National Guard Integration in the New Normal

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There are many aspects of the “new normal” for emergency management, but the ability to effectively prepare and respond to disasters of increasing severity and frequency while operating in a resource-constrained environment is perhaps the most formidable challenge. Disasters are increasing due to the effects of global climate change and are also becoming more complex due to the interdependencies of people, technology, infrastructure, and the environment (Quarantelli, 1991, 1997). Resources are becoming constrained due to reductions in budgets, increasing costs for services, and the decline of volunteerism (Gazley & Brundney, 2005; Kurtzleben, 2014).

In order to continue to plan and appropriately respond to the potential for catastrophic disasters, many state emergency management agencies are looking to their state’s National Guard to help fill this gap. The National Guard is not only being called on more frequently, but also is being called on for an increasingly diverse role in disaster response. The basic mission sets of aviation and transportation are being complemented with resources that fill numerous other core capabilities within the five mission areas in the National Preparedness Goal (FEMA, 2014).

Extent of Involvement

More than 7,400 National Guard personnel directly supported first response efforts during Hurricane Sandy, providing critical services such as evacuation assistance, route clearance, search and rescue, and delivery of essential equipment and supplies. Additionally, more than 6,200 National Guard personnel continued to support recovery efforts, providing personnel and equipment for fuel distribution, communications, security, sheltering, debris removal, and transportation (FEMA, 2014a). The National Emergency Management Association (NEMA, 2014) noted that 70% of the assistance requested through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) for catastrophic events comes from the National Guard. In order to prepare for the “new normal,” state National Guard entities are involved in a continuous effort involving many initiatives to ensure greater integration with and support to civil authorities in planning for response to disasters.

National Guard Resources for Disaster Response/Recovery

The National Guard has many resources that are applicable to disaster response and recovery. Some of these resources were originally intended for warfighting activities such as aviation resources and Stryker vehicles. Other resources were originally intended to support military base and installation activities, such as fire and emergency services, and power production units.

More recently, others have been created solely for support to civil authorities during times of disaster, such as Homeland Response Forces (HRF) and Disaster Relief Bed-down Systems (DRBS). The HRF is a 577 joint Army and Air National Guard unit intended to respond to catastrophic disasters involving chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear materials. The DRBS is an Air National Guard capability designed to provide rapidly deployable shelter, sanitation, and other infrastructure to support 150 personnel in field conditions.

Regardless of the intended purpose of the resource, if it is to be leveraged for support to civil authorities in a timely manner, the civil authorities must know its capabilities and limitations as well as the support needed and costs associated with its deployment and use. One aspect of embracing the new normal for many state National Guard organizations has been development of Mission Ready Packages (MRPs) to support civil authorities, in the format promoted by EMAC.

EMAC is the preferred method for requisition and deployment of National Guard resources for humanitarian efforts between states and territories during times of disaster. The military services all have well-established systems for typing, requesting, deploying, and supporting military units. Within the U.S. Air Force/Air National Guard, there are Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC) and Unit Type Codes (UTC) for every deployable person and capability.

As an example, in order to provide forward deployed fire and emergency services, the individual service members would be from the 3E7X1 AFSC. These personnel would be organized into teams with UTC designations for functions such as command and control (4F9FJ/4FPFJ), and tactical fire and rescue (4FPFP). These teams would be paired with vehicles and equipment (e.g., AS/

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32P-22 Fire Engine) as well as communications and sustainment UTCs. Ultimately, the personnel have the appropriate skills, are organized into effective and relevant teams, and are deployed with appropriate tools, equipment, and supplies to meet mission demands. The challenge with this is that while the concept may seem familiar and make sense to a state emergency manager, the verbiage, acronyms, and process do not. Attempting to determine the type and kind of resources that may be leveraged from the National Guard should be consistent with the processes used for other interstate resources.

In the development of MRPs for National Guard resources, there are instances where the resource will be typed in accordance with NIMS Resource Typing Standards, but in other cases, the unique capabilities of the resource are outside of the standard. Using the Air National Guard fire and emergency services example mentioned previously, a 4FPFP team with an AS/32P-22 (fire engine) can easily be typed to a Type II Structural Firefighting capability identified within NIMS. Three 4FPFP teams paired with an Urban Search and Rescue Kit UTC can be typed to a Type III US&R capability. Both of these resources, by type and kind, would be known to state emergency management officials.

