



This article is based on a new book, published by the International City/County Management Association (<http://www.icma.org/> <http://www.icma.org>), "Homeland Security: Best Practices for Local Government". It is authored by former Clifton City Manager Roger Kemp. It is a very useful guide to the latest issues in homeland security affecting local governments across the country.

Homeland Security: Best Practices in America

by Roger L. Kemp, PhD

Meriden, CT., is a city of just under 60,000 located in the middle of the state between New Haven and Hartford. I serve as the city manager and, like other public officials across the country in the past two years, I've given much greater focus to emergency response issues than ever before.

I wanted to find the best practices across the country and I did, but they were scattered and dispersed so I decided to compile them into a single source book. What follows is a summary of some of these practices. These practices have forged a close working relationship between Public Works, Police, Fire, and Health Departments. All of the employees of these departments are cooperating now more than ever on homeland security issues.

The future of homeland security will depend upon the preparedness initiatives at the local level. Local government officials are taking the dangers posed by a possible terrorist attack seriously and, since September 2001, have implemented the state-of-the-art practices examined in this article. The best practices examined include many different sizes of cities from all geographic regions of the U.S.

New emergency management practices will be developed and tested at all levels of government during the coming years. The trends presented here are at the promising forefront of these new developments. All of the practices examined represent the continued goal of emergency management. That is, *to limit the loss of life and property of citizens during times of a disaster.*

All of these new measures fall into one or more of the four phases of emergency management: *mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.*

Mitigation

Federal Assistance Programs. There are numerous federal programs available to assist local officials in the mitigation phase of their emergency management plans. Many of these training programs are provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the U. S. Fire Administration, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Justice, Health and Human Services, Defense, and Energy. Contact should be made directly with these organizations to determine the details, availability, and location of their respective training programs. Many of these programs are provided free of charge, or for a limited cost, to local government officials. In many cases, these training programs are listed on the internet websites of these federal agencies.

U. S. Homeland Security Advisory System. In 2002, Thomas Ridge, the Director of the Office of Homeland Security (now the secretary of this new department), set forth a national system warning for advising all levels of government – federal, state, and local – as well as the American public, of the possible risk of a terrorist attack. Under this five-level color-coded warning system, several levels of possible terrorist threats confronting the nation are specified. They are: low (green), guarded (blue), elevated (yellow), high (orange), and severe (red). This national alerting system spells out various “protective measures” suited to each warning category. So far, the highest level of alert the nation has witnessed under this code model is “orange.”

Threat Analysis and Assessment. To properly analyze and assess the threat-level of possible terrorist acts by individuals or groups within their jurisdiction, city and county officials must work with the appropriate state and federal agencies. Possible terrorist targets, both public and private, must be examined, analyzed, and ranked by their level of possible risk. Appropriate safeguards and security measures should then be taken according to this ranking process. This comprehensive approach to emergency management fits well with FEMA’s Integrated Emergency Management System (IEMS), which provides the necessary framework for an all-hazards approach to emergency preparedness. The more possible targets a community has, the greater the reliance of its public officials on using this model of threat analysis and assessment.

Building Design and Physical Structures to Improve Public Safety. Certain types of construction are more likely to withstand a terrorist attack than others. High-quality sprinkler systems and new fireproof roofing materials, for example, can reduce the chance of fire. Legal limits on building heights and building setbacks can also lessen potential damage from attacks. These and other safety features should be incorporated into the design of new buildings. Physical structures also can be used to protect existing buildings. The selected placement of steel and concrete barriers around public buildings is frequently used to restrict vehicular access. Fences, walls, and other protective encasements can easily be constructed. New types of devices and barriers are emerging in the marketplace that control access to public buildings, monuments, and parks.

Municipal and County Building Codes. City and county building officials may want to update their development codes for certain types of buildings – both public and private – to make them less vulnerable to terrorist attacks. The loss of life and property can be limited by retrofitting existing buildings or – sometimes a less-

expensive option – by building new structures that meet state-of-the-art safety and security criteria. Local government regulations should require the posting of exit signs, evacuation routes, and other appropriate security and safety information, in all public buildings for the safety of their citizens. City and county building codes should be updated to impose these same requirements on the owners of private buildings.

Nonstructural Measures to Improve Building Safety. The use of police or security guards (depending upon whether a building is public or private), metal detectors, and surveillance cameras, can help protect the occupants of buildings, as well as visitors, by identifying possible threats. Police or security guards can inspect the personal belongings of people as they enter the premises. Existing labor agreements, possibly state laws, will determine whether sworn police officers, civilian employees, or contract private security services can be used to provide this service. Building owners, both public and private, owe this level of security to those citizens that work in and visit their buildings.

