allows public and private support agency personnel to manage relief activities related to an incident, such as food, materials and medicine receipt, transfer, and distribution.

Access to the System

MEIS will provide a single access point to all functional components described above. Authorized personnel in participating agencies will be able to access the password-protected system via the Internet.

REQUIREMENTS

Keys to Success

In order to successfully develop and implement a system like MEIS in a large region with multiple jurisdictions and diverse needs, MARC had to secure the commitment of a wide range of agencies throughout the Kansas City area and across disciplines. From the outset, it was imperative to develop a common picture of how the system would operate, which functions would be implemented first, and who would be responsible for maintaining and updating the system. As the coordinating entity for the development of MEIS, MARC used its existing relationships throughout the region to obtain the “buy-in” of agencies in the emergency responder community.

Resources and Funding

MARC will oversee the day-to-day operation of MEIS and will designate personnel to monitor system performance and feedback. An information technology applications firm provides system management, server hosting, and technical support. The same firm has been contracted to conduct training for all system users. Local agencies assign personnel to collect, format, and upload information as needed.

Phase 1 of the MEIS project was funded by a federal grant from the U.S. Public Health Service. Phase 2 was funded by U.S. Department of Homeland Security grants and philanthropic contributions from the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, Hallmark Cards, and Sprint Foundation. The total cost of developing and implementing the system was approximately \$1.0 million.

Training

Personnel at each participating agency linked by MEIS need to be trained on the system. MARC estimates that it would require approximately one year to cycle all necessary personnel through the training program.

Links

- Kansas City Metropolitan Emergency Information System Project
Description: (*LLIS.gov* ID# [13442](#))
- MEIS Steering Committee Website: <http://www.marc.org/emergency/rhsc-meis.htm>
- Mid-America Regional Council Website: <http://www.marc.org/>

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