

Integrated Mitigation Model: It's Time to Rethink the Phases of Emergency Management

By Brian C. Bannon, Senior Consultant, Booz Allen Hamilton, Belcamp, Maryland

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) defines mitigation as “the effort to reduce loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters. This is achieved through risk analysis, which results in information that provides a foundation for mitigation activities that reduce risk, and flood insurance that protects financial investment.”

FEMA carries out its mitigation mission by administering risk analysis, risk reduction, and flood insurance programs. Examples of risk analysis programs administered by FEMA include: flood hazard mapping, the National Dam Safety Program, and hazard mitigation planning. FEMA’s risk reduction efforts are covered by the Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) Grant Programs, National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP), and by the research and technical assistance provided by the Building Science Branch. Finally, FEMA administers the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).

All of these programs are almost entirely focused on natural hazards and heavily tilted toward flooding and flood plain management. This likely springs from federal mandates to deal with flooding and the isolated nature of mitigation programs and practitioners. This article is *not* a commentary on the relative effectiveness of FEMA or its ability to administer these programs. Instead, it is a commentary on the current doctrine’s lack of success in developing an integrated approach to leverage mitigation activities to achieve desired outcomes.

The accepted, traditional view of emergency management is that it consists of four overlapping but

distinct phases: preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. This view has translated into doctrine that influences the allocation of funds and resources and has led to the gradual isolation of mitigation efforts and practitioners over time. This doctrine falls short of developing a holistic approach, integrating mitigation programs, activities and services across all phases of emergency management to equip stakeholders to build and maintain safer, more resilient communities and respond to disasters.

Integration of Mitigation into Jurisdiction’s EM Activities

Mitigation can and should be a cross-cutting effort, completely integrated into a jurisdiction’s emergency management preparedness, response and recovery activities. Mitigation activities are stand-alone efforts, routinely underfunded, and based on artificially subsidized and narrowly defined insurance risks. These programs often lack connection to the emergency response community, and are overly focused on insurance, engineering and floodplain management. Insurance, engineering and floodplain management are important pieces of a community’s ability to prepare, respond and recover from a disaster – but they are not all encompassing.

Most communities leverage FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funds to conduct a natural hazards based Hazard Vulnerability Analysis (HVA) to develop and update their five-year jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) as required by federal law. This plan usually has little or no information about



Figure 1. Integrated Mitigation Model.

technological hazards and often fails to align with other existing jurisdictional plans and procedures. In effect, the current HVA and HMP processes have become compliance exercises to ensure that the community is eligible for Stafford Act funds following disasters and to help communities manage their NFIP premiums.

It is common for the HMP process to be driven mostly by floodplain and community planners, with little or no input from emergency responders. Planners are important allies in developing an integrated emergency management approach, but they lack the perspective and knowledge of law enforcement, fire, emergency medical services, emergency communications, emergency management and disaster recovery to create a truly integrated mitigation approach, useful in preparedness, response and recovery. Emergency managers can be a vital link between responders and community planners to help foster this integrated mitigation model.

Time to Rethink Our Approach

It’s time to rethink our approach. The time has come to build a new emergency management doctrine that acknowledges the cross-cutting nature of mitigation

¹ <http://www.fema.gov/government/mitigation.shtm>

(continued on page 11)

Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) - A Great Resource for Your Community

by Dave Nichols, CEM, Field Operations Manager, Public Health, Seattle and King County, Wash.

I have worked as a Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) Coordinator for the last year, and it has become apparent that some parts of emergency management are not utilizing MRC to its fullest. What I would like to do in a short article is give you some examples of what the Corps can do for you.

The Medical Reserve Corps was developed after 9/11 and the subsequent anthrax attacks, which makes it a relatively new addition to the emergency management toolbox.

Types of MRC Volunteers

The MRC is a volunteer organization comprised of two sets of valuable volunteers.

- The first are medical volunteers, both working and retired, who maintain active medical licensure.
- The second category is comprised of support volunteers. Many units call these folks non-medical volunteers but this term sounds odd if they are missing something. They aren't lacking anything; they have important skills

to support the operation of a medical team. For instance, support volunteers can function as reception staff, traffic controllers, clerks, carriers, telephone operators, and many more positions. Ever see a hospital run without support?

How to Utilize MRC Volunteers

So how can you utilize them? There are many ways, but I am going to give you two.

- **Responders at a drill or exercise.** For your next exercise, contact ESI 8 through your EOC to bring in an MRC team to set up a clinic or a triage area. Alternatively, if you are doing a tabletop exercise, utilize the MRC to fan out in the community and do public education about the tabletop exercise and what the population would need to do if it had been a real disaster. Why just train the first responders? Train the public, too.
- **Public Health Outreach in the Community.** MRC volunteers have a wealth of knowledge and are interested in supporting the

communities in which they live. A great way to take advantage of their skills is to use them as support in community outreach. Whether it is during an exercise or a separate event, MRC members can be utilized to inform the public. Specifically, medical volunteers interact with at-risk access and functional needs individuals (such as the homeless, elderly and special needs) regularly and are equipped to properly educate and assist this population. Educating the public about how to prepare for an emergency will further alleviate the stress our response system feels in the event of a disaster. Events such as health fairs and community block parties are a great opportunity to provide public education. MRC volunteers would be a great resource at your next fair or block party.

Inclusion

As we all know, it is vital to understand and utilize all available emergency management tools, both during practice and during a real world event. As you work with your local MRC, you may come up with more ideas. The goal is to include MRC volunteers in your planning and exercises so you will think to include them when the disaster happens. Don't let a valuable resource atrophy just because you didn't know about it or utilize it before.

Learn More

Don't know how to contact your local MRC? Here is the link to the national site where you can look up your area by region, state or zip code: www.medicalreservecorps.gov/FindMRC.php.

Integrated Mitigation Model

(continued from page 9)

and coordinates the HVA and HMP process into a jurisdiction's overall emergency management approach. This new approach would apply mitigation techniques and programs as cross-cutting means to support preparedness, response and recovery efforts. The new approach outlined in Figure 1 on Page 9 would help engage stakeholders throughout the phases of emergency management to interactively weave mitigation into

everyday activities of planners and responders. This approach could add value to stakeholders by reducing duplication of efforts, coordinating grant programs, and promoting an integrated "whole community" solution to communities' toughest emergency management challenges.

The role of mitigation as a separate and distinct phase of emergency management would be replaced by a new integrated mitigation model with mitigation as a cross-cutting centerpiece; tying preparedness, response and recovery activities together to support communities' public safety goals.