Pedestrian and Vehicular Evacuation Routes. To ensure that the public can be properly evacuated from buildings in an effective and timely manner, local public safety officials should prepare building evacuation plans and procedures. The safest and most expeditious exit routes from all buildings, especially those in high-rise areas, should be clearly explained. Buildings that are most vulnerable to a terrorist act may need specialized instructions for the public in case they must be evacuated. Vehicular evacuation routes leading out of town from urban centers should also be identified and made available to the public. Depending on the type and size of a particular disaster, local officials may wish to issue a directive encouraging residents to evacuate their families to safer areas.

Preparedness

Assignment of Emergency Management Responsibilities. All departments and agencies should be assigned specific duties to undertake in case of an emergency or disaster, whether of a human or natural cause. The roles of public safety, health, and public works employees have been redefined and enhanced to improve the nation's preparedness for a wide variety of possible terrorist acts. The proper roles for police and fire department personnel in the event of a disaster must be clearly defined beforehand. In case of a HAZMAT emergency, for example, it is common for police to secure the perimeter of the area, while fire personnel deal with the hazardous material clean-up. Other departmental employees would be called as needed to respond to different facets of an emergency.

Emergency Plans and Possible Hazards. The emergency plans of cities and counties should include preparedness procedures for all types of likely disasters. These plans should detail the technical expertise that might be needed in the event of a terrorist attack, the required resources, and the proper procedures for requesting assistance from neighboring jurisdictions as well as higher levels of government. Increasing emphasis must be placed on the interactions of local, state, and federal officials. Public officials in cities and counties with sites that might be the prime target of terrorists, such as nuclear power plants and busy ports, should include these sites in local emergency plans.

Mutual Aid Agreements. Fire departments typically have mutual aid agreements with neighboring communities, but law enforcement, public works, and health departments are increasingly entering into these agreements as well. Mutual aid agreements ensure a prompt response by departments and agencies from

contiguous municipal and county governments. The goal is to provide a seamless response to an emergency once local resources have been exhausted. Under these agreements, a local government does not need to seek formal approval to use services from another jurisdiction since the provision of requested services is automatic. Since a terrorist act might affect more than one community, mutual aid agreements should be made with all contiguous communities, as well as the county in which a town or city is located. Contiguous counties should also have mutual aid agreements for these same reasons.

Simulated Disaster Exercises. When public officials revise their emergency management plans, they should periodically test them against reality by conducting simulated disaster-response exercises. Such exercises help ensure that local emergency plans hold up against reality. These exercises should also include state and federal agencies. Nongovernmental agencies from the nonprofit sector, such as the Red Cross, Salvation Army, hospitals, and other public-assistance organizations, should also be asked to participate. These exercises give local officials a chance to work the “bugs” out of their local emergency response plans, and assists them in responding to possible actual emergency conditions. Such disaster exercises help improve local preparedness, and assist public officials in limiting the loss of life and property during a real-life disaster.

Training for Local Government Employees. Since the September 11th terrorist incidents, specialized training programs have become available for public safety personnel and other local government employees in several areas relating to man-made disasters. Training programs are emerging in the areas of stress management for public safety employees, the management of fatalities, proper responses to weapons of mass destruction, enhanced intelligence and information networking, medical service readiness, and the provision of social services to the victims of a disaster. Hazardous materials identification and modern decontamination practices are also new topics on the training agenda. Many of these training programs are provided free of charge by state and federal government agencies.

Use of Incident Command System. FEMA recommends the use of the ICS when local governments respond to any type of emergency. This system of management best accommodates a response by multiple parties, including local, state, and federal agencies. It gives the responsibility for command to an on-site manager, who reports to the emergency operations center. The use of this emergency management process allows for the immediate coordination of services from numerous sources, including other levels of government. Local governments that use the ICS enhance their effectiveness, streamline their chain of command, and eliminate the possible duplication of services. State and federal agencies provide much needed and valuable training in the use of this state-of-the-art emergency management practice.

Response

Contributions and Donations Management. In large-scale man-made or natural disasters, private citizens and local community organizations often step forward to help victims and their families. As the public response to the World Trade Center attack demonstrated, nonprofit organizations, as well as members of the public, are eager to donate goods and services and lend assistance to victims and their families following a disaster. Specific requests can be made by public officials if specialized equipment or services are needed. Drop-off locations should be designated, and an accurate accounting should be kept of all groups and individuals who donate goods and services both during

and after an emergency. The collection of these contributions from the private and nonprofit sectors should be managed so as not to interfere in any way with the actual response by local government emergency service personnel.

Damage Assessment Practices. Damage assessment at the local level must be accurate and immediate, since assistance from higher levels of government depends on this information. Appropriate municipal and county officials must be trained in the details of this valuable emergency management function. In large jurisdictions, teams of employees are usually assigned to cover different neighborhoods, or areas, of a city or county after a disaster occurs. As a local government's response unfolds, the information on the damage that is gathered must be continually verified and reassessed to ensure its accuracy. Procedures should exist in advance to properly document the damage done to real property, as well as methods to determine the entire financial magnitude of the disaster, including the costs of the local government's response.

