following on from the successful national risk 08, we are delighted to announce that national risk 09 will take place at london’s city hall, june 10, 2009. this event will draw upon the original discussions of the december 08 debut, and build a more in-depth picture of the risks facing agencies, organisations, businesses and communities.

- learning lessons from the mumbai terror attacks
- information assurance
- preparedness for the transport sector
- utilities and the protection of critical national infrastructure
- catalysts for civil disobedience

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Emergency evacuation

The United States has focused sharply on evacuation from catastrophic events, particularly in major cities, since the experiences of 9/11, and after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. Here we present part II of an article based on a webcast discussion considering the issues involved.

The Ash Institute for Democratic Governance at Harvard Kennedy School convened a panel of emergency management specialists for a webcast discussion to consider the issues involved in getting a major city ready for evacuation. CRJ 4:4 presented an initial article based on that webcast. What follows are additional edited excerpts from that discussion.

Arnold Howitt: In terms of jurisdictional planning for evacuation, could you identify where this might differ for events for which there is advance warning, as opposed to situations in which there’s no notice, and where events start without the opportunity to get pre-prepared plans operating?

Ellis Stanley: With ‘notice events’, you can bring all the players around the table, not only the responders, but the people who will be implementing, and potential victims. You can let them know that these are your routes. These signs are posted. Follow the instructions, you can get out.

Mike Montgomery: One of the lessons that we learned (from receiving evacuees after Hurricane Katrina) was that prior relationships established between the responders and the command staff, allowed people to come together and be very effective in a short period of time. If we can identify the most common risks and hazards for our respective areas, develop...
plans to respond to those, then exercise and practise, even in a no notice event, it increases the chance of success, because we are responding as we have been trained to respond. And citizens are reacting the way they have been instructed and trained.

Andrew Velasquez: If you had to evacuate close to 600,000 people out of the central business district of Chicago on any given day, what’s important is having a strong collaboration among your public safety and public works people, but also your private sector partners, who have a big stake.

And that’s having a partnership with your security directors who are responsible for providing security for those skyscrapers and making sure that they, too, are part of your planning efforts and the briefings that you provide on a monthly basis. Because typically when something like this occurs in a city like Chicago, it would be a no notice event.

Arnold Howitt: How do you plan to integrate contracted services within government service support during an event that may disrupt all of the routines that you’re expecting to see in place?

Andrew Velasquez: We learned from the 9/11 Commission that 85 per cent of the critical infrastructure is owned by the private sector, so having this sector as part of your homeland security strategy, or emergency repair strategy, is key. You’re going to need to call upon the private sector for assistance. And it may need to call upon government for assistance during a catastrophic incident.

PRIVATE SECTOR

We have the Illinois Terrorism Task Force that’s comprised of 15 committees, including a private sector committee. We also have a committee that works directly with the unions. So, we can assess and determine what resources are available from the contractors, the electricians, those companies out there with heavy equipment, making sure that we have partnerships with the private sector. We can bring all those resources to bear during a catastrophic event.

Ellis Stanley: Whether you’re looking at incorporating some 90,000 security or private security employees into the process, or whether you’re looking at a private census to submit various people to doctors on a day-to-day basis, or senior citizens to the ‘Meals on Wheels’ programme, they are part of the fabric of the community.

Another private partner is the universities and colleges within your jurisdiction. They have the patient and accommodation systems in place. So it’s a matter of bringing them to the table, understanding where they fit, working them into the planning process, into the exercises. You have to make sure that when you have to give instructions to do certain things, they don’t have to worry about how the process of being reimbursed is going to happen because you’ve worked all that stuff out. So the private sector, the non-governmental organisations, volunteer agencies have a huge role.

Arnold Howitt: There are a great number of stakeholders involved in this. Bringing them in to feel a sense of partnership and collaboration with government is crucial. But how well do the systems in place work when they’re not dealing with a hierarchical situation in one unit of government, but instead are reaching across a variety of non-governmental stakeholders and are engaging other jurisdictions and perhaps other levels of government that aren’t subject to the authority of the jurisdiction in which the disaster occurs?

Ellis Stanley: They are adequate only as much as they are used on a day-to-day basis. You can’t wait until a situation occurs, then try to implement an integrated process. These things have to be blended into the fabric of training. It comes back to bringing folks around the table and not just putting them in the EOC when something happens, but making sure that they all – the planning side, the training side, the response side, the recovery side – feel part of that process.

Arnold Howitt: The Houston area is noted for having a high technology approach to co-ordination.

Mike Montgomery: About ten years ago, we started a concept called TranStar, which began as a consortium of four partners: The City of Houston; Harris County; our Metropolitan Transit Authority; and the Port of Houston. We got together to discuss transportation mobility. Because many of the challenges that we face as emergency responders in emergency evacuation situations deal with mobility and getting people where they need to be.

Like many other major metropolitan areas, we have a series of cameras and communication links, including a regional radio network, our current state evacuation camera set-ups, and some real time sensors, that’ll tell us what traffic speeds are, congestion, things like that. What we’ve learned is that an over-reliance on technology can sometimes be a hindrance if people aren’t trained in its use, and use it day-to-day routinely.

So the key as we add these new elements, such as Web-based interactive tools and more robust, interoperable communication systems, comes back to those basic relationships, and understanding how the systems work together. Most important are willingness and understanding that the functions we may have in our day-to-day operations may not be the same ones we fulfill during an emergency.

Andrew Velasquez: Chicago is unique in that its emergency management office it also has traffic management and 911 operations, bringing a number of disciplines together under one roof.

Chicago has a robust camera surveillance platform, with thousands of cameras throughout the city, as well as on the different interstate highways, where they can be used, not only to monitor traffic with built-in analytic software, but also to monitor potential evacuation situations that may occur.

At state level, we’re trying to leverage those technologies, to integrate those systems with those of the State of Illinois, so we can be a partner. The state is working closely with large metropolitan areas to share technology and information, so that in the event of a catastrophic incident, we can all be on the same page, in terms of information flow.

Part III will discuss hazards that could place evacuees in the path of danger, shadow evacuation issues and working with the media.

Authors

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