

The obvious lesson drawn from Hurricane Katrina is the importance of disaster preparedness at all levels, especially among first responders. Homeland security experts admit that their wakeup call came on Sept. 11, 2001, but remind us that they have been preparing feverishly ever since.

# Emergency Training Takes CENTER STAGE

**A**s public reaction to Hurricane Katrina erupted into a flurry of finger pointing, one topic seemed conspicuously absent from the debate: the professionalism of emergency personnel who assisted hurricane victims on the scene and in communities throughout the country.

Although the readiness of first responders to meet U.S. Gulf Coast's enormous demands will clearly be grist for formal assessment, initial reports appear to be favorable toward emergency response units from around the country.

That's as it should be, considering that mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery from natural and man-made disasters have become a national priority in the post-9/11 era. The feverish activity could itself be likened to a hurricane, one that positions training in the middle of its eye.

Everywhere you turn—within government agencies at all levels, public health organizations, and even among many large corporations—emergency planning and training activities are under way to prepare individuals for the unexpected. The Department of Homeland Security urges every American to be prepared—a cry that is certain to take on new urgency following Katrina's sobering lessons.

Learning technologies are an integral part of the training mix, including free online courses available on the Federal Emergency Management Agency website ([www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)). One such course, called Are You Ready? An In-depth Guide to Citizen Preparedness, provides step-by-step instructions on how to survive a litany of natural hazards and terrorist attacks.

The government's emphasis on training rose to another level in September with the appointment of career emergency management professional, R. David Paulison, as the new director of the Federal Emergency Management

Agency. A former firefighter, Paulison headed FEMA's emergency preparedness force before being named head of its U.S. Fire Administration. That organization operates the Emergency Management Institute, the nation's center for the development and delivery of emergency management training for professionals and volunteers throughout the country. It is located at the National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

### Training guidelines issued

The firestorm of public and Congressional criticism pointed at the White House and the Department of Homeland Security for their response failures regarding Hurricane Katrina will surely lead to changes at DHS. The massive agency is a dizzying amalgam of departments which, like FEMA, typically operate separate training organizations focused on emergency preparedness and other areas.

In travel and transportation alone, TSA inherited from other departments the professional workforce, programs, and infrastructure of the Coast Guard, Customs Service, Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the Transportation Security Administration. From the Department of Justice, it acquired the Office for Domestic Preparedness, which is the principal provider of training and funds for state and local government programs aimed at protecting the United States from acts of terrorism.

A giant leap toward integrating independent security training initiatives throughout the country has been made by FEMA's National Incident Management System. NIMS is a national approach to managing incidents at all jurisdictional levels across the full spectrum of hazard scenarios. It was created by a 2003 presidential order that requires "a consistent nationwide template" to enable all government, private-sector, and nongovernmental organizations to work together during domestic crises.

That directive (HSPD-5) also requires federal departments and agencies to make the adoption of NIMS by state and local organizations a condition for federal preparedness assistance, including grants and contracts. This year has been a ramp-up year for the system, highlighted by a September 30 deadline for states to submit their self-certification plans needed to become eligible for fixed grants. FEMA will continue working toward NIMS compliance during fiscal year 2006.

The NIMS ball got rolling in earnest in August with the issuance of a National Standard Curriculum Training Development Guidance, a detailed protocol for Incident Command System (ICS) training providers. Eagerly awaited by training organizations, the guidelines provide a common language

and frame of reference for everyone involved in emergency response. "The new guidelines will enable standardizing by state agencies that want to develop curricula," says Scotty Hager, director of state and local homeland security services for General Physics Corporation.

The ultimate result will be a detailed curriculum for all training courses that support the NIMS implementation. The curriculum will also clarify training necessary for NIMS-compliance and streamline the training approval process for recognized courses.

The curriculum initially will be made up of NIMS awareness training and training to support the ICS, which must be followed by state and local entities. It will eventually include all NIMS training requirements, including training established to meet national credentialing standards.

### Setting the bar

Just as with other areas of learning, the increased need for improving the skills of government security and emergency personnel has created a competitive marketplace for training companies competing for contracts. Two of the most prominent are Plateau Systems and Geo-Learning, which are both providers of enterprise learning management systems that are employed in numerous government agencies and departments. The two firms are prime contractors for the federal government's training website, USALearning.gov, which previously was known as GoLearn.

Their activities demonstrate the impressive breadth of security-related training being employed today and the opportunities for technologically savvy vendors to provide them.

"The fastest growing training market today is among state and local governments," reports Frank Russell, CEO of GeoLearning. "Roughly 50 percent of that is homeland security training." The increase in federal funding for security training initiatives will ensure the continued growth of that sector, he says.

One of GeoLearning's most exciting projects is in New Jersey, where it is delivering first responder training to 145,000 police, fire, and emergency personnel using the GeoMaestro platform. The contract for New Jersey's Domestic Security Preparedness Task Force also manages competencies, skills development, employee selection, and succession planning related to homeland security.

The initiative is considered a blueprint for first responder training elsewhere because it includes assessments of individual competencies in security-related skills as well as compilations of detailed student training records on each participant. It also tracks attendance and performance records for a database

used by emergency management teams when planning for and responding to disasters.

"The system assesses a student's individual skills, delivers targeted training, and measures the results and impact on the organization of closing that gap," says W.R. Wymer, senior product specialist. Ultimately, he says, those capabilities will be linked to mapping software and GPS systems so that in the event of an incident, a call would go out within minutes to the most appropriate responders skilled in a needed expertise.