Early-Warning Public Notification Systems. A key feature of a local government's response to an emergency is prompt notification of the public. In case of a flood, for example, public officials may have several hours' lead-time in which to warn citizens. In the case of a terrorist act, however, the warning to the public must be as immediate as circumstances will allow. Reverse 911 notification systems are prompt and flexible enough to issue a warning to citizens on a block-by-block or neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis. The traditional means of notifying citizens, such as the public media, may not be readily available because of the time of day or night that an incident occurs. City-wide sirens (some have voice-over capability) can also be used to inform the public. Government-access cable television channels can also be used for this purpose, but not as a primary source of notification, since this warning system does not reach all of the citizens in the community.

Emergency Shelters and Assistance. A natural or man-made disaster, especially a carefully designed terrorist attack, could leave a large number of citizens without food, water, and shelter. Emergency shelters (beds and restrooms) and assistance (food, water, and first aid stations) should be available immediately. The location and size of such shelters, and the organizations that would provide them, must be known in advance of an actual emergency. Usually public buildings are used for this purpose, with assistance provided by the Red Cross and Salvation Army. Municipal or county employees, depending upon the state and its local forms of government, may provide health assistance. In case primary facilities are damaged, a comprehensive emergency operations plan should note the location of appropriate back-up facilities should they become necessary.

Evacuation Procedures and Practices. In the case of an arson fire or bombing, people must be evacuated immediately from all impacted buildings and surrounding areas. Procedures should exist to facilitate the smooth evacuation of large numbers of people in the shortest possible time. In the case of fire or the imminent collapse of a building, a prompt response would save many lives. Vehicles owned by the local government, such as buses and vans, should be used to facilitate an evacuation. The number of vehicles available, as well as issues relating to their accessibility, should be known in advance of an incident. Proper exit signs and evacuation routes should be conspicuously posted in all buildings, both public and private. The location of safety equipment and first aid supplies should also be known and posted in advance of an emergency.

Geographic Information Systems. Computerized mapping using geographic information systems (GIS) can provide immediate assistance to local officials when responding to either natural or man-made disasters. City and

county officials should know the exact location of power grids, public utilities, public telephones, public open spaces, hospitals, natural amenities, and other useful information, in advance. The location of these items should be on a public agency's computer database. This is in addition to the usual information, such as the location of property lines and buildings. Staging areas, incident command posts, emergency shelters, designated medical facilities, and approved evacuation routes, should also be plotted for use by city and county employees when responding to emergencies. The use of GIS was critical in New York City's response to the September 2001 terrorist attack, and helped police officers and firefighters limit the loss of life and property.

Medical Services and Equipment. It is critical that the availability of all medical services and equipment be known in advance of an incident. The locations of hospitals, ambulance companies, and private medical providers – and the resources they can provide – must be included in emergency operations plans. Because primary facilities may be damaged during a disaster, back-up medical facilities and services should also be known and determined in advance. Also needed are decontamination procedures that would be followed in the event of a chemical or biological emergency. Public information must also be provided within a short time frame to relatives and friends of victims. Careful advanced planning in these crucial areas can lead to a timely and professional response by local government personnel.

On-Site Command and Control. The immediate on-site management of a disaster is essential. The on-site manager and command staff are responsible for coordinating the response, including their interaction with public officials from other agencies (e.g., city, county, state, federal, and nonprofit). The on-site command staff reports to the emergency operations center, which would relay incident information to the appropriate people, including elected officials and the news media. Actual responders (typically police and fire personnel) report their findings to the incident commander, who coordinates the immediate on-scene response. The location of main command sites and back-up locations should be determined on a neighborhood basis before an incident occurs. A site where an act of terrorism has taken place should be treated like a crime scene. This requires extra security and investigative services on the part of police personnel.

Public Information and the News Media. Although local and state news media pay attention to typical natural disasters at first, their interest, as well as that of the public, soon wanes. In the case of a man-made disaster, such as an act of terrorism, news media (print and broadcast) at all levels (local, state, and national) will likely have a keen interest in a local government's response for some time. It is essential to have someone at the emergency operations center knowledgeable about the event and the ongoing response. This person should also be available to the media. The media provides an excellent way for local government officials to issue warnings and evacuation notices to the public. The media should be kept away from the epicenter of a local disaster whenever possible. Representatives of the news media should not be allowed to get through the perimeter security of an incident. Proper security measures must be provided by police personnel to achieve this goal.

Recovery

Crime Scene Security. Man-made disasters such as terrorist acts are crimes, and the location of the incident should be treated like a crime scene. Evidence at the site must be secured, collected, and properly protected for future use in legal proceedings. This evidence may be used to prosecute the perpetrators at a later date, once the

recovery phase of the emergency response has been completed. This means that public access to the site must be limited. First responders must be trained by law enforcement personnel to both identify and protect evidence at the disaster site. For this reason, debris removal must be undertaken under special, and controlled, circumstances. Depending on the size of a disaster, this process could take weeks, even months, to complete.

Crisis Counseling. Following a disaster, public safety employees, and citizens in general, often suffer from a variety of stress-related symptoms, including anger, depression, headaches, and insomnia. Debriefing and counseling sessions for affected personnel by experienced counselors should take place as soon as possible after a disaster occurs. Psychologists, chaplains, family counselors, and mental health professionals typically provide these valuable services. Many employee assistance programs (EAP's) offer counseling services to city and county employees. If a jurisdiction does not have an EAP in place, it may need to hire trained specialists to provide post-disaster counseling services to employees and their families. Ideally, these services should be provided quickly, usually within 24 to 48 hours after an emergency takes place.

Disaster Assistance to Property Owners and Citizens. Public officials in a jurisdiction where a natural or man-made disaster occurs should immediately establish a clearinghouse to coordinate assistance to the victims and their families. The FEMA, state governments, the Red Cross, Salvation Army, and other nonprofit organizations, frequently provide this type of assistance. By providing a centralized location for citizen information about assistance, city and county officials will be able to facilitate the process of restoring order after a disaster takes place. It is incumbent upon local officials to inform the public about the disaster assistance programs that are available to them, as well as to coordinate the services provided by these programs. Local government officials may wish to provide for "gap" coverage to property owners and citizens who were victims of a disaster until other programs "kick-in."

Management of Fatalities. The limited scope of most local disasters does not require extensive planning for the management of on-site fatalities. In the case of terrorist incidents, however, local government officials may need to make arrangements for temporary morgues, depending upon the size of the incident. Local mortuaries should be put on alert to handle the additional deaths created by these type of emergencies. Procedures for properly notifying victims' next-of-kin must be worked out in advance. Emergency operations plans must include a section pertaining to the management of on-site fatalities. It is prudent to include this information in all local emergency response plans, regardless of the size of the jurisdiction. Resources for the management of fatalities are an integral part of the recovery phase of an agency's emergency response.

Rebuilding Private Structures and Spaces. Typically, after a natural disaster, the owners of damaged property will file a claim with their insurance company to collect for damages. Once the monetary settlement is received, property owners can begin the process of reconstruction. In the case of a terrorist attack causing widespread damage, the local government has an important role to play in this rebuilding process. Local officials must notify all owners of damaged property and ask them to clear their land, ensure it is free of hazards, properly fence it for public safety purposes, and ultimately, reconstruct the improvements. In the interest of public safety, local government officials may wish to perform some of these tasks. In this case, permission should be obtained from the property owners involved. Public officials may seek title to impacted private properties where the aggregation of individual ownerships best serves the public's interest. This especially holds true if local owners of commercial and residential

properties do not want to rebuild in the disaster area.

Restoration of Public Infrastructure and Open Spaces. After a disaster, citizens expect their local government officials to restore the public infrastructure (for example, sewer and water lines, electricity, roadways, sidewalks, and public transit) and public open spaces (parks, playgrounds, walkways, bikeways, trails, beach access, and waterways, to name a few) in a timely manner. While the public sector must hold citizens accountable for the restoration of their private property, citizens should hold their local government officials accountable for the timely restoration of all public property. City and county officials should take prompt action to gain the trust of citizens in this regard. The bottom-line is that improvements in and around the disaster area, particularly public amenities, should be restored as soon as possible following a terrorist incident.

The Future

While the emergency management practices and techniques that evolve during the coming years will be different from the civil defense measures of the past, the goal of these initiatives will still be the same: to minimize the loss of life and property. This goal requires the implementation of policies and the testing of procedures in each of the four phases of emergency management.

The field of emergency management has gone full circle in the past half-century. External threats have focused the attention of emergency planners on man-made disasters. At the same time, plans to cope with natural disasters must continue. FEMA's all-hazards approach to emergency management enables local government officials to prepare comprehensive plans that encompass all potential hazards, both natural and man-made.

Note: This article is based on research for *Homeland Security: Best Practices for Local Government* (ICMA, 2003). The book is available by calling 1-800-745-8780.

Dr. Kemp is City Manager of Meriden, CT and a former City Manager of Clifton, NJ. He holds both MPA & MBA degrees, plus a Ph.D. in Public Administration. He is also a graduate of Harvard's Program for Senior Executives in State and Local Government. Roger can be reached at rkemp@ci.meriden.ct.us.