Conversely, the Homeland Response Force (HRF) is a robust 577-member deployed unit intended to provide command and control for its military responders, search and extraction, decontamination, and medical care during large scale disasters involving chemical, biological, nuclear, or radiological materials. Because this is a unique capability it is not typed against the NIMS standard, but in developing the MRP, its capability, limitations, and support needs would be known to state emergency management officials well in advance of the need for such a resource.

NIMS/ICS Training for National Guard

In addition to the military training that National Guard members receive as part of their military specialty, members with responsibilities to support civil authorities during times of disaster also receive National Incident Management System/Incident Command System (NIMS/ICS) training to their appropriate level of incident participation. Here again, while the military has well-established systems and processes for command, control and coordination of military resources, it is an exclusive system that is not familiar to many emergency managers.

Military certifications and licensure also present challenges with integration, as these may not be known or accepted by civilian authorities. One way of addressing this has been the military career-field or National Guard modifying requirements to ensure that service member training meets civilian certification requirements, or requiring personnel to be trained and become certified to industry standards well recognized by civilian emergency management officials such as the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC).

Military planning is another area where the services have well-established doctrine for planning development, content and format that will likely be unfamiliar to state and local emergency management officials. In order to continue to address this challenge, state National Guard organizations are also engaging their civilian counterparts at the state EMA and FEMA Region levels for state, geo-specific (city), and regional planning efforts for major disasters and emergencies. This allows for military plans to support and integrate into civil plans as well as to ensure inclusion of key elements necessary for effective integration at the time of plan execution, such as the use of ICS during disaster response. This also serves to establish relationships among military homeland response and civilian emergency management planners and builds the planning network that is critical to effective coordination when a major disaster occurs.

Conclusion

The new normal for emergency management will involve larger, more frequent, and more complex disasters that will require significant resources performing traditional roles, as well as resources that will perform roles yet to be identified due to the unique and complex nature of disasters and catastrophes. Many of these resources will come from the National Guard. The new normal requires civilian and military planning and preparedness efforts to become assimilated in order to ensure effective disaster response and recovery. The development of MRPs, the implementation of NIMS/ICS and industry-recognized training and certification, and the integration of city, state and regional planning efforts are key to the future success of National Guard support to civil authorities.

References

Training & Education Corner

Cultural Competence in Risk Reduction Course

By Therese Quinn

You probably know about the great training that is available at the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) in Emmitsburg, Maryland, but you may not be aware of some equally interesting courses available at the National Fire Academy (NFA), located on the same campus as EMI.

In January 2013, I was allowed to participate in a new training at NFA titled Cultural Competence in Risk Reduction (R0394). The course was primarily for fire prevention personnel to learn how to more effectively communicate to a diverse community for the purpose of reducing risks in the community. Since I have often stressed the importance of cultural competence in emergency management, I thought it would be an interesting course to take.

It was not only interesting, but also was one of the best courses that I have taken. The six-day class was taught by two instructors. One was a subject matter expert in the field of culture and diversity, and the other was a fire service professional in risk reduction. The coursework is based on Figuring Foreigners Out, by Craig Storti, which participants were encouraged to read before the course began.

Course Structure and Content

After introductions, the course reviewed risk reduction models. From there, cultural competence was explored within the realm of risk reduction, looking at a spectrum of cultural perspectives. The foundations of culture were examined, and people talked about where their own cultures fit within those foundations. Participants learned about assessing community risks for cultural groups in their own community and then worked on creating strategies to address those risks.

The class worked both individually and in groups to complete a risk reduction goal and an action plan. Besides the full days of class work, there also were reading and written assignments to complete each night. Throughout the course, each element of cultural competence was related back to fire prevention and risk reduction.

As you may have guessed, I am not in the fire service, but work in public health and emergency management as the Snohomish County Medical Reserve Corps Coordinator. This course was very relevant to the work that I do in communicating to diverse populations about preparedness.

Learn More

If you are interested in learning strategies to better work and communicate in diverse communities, I encourage you to explore this interesting class. The course number is R0394, and details are available on the NFA website.

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