

Roundtable Report

The Role of Public Works in Emergency Response: What is Happening in Connecticut?

Date of Roundtable Discussion: November 3, 2009 – Rocky Hill, CT

Notes from the Discussion:

A presentation was given by Mike Turner – Public Works Director – Town of Wethersfield providing an overview of lessons learned from the public works response to the Wethersfield Tornado that occurred on 6/26/09.

Link to full PowerPoint Presentation:

Key points:

Must meet FEMA thresholds in order to receive reimbursement. If you don't meet them, you don't get money. Damages to private residences with insurance do not count toward the total. Damages in surrounding area might count toward total if FEMA decides the damages are all from the same event. DEMHS Representative can help with that.

To access information on applying for FEMA assistance, visit their website at:
<http://www.fema.gov/assistance/index.shtm>

PW main role was clearing roads so emergency / medical rescue could get through. Downed wires were a major issue – had to wait for utilities to declare them safe before clearing roads. To access a short video on electrical safety for emergency responders, please go to: <http://www.cl-p.com/Business/Safety/SafetyVideos.aspx>

Tremendous response from neighbors and other towns – Rocky Hill, MDC, Tolland, Coventry, Newington, Wolcott, others

Should have had all department heads in emergency operations center so decisions could be made instead of being out in the field.

PW concentrated on clearing actual roads – focus on arterials and collectors first. Mostly loader work – not chainsaws at first.

Established 2 temporary debris storage and reduction sites (TDSRS) in town – one was available for private citizen use and one was reserved for town use.

Made sure the DEP permits were taken care of – very important to get DEP involved early in the process - make sure that you are meeting their permitting requirements or have received a waiver of the requirements from the DEP Commissioner. Important to

identify potential TDSRS in advance and take care of any necessary permitting before a disaster happens in your agency.

If looking for FEMA funding, must make sure you are following all appropriate requirements and keeping good records.

Use of a local logging contractor turned out to be extremely helpful. They had equipment that expedited the debris removal processes. The logging company took the wood and gave the town a credit for the value of the wood to offset the costs of their assistance.

Debris disposal site manned by 1 DPW operator and a private tub grinder and operator. Be sure to keep track of the tickets. Also consider getting your trucks certified in advance.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Disaster Declaration starts the timetable
- Keep good records, track everything (tickets, invoices, contracts, forms, etc) FEMA HAS FORMS AND TOOLS TO USE to track damage and expenses. Use their forms if possible – no sense recreating the wheel – you need to put it on their forms in the end.
- Photos will be very useful to support your written documentation
- Keep your DEMHS Regional Coordinator in the loop – establish that relationship now. They have tremendous resources and access to statewide information.
- The members of your RESF#3 (in your region) can be a good resource, establish a relationship with them now.
- Have the right leadership people in the EOC, it will help when quick decisions need to be made during the disaster. – commanders / chiefs / directors need to be in there – not out handling emergencies.
- Have the right people in charge – emergency management leaders should not have other responsibilities that will be critical during a disaster (i.e. dispatcher / police chief / etc)
- Know the right people to contact at the utilities and get their cell phone numbers for after hour calls – cuts response time down a great deal. You need to wait for them to clear the lines for removal so you need them there fast.
- Make sure you include logging companies on your contractor contact list – emergency level contacts so they come on the weekend – not waiting until Monday to get back to you
- Make sure you have a way to communicate with all of the response crews by radio - even those from other towns who are offering assistance - should be on the same radio frequency so they can reach you...give them your frequency or give them a radio that works with your system.

Roy Piper – DEMHS Region Two Coordinator said a few words to the group during the roundtable:

- Intrastate Mutual Aid Compact helps you to help each other

- RESF 3 has finally gotten the recognition it deserves – you are an important partner in emergency response so it is important to be at the table with the other first responders.
- Recordkeeping and reimbursement – widespread events that meet thresholds will be reimbursed by FEMA. If not met, there is no reimbursement

General Discussion

Debris Management

Will DEP relax permitting regulations for emergencies? DEMHS is working with DEP to develop a statewide debris management plan. A tabletop exercise is also being developed by DEMHS, the exercise should be introduced in the summer of 2010.

Could DEP Commissioner come up with some parameters on what would be waived? DPWs need to know what to expect and who to reach out to in an emergency so they aren't getting into trouble.

Good idea to be proactive and pick sites in your town that can be used for Temporary Debris Storage and Reduction Sites. Good idea to work with DEP in advance on the site pre-qualification and permitting.

Good idea for Regions to survey towns to find out what resources there are in the Region to handle debris and to handle fuel needs.

Equipment

Should have a good list of everything you have and keep it updated.

What types of equipment would we need in an emergency?

- Communication Equipment
- Electronic Sign trailers and message boards
- Light Towers
- Automatic Sandbagger
- Integrated Tool Carriers
- Prime Mover
- Tub Grinder
- Portable Loading Docks
- Logging truck
- Cranes
- Maintenance Vehicle to service equipment onsite (complete with fluids)
- Grappling Bucket Attachment for Loader

Web EOC will have a database of all public works equipment that was cataloged as a part of the resource typing initiative that was completed by all local agencies. There have been some software issues with the Web EOC system that have not allowed it to become available yet to local agencies as a resource. DEMHS will keep us updated on the status of the database.

Your area coordinator might be able to access raw data if you need it prior to the system being online. It is a good idea to have a hard copy of what is available in your region so that you can access regardless of electricity. You can work with your RESF#3 to secure the lists.

Chair of Region 2 RESF 3 – worked along with Middlesex-New Haven Public Works Association and found it very helpful in communicating with all the towns in the region and getting the information they needed.

Credentialing

As with other emergency responders, Connecticut will begin to credential their public works employees. The credentialing plan has been developed for Connecticut but implementation of the process has not begun to date. Each local agency will be identifying those public works employees who will be credentialed, based on their level of training and expertise. Guidelines will be distributed by DEMHS once they are finalized.

Property Damage Assessment

DEMHS may be able to provide training to regions on PDA requirements (property damage assessment). This training would be useful to local agencies if it becomes available.

Tabletop Exercises relating to Public Works Emergency Response

Town of Coventry recently held a tabletop exercise that included all departments including board of education and school staff. Very successful exercise consisting of a scenario about a gas propane truck that overturned and hit a car near a school. A lot of good information was discussed and it was very informational. It was very useful to have the staff of the board of education participate in the discussion.