

Policy Report and Recommendations
Emergency and Disaster Leadership Preparedness:
A Summit on Preparing Today's Leaders
For Tomorrow's Emergencies
November 15, 2007

Policy recommendation used in preparing this report came from several sources: the speakers, each of whom was an expert in a specialized area of emergency and disaster preparedness; recommendations made during the final speakers panel and discussion; and a questionnaire presented to each registrant during registration. We owe a great deal of appreciation to those who took time from their busy schedules to participate in this state-wide summit which also included participants from other states.

1. Participants were asked to identify organizations or resources needing special attention in terms of being equipped for emergencies and disasters of the future. The following organizations or groups were mentioned:

General Public,

Schools,

Local Governments,

County EMS Departments,

Police Departments,

Fire Departments and Volunteer Fire Departments,

Families,

Business Community Including Small Businesses,

First Line Responders,

Telecommunication and 9-1-1 Centers,

County Law Enforcement Agencies,

Municipal Law Enforcement Agencies,

Volunteer Organizations,

NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations),
Churches and Faith Based Organizations, and
Agricultural Businesses.

The fact that participants mentioned so many local organizations reflects a comment by Douglas Hoell, Director of North Carolina Emergency Management, that, “All disasters begin and end at the local level not the state or federal level. In times of disaster people in communities and neighborhoods are the ones on the front lines.”

Special resource needs on the above questions and on satisfaction with federal and state disaster relations with the local community recommendations were:

- First line responders thought there was a need for more information and for improved communication between local, state and federal officials.
- Increasing state-of-the-art interoperable emergency communication systems that work in the mountain terrain of Western North Carolina was identified as a top priority. This need to prioritize Western NC needs in communication was expressed as the mountain terrain presented unique challenges in emergency radio and data communication and transportation.
- Resources for better communication equipment and first responder emergency equipment are also needed. Some participants suggested that email capabilities need to be examined all over North Carolina to be sure they are operable when power outages occur.
- More training and educational opportunities and resources are needed for officials at the local, state and federal levels and consideration or plans for special personnel are needed to fill in while the training is taking place.
- More cooperative and planning frameworks need to be established so cooperation between officials will be possible. More will be mentioned on this point later.

The repeated need for more planning, training and preparation was also mentioned by Corey Gruber, Assistant Deputy of the National Preparedness Directorate of the United States Department of Homeland Defense in his discussion on valuable lessons learned from Katrina, “The greatest thing we faced in Katrina was the lack of planning, preparedness, and building that had characterized this county for decades. These problems did not happen overnight. We walked into Katrina and into September 11 with a suitcase full of behavioral assumptions. Some of them proved wrong.” Later during the discussion Corey Gruber said, “The message to all of us should be: We have a responsibility for preparedness.”

2. In order to better prepare for the future, our questionnaire asked participants what they believed to be North Carolina's greatest disaster threat. These possible future threats are listed in the order of the frequency with which they were mentioned:

Hurricanes and Tornados;

Flooding;

Pandemic Flu;

Drought;

Terrorist Incident such as a Bio-Hazard, Dirty Bomb, or Nuclear Bomb;

Contamination of Water Supply;

Nuclear Power Plant Accident or Disaster;

Hazardous Materials;

School Shootings;

Ice storms;

Large Fires; and

Extended Power Outages.

While these are all possible disaster areas that we must be prepared for Douglas Hoell, Director of the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management, mentioned in his keynote address that, "There are disasters on the horizon things that we have not even thought of yet." In addition he mentioned the threat of massive technology failures and the rapidly rising cost of fuel which could lead to an economic emergency.

3. Another question on the survey related to obstacles to achieving maximum efficiency in the area of disaster preparedness and response. This question is important because as Kyle Carter, Western Carolina University Provost, indicated in his welcome, "We hope that through your participation you will help provide some of the answers we all need. We don't want our daughters, our friends or our colleagues to be victims of us not being prepared. I'm glad we are working collaboratively to solve problems that could be facing us just around the corner."

- The greatest obstacle mentioned in the survey was the lack of funds for better technology, equipment and personnel resources. Many participants thought that the greatest need for resources was at the local level.

- Another major obstacle was the need for more and better communication. One problem mentioned was the need for greater bandwidth on internet communication as well as the ability to have equipment that would work during power outages. Also some of the participants thought there needed to be more interactive network capabilities and that more emergency communication equipment is needed at the local level. Improved radio communication capabilities was also mentioned as well as the need for the dissemination of more practical and helpful information. In the communications area it was felt that there needs to be more coordination and communication between government agencies at all levels of government especially between the federal, state and local levels as well as interagency communication. Another problem in the area of communication was that many at the local level of government felt they needed more input on resources, policies and planning with respect to the state and federal levels of government. Some participants recommended that NIMS (National Incident Management Systems) be institutionalized and that ICS (Incident Command Systems) be utilized more.
- During a disaster or emergency some expressed the concern that hospitals and emergency shelters would be overcrowded and that more shelters need to be provided in communities for displaced people or for at risk populations needing medical attention.
- A final obstacle mentioned was the area of personnel needs. More assessment of personnel needs during emergencies will be needed in the future for long-term emergency planning. For example, EMS capacities are already on overload and this capacity must be increased in periods of emergencies. It was also mentioned that more skilled resource personnel are needed and currently there is extensive turnover of employees with needed skills.

4. On survey questions nearly all responders thought our nation's preparedness was better than before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Nevertheless, on the questions of what actions could we take to reduce the effects of potential disasters that threaten North Carolina there were suggestions from participants and speakers.

- A top priority seemed to be the need for continual preparation and training in exercises and action based exercises and action based exercises that involve action based drills for responders. It was suggested that more drills need to be related to natural disasters, pandemic flu and terrorism. Also some of these exercises should be state-wide and multi- state since emergencies and disasters often occur over an extensive geographical range. As mentioned earlier more elected officials need to be involved in disaster training and drill programs according to some participants.
- Training needs were prioritized in the questionnaire surveys as well as by summit speakers. Lisa Briggs and Karen Mason, Applied Criminology Professors presented findings on training from a survey of 350 agencies in the 18 Western-

most counties showing a majority of the first line responders lack training in technical surveillance and intelligence management, with forty–seven percent lacking training in preparedness to deal with weapons of mass destruction. They found training to be more effective on natural disasters than dealing with terrorist type disasters. One of the speakers, Greg Grayson, Chief of the Fire and Rescue Department with the City of Asheville, noted that emergency training for first responders is available year-round through a variety of delivery agencies. Personnel constraints were mentioned earlier as being one of the problems of taking advantage of training opportunities. Another speaker, Robert Berry, Applied Criminology Professor, mentioned that a number of agencies offer training including FEMA, universities, community colleges and the International Association of Emergency Managers. Dealing with personnel, time, and financial constraints for training opportunities seemed to be more problematical in smaller and medium size jurisdictions. This problem needs to be addressed since training was mentioned as a top priority. Training needs to be viewed as an ongoing process with more funding available according to many participants.

- Another major obstacle was the need to make the public more aware, ready and knowledgeable about their preparation and responsibilities during an emergency or disaster. This is a major challenge of the future. Debra Collington, Director of Emergency Services with the Asheville Mountain Area Chapter of the Red Cross, indicated in her presentation that, “The better our communities are prepared when something happens that makes things a whole lot easier.” She also indicated civic groups need to get more involved in helping to prepare citizens for emergencies. Douglas Hoell, Director of the N. C. Division of Emergency Management mentioned that public education is “extremely important as we move forward” since communities and neighborhoods are on the front lines in emergencies and disasters. Gruber and Collington discussed the first 72 hours as the time period that families and individuals must be prepared for since local, state, and federal officials may not arrive immediately and the magnitude of the problem may be great. Participants recommended more public preparedness. For example, the American Red Cross has a video on disaster preparedness and preparing an emergency kit and also preparing a family disaster plan. It was also suggested that public media become more involved in community preparation for citizens and families to be ready in times of emergencies or disasters. Public education emerged from the summit as a major challenge ahead.
- Some participants mentioned that man-made disasters can be prevented by effective police and detective work as well as effective national and international intelligence. We need to continue to emphasize early warning systems and intelligence gathering.
- Creating a culture of preparedness for emergencies and disasters also emerged as a top summit priority. Dr. Martha Salyers, Public Health Regional Surveillance Team 6, mentioned the challenge of creating a culture of preparedness during her presentation and Corey Gruber, Assistant Deputy Administrator for the National

Preparedness Directorate, indicated that “The Message to all of us should be we have a responsibility for preparedness.” Creating a culture of preparedness requires systems thinking and the realization that on the one hand participants seemed to think based on the questionnaire that we have advanced from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 but we have a challenge of developing a culture of preparedness. As we meet these challenges local responders need to be more involved in planning for equipment needs, training programs and assessing their need for additional resources. The level of communications between federal, state, and local officials involved in emergency and disaster preparedness needs to be much greater in the challenge of creating a culture of preparedness. In order to deal with extensive training, personnel, equipment and resource needs of first line responders more financial resources will be needed. Finally more resources need to be committed to public education to help the public become prepared for emergencies and disasters.

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We wish to thank the sponsors of the summit as well as the speakers and panal chairs at the summit.

Sponsors: City of Asheville, *Asheville Citizen-Times*, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, NC Division of Emergency Management, Macon County Government, WCU Department of Political Science and Public Affairs, WCU Department of Applied Criminology,
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