"If a terrorist act were to strike the Holland tunnel, for example, the system could determine what structural engineer is closest to the scene," says Wymer. The state could similarly conduct worst-case scenario testing by selecting points on a map to determine if sufficient emergency response skills are available for a given incident. He says such capabilities are currently being phased into the system.

Norman J. Easton, a training coordinator in the state's Office of the Attorney General, says the Geo-Maestro platform and its assessment features enable practitioners to sort training performance data at state, county, regional, and municipal levels to meet a variety of first responder needs. Competency profiles enable them to certify individuals when necessary in their specific skills.

Another organization assisting New Jersey in its first responder training is the New Jersey Institute of Technology. The state's Homeland Security Technology Systems Center, headquartered on its campus, seeks to reduce national security vulnerabilities. NJIT also trains state police in counter-terrorism and is working in the petrochemical sector under a training grant with the AFL-CIO. It participated in a recent week-long terrorism simulation that involved 20,000 people in the state.

At Arlington, Virginia-based Plateau Systems, training contracts with government security and other departments represent a dynamic growth area. The provider has landed contracts within numerous federal departments, including the Transportation Security Administration, the Department of Energy, and the Justice Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives.

The pace of training is especially brisk at TSA, which went from zero to 60,000 employees at 450 airports seemingly overnight, says Linda Lazor, senior vice president of marketing. Plateau was awarded the agency's LMS contract with full deployment in nine months. TSA has installed 350 courses on the system, which it has branded the TSA Online Learning Center.

"We are dealing with people who are preoccupied with nothing but security," says Lazor. "They are not only disseminating real-time learning around policies and procedures aimed at making things more se-

cure. They are also keeping everyone's response skills up to date."

To emphasize the real-time nature of airport security, TSA trainers conduct weekly briefings on current threats and incidents that have occurred throughout the world, says Lazor. Known as Weekly Threat in the Spotlight Briefings, they highlight best practices employed to deal with airport and other transportation incidents, she says.

Another important security training initiative is underway in Charlotte, North Carolina, where the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department has awarded Plateau a contract to deliver online learning to more than 1,500 officers and detectives across 12 districts. The software application allows officers and administrators to manage a complex firearms training schedule and review a variety of training courses online, where and when they need it.

Lazor calls it a precedent-setting contract that serves widely distributed and mobile officers who must cope with strict learning and certification demands.

For firearms training alone, the department schedules 6,000 sessions a year on a firing range with only 20 slots. It must also schedule and deliver training for soft skills, hazardous materials, radar certification, OSHA instruction, diversity training, and numerous cyclical training courses. It tracks the learning history of every officer for state and national regulators, and can retrieve records immediately upon request.

In its first month of operation, 1,000 officers used the Plateau LMS to enroll in mandatory firearms training. Instead of signing a paper roster, they check their personal development plans and enroll for training on a web browser. Once enrolled, the LMS automatically sends them an email attachment that can be saved in their Microsoft Outlook calendar. The officer's homepage also allows them to review all procedural changes and enroll in a variety of courses offered online or in a classroom.

"This is a major change for career police officers who view it as a tool for advancing their careers," says Lazor. "Succession planning in government is a big deal, and it's just as important at this level." She says it's also why Plateau now has a dedicated sales person assigned to attract additional police department business.

### **MC Strategies aids Katrina relief**

As waves of evacuees from Hurricane Katrina fanned out across the country in search of shelter, and in many cases a new beginning, communities opened their arms and wallets to assist. Waiting to help them were teams of medical, fire, and safety professionals who have been carefully trained to respond to natural

and manmade disasters.

One such participant was the Georgia Department of Public Health's East Central Health District, which serves 13 Georgia counties. A day after the hurricane hit, its emergency operations center began performing national disaster and medical support.

"Our training mission ceased as we moved to the response mode," says Charles W. Reneau, director of emergency preparedness. Response procedures established a central processing center and a secondary triage treatment center at an airfield for airlifted victims. It also assisted evacuees arriving from interstate highways.

The agency was well prepared for the initiative thanks in part to a relationship with MC Strategies, an Atlanta-based health-care training company. Part of the health and science division of publisher Elsevier, MC Strategies helps state and local organizations prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural and man-made disasters.

MC Strategies provides web-based training to the health-care industry, which has a client base of more than 1,500 hospitals as well as nearly 100 colleges and universities. Its products include the WebInservice Knowledge Deployment System (KDS) learning management platform, and content that includes some 4,000 lessons. The company's entire library is certified by ASTD.

MC Strategies began to tackle the training needs of the first responder community two years ago via its USA Prepare Division, which helps train health-care, emergency response, and school personnel to be ready when disaster strikes. It offers custom online and classroom-based courseware developed from homegrown sources that include the Standard Operating Procedures created by clients as part of their emergency operations plans. It manages and tracks the training through its LMS.

USA Prepare has developed a specialized product called the Public Health Virtual University, which provides standardized online training across the spectrum of local agencies and institutions that serve the public health needs of communities. PHVU enables

public health leaders to provide coordinated competency-based training for their employees, volunteers, and local hospitals.

"There are approximately 4,500 public health agencies throughout the United States, every one of which must manage training for their personnel," explains Tim Boone, managing director of USA Prepare. "Distance learning is perfectly suited for them."

Boone says some appropriate first responder content has been developed and placed on the web by universities but it isn't managed, which limits its usefulness. "In addition to the e-learning and classroom training developed by MC Strategies for public health agencies, the PHVU can be linked to the public website of any university that has been established for that training," he says. "The training manager, bioterrorism coordinator, and other leