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Strengthening the Public Safety Response to Terrorism

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Strengthening the Public Safety Response to Terrorism*

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Abstract

This is an overview of the recent conference sponsored by the Dept. of Homeland Security. The title of this invitational conference was “Strengthening the Public Safety Response to Terrorism.”

KEYWORDS: homeland security, emergency management

*Roger L. Kemp, PhD, a career city manager, attended this conference on behalf of the International City/County Management Association, Washington, DC.

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), in conjunction with the U. S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate, recently convened the *Third Annual Conference on Strengthening the Public Safety Response to Terrorism and Other Hazards* during the last week of June near Washington, DC.

This three-day conference included a broad range of representation from the first-responder community, including:

- City and County Managers,
- Fire Chiefs,
- Health and Human Services Directors,
- Police Chiefs and Sheriffs,
- Public Works Directors, and
- other emergency responders.

These individuals were selected, by invitation only, from their respective national professional membership organizations. The professional associations involved in this selection process, that sent representatives from their respective memberships to attend this conference, included the following:

- American Public Works Association (APWA),
- Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO),
- International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC),
- International Association of Police Chiefs (IACP),
- International City/County Management Association (ICMA),
- National Association City and County Health Officials (NACCHO),
- National Sheriffs' Association (NSA), and
- other emergency-responder membership organizations.

The topics covered included an understanding of the threat of terrorism, an overview of the national perspective (including the President and Congress), a review of the National Response Plan (NRP), an overview of the National Incident Management System (NIMS), a review of the Incident Command System (ICS), and other topics and issues facing emergency first-responders.

Presentations were made by members of academic institutions, city and county governments, state governments, as well as the federal government. These presenters included emergency response decision-makers from all levels of government – municipal, county, state, and federal. In addition to presentations from the local and state emergency response community, those federal officials involved included representatives from the White House, the Department of Defense (DOD), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The roles of respective first-responders were also examined from a number of different perspectives. These included state-of-the-art emergency management

practices, the on-site management and chain-of-command used for emergency incidents, the most effective ways of providing mutual aid, and methods and options to improve communications among those agencies involved in responding to an emergency. Attendees included representatives from the following levels of government:

- cities and towns,
- counties,
- tribal nations,
- states, and
- federal.

With the use of trained facilitators, individual focus, groups consisting of state, local, and tribal government practitioners, were organized to examine, discuss, and suggest recommendations on ways to enhance various aspects of emergency management, including the following topics:

- interoperability issues,
- unified command system management,
- mutual aid methods,
- human, social, and public health services,
- continuity of government operations,
- personnel and human resources issues relating to these topics, and
- two issues relating to intergovernmental partnerships - moving preparedness and response forward together, and adequate and stabilized federal funding and other resources.

These topics were previously identified by an interdisciplinary focus group. Suggestions from these groups, which were topic specific, were passed along to all in attendance, including representatives from the state and federal governments. All focus groups had federal observers, who took careful note on ways to improve intergovernmental relations, as well as all aspects of these first-responder management issues.

This conference represents the true partnership, from an intergovernmental perspective, that exists among first-responders to emergencies, and the systems (in terms of staff-power, technology, and funding) that back them up during times of a disaster. It is such conferences as this that result in knowing our counterparts in different government agencies, and having an awareness of what resources and programs are available during the four phases of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

First-responders from all levels of government benefited from attending this third annual conference. Hopefully, DHS, as well as these other first-

responder and professional membership organizations, will make this an annual event. It is only by meeting, reviewing, and discussing the issues that problems can be resolved, and that all levels of government can better respond to the public they serve during an actual emergency.

Given that the purpose of emergency management is to limit the loss of life and property during a disaster, whether brought about by nature or man, conferences such as this certainly go a long way towards achieving this objective. DHS and IAFC, as well as all of these national membership organizations, should be congratulated for their efforts to improve the quality of emergency management services to citizens throughout the United States.