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LESSON LEARNED

Mass Care Response in Meeting the Needs of Infants and Children: Task Force Planning

SUMMARY

Feedback from the 2013 National Mass Care Exercise revealed that the composition of the task forces did not adequately represent the planning needs of all affected individuals, including infants and children. Participants recommended both explicit assignments of planning responsibilities to the relevant task forces and that working groups within task forces should address the specific planning needs of smaller groups.

DESCRIPTION

On May 20-23, 2013, over 60 individuals from the whole community, all levels of government, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector participated in the 2013 National Mass Care Exercise. Sponsored by FEMA, the American Red Cross, and The Florida Division of Emergency Management, this exercise occurred in conjunction with the 2013 Florida annual Hurricane Exercise. The 2013 National Mass Care Exercise was designed to test progress in implementing the concept of state Sheltering and Feeding Task Forces. This concept was tested during the 2012 Florida annual Hurricane Exercise. The 2013 Exercise simulated landfall of two hurricanes, hazardous materials spills, and the closing of various critical commerce routes into the state. While the impact was entirely simulated, the exercise did give participants the opportunity to test coordination of feeding and sheltering operations in a “triple impact event;” high population density, large damage amounts, and significant logistical complexities.¹

This Lessons Learned document focuses on the planning responsibilities within task forces, and it emphasizes that work remains to be done in the maturation of the task force concept in mass care response. Participants noted significant improvements from 2012 due to the broader acceptance and institutionalization of the task force concept, but also that work remains in adoption and application by mass care stakeholders.



Participants During the 2013 National Mass Care Exercise
(Source: Florida Division of Emergency Management)

Florida Mass Care Task Forces

The Task Force concept is a team of 10 – 15 people within the Emergency Support Function 6 designated to a specific aspect of Mass Care. The 2013 NMCE tested Florida’s Shelter and Feeding Task Forces. These two Task Forces plan and coordinate activities specifically to support Mass Care Sheltering and Feeding.²

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PLANNING BALANCE WITHIN TASK FORCES

Planning for the precise needs of the shelter population is crucial to ensuring that the mass care needs of all individuals in the affected community are adequately met. Exercise participants noted that shelter planning within task forces requires a more balanced representation of interested communities on the task force than occurred during the exercise. For instance, participants noted that the Shelter Task Force did not include representatives focused on the shelter needs of either infants and children or pet owners, but included multiple representatives focused on the shelter needs of the disabled and elderly.³

RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants made several recommendations to standardize Florida's mass coordination process for large events, including the development of a "standard procedure or operational guide". Based on this procedure or guide, each task force would receive specific planning and coordination responsibilities for mass care resource requirements. In response to the specific issue of balancing task force representatives to adequately represent the shelter planning interests of all groups, participants recommended the creation of smaller working groups within each task force to ensure representation of the planning needs of each group with specific mass care needs.⁴

REFERENCES

¹ Florida Division of Emergency Management. *National Mass Care National Exercise After Action Report*, FEMA, American Red Cross, and Florida Division of Emergency Management, July 1, 2013
<http://nationalmasscarestrategy.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/nmce-2013-aar-final.pdf>

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

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