

ENERGY COMMUNITIES ALLIANCE
EMERGENCY RESPONSE PEER EXCHANGE
SUMMARY

June 17-18, 2002
Las Vegas, Nevada

I. Introduction

The Energy Communities Alliance (“ECA”) conducted an Emergency Response Peer Exchange (“Peer Exchange”) on June 17-18, 2002 in Las Vegas, Nevada. The Peer Exchange brought together local emergency responders and local government officials from communities impacted by Department of Energy (“DOE”) activities, and DOE officials. During the Peer Exchange, local emergency responders and DOE officials discussed roles and experiences with emergency response and anti-terrorism activities and how to improve existing processes.

The goal of the Peer Exchange was to facilitate discussion among emergency responders and for them to learn from each other about the similar issues that they are facing relative to emergency response.

II. Emergency Preparedness and Response Needs of Energy Communities

During the Peer Exchange, local government officials, local emergency responders, DOE officials, and State officials highlighted the following issues with regard to emergency response activities at and adjacent to DOE facilities:

Communication

- Communication equipment used by DOE and local governments adjacent to DOE facilities must be compatible. For example, a key issue that regularly arises during incidents is the inability of local emergency responders to communicate with DOE due to incompatibility of communication systems.
- In communities that are host to several federal facilities, local emergency responders need to form working relationships with the various federal agencies.
- DOE and local governments should improve communication coordination during events.

Standards

- Current and future standards must be consistently enforced and the parties involved must be accountable. DOE should investigate using third parties to enforce the standards.
- Standards must be applicable to exercises and joint training on- and off-site. Standards should be consistent across the DOE complex.
- DOE can use the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Army and Nuclear Regulatory Commission funding and training modules as examples of how federal agencies properly develop and enforce an emergency response system.

Exercises

- DOE, state and local governments must engage in joint training, both on- and off-site. Joint training should not be a “special event.” The development of personal relationships is very important and shared experiences help develop those relationships.
- During DOE and local government exercises, the participant roles and responsibilities must be consistent with action taken during a “real-time” event.
- Training and education for local emergency responders adjacent to DOE facilities across the country needs to be consistent.
- DOE’s excess equipment is very useful to local emergency responders; however, the Department should keep an up-to-date inventory of its excess equipment and make local emergency responders aware of the equipment available for reuse.
- Current exercises at DOE sites are too scripted. The exercises must be effective and graded properly. For example, in some cases press releases touting a success are released before the exercise actually occurs.
- The current system does not permit failures during exercises. If a failure occurs the exercise is sometimes cancelled. (See contractor fee structure discussed below)

Funding

- The budget process for funding the Department and the structure of the Department’s emergency response and management programs are not conducive to creating a successful integrated emergency response system.
- Funding is not transparent for emergency response activities and often is an overhead item that is paid at a level selected by the contractor.

- When a contractor's fee is tied to success of exercises, the contractor's incentive is to only conduct exercises the contractor knows it can accomplish. The fee structure of contractors should be reviewed to ensure safety and security are the top priorities.
- Local governments require funding for emergency response training and equipment.
- An assessment of local emergency responder capabilities and needs throughout the complex would help identify the capacity of local emergency responders.

Security

- Local government officials and emergency responders need to have security clearances and the process for receiving the clearances needs to be efficient. Emergency responders should not need to deal with clearance issues at a threat or incident.
- Community preparedness in the arena of emergency response must be seen as a security issue.
- DOE and local emergency responders must increase intelligence capabilities in order to enhance security.

III. Lessons Learned

The following are lessons learned as a result of the wildfires in New Mexico and Washington:

Simplicity- Emergency response plans must be kept simple or they will not be used. A plan must be updated often.

Volunteers- Local emergency responders should be prepared to work with volunteers, and identify how and when to utilize the volunteers. Volunteers can be used as "point-of-contacts" at a public information center.

Donations- Local emergency responders should develop a plan for specific donations needed during emergencies. Volunteers can help to organize donations.

Finances- A local government should utilize a financial manager to track procurements and expenditures.

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Staff Communication- A plan of how to communicate with staff members and workers during an emergency is essential and should be reviewed frequently.

Community- Identify the location of “special needs” citizens. Further, animal shelters and veterinarians should be identified to take care of the animals.

Issues of Authority- Local governments need to identify positions of authority, and staff members must be made aware of who is in authority. Also, local governments need to identify a spokesperson that is in a leadership position.

Communication with Community- Communities should have joint information centers that include both DOE and local government representatives; this will enable effective communication and coordination of information to the community.

Radio Systems- Emergency responders should have multiple backup systems and need to prioritize cell sites.

Hazard Safety- Local governments need information about the threat from potential hazardous releases and should have access to the data collected.

Develop Regional Teams- Local governments should work with the surrounding communities to develop a team of emergency responders in the region who can be utilized in an emergency.

Re-entry into the Community- During the re-entry process into a community, a local emergency response team must identify who needs to be involved to promote safety and security.

Long-term- Mitigating the effects of wildfire is at least a 3-year process. Need to recognize the impact that the emergency will have on the community.

IV. Action Items for Emergency Responders and ECA

- **Presentation of Peer Exchange Summary to DOE**

ECA staff will meet with top DOE officials to relay the issues of concern identified by Peer Exchange participants.

- **Emergency Response Committee**

ECA established a new committee responsible for focusing on emergency response activities pertaining to communities adjacent to or impacted by DOE facilities.

- **Needs Assessment**

ECA will develop a needs assessment and identification of key issues for local governments adjacent to DOE facilities by conducting a survey of its members.

- **Complex-Wide List of Contacts**

ECA will compile a list of contact information for local emergency personnel adjacent to or impacted by DOE facilities.

- **Peer Exchange Between DOE Site Personnel and Local Fire Officials**

ECA will examine the potential for hosting a Peer Exchange between the emergency response officials working at DOE sites and in the communities adjacent to the DOE sites.

- **DOE Emergency Response Policies**

Local emergency responders and ECA will examine DOE Directive 151.1 that establishes policy for emergency response both on- and off-site. Local emergency responders and ECA will also examine DOE draft policies regarding emergency response and will provide comments on the draft policies to the appropriate DOE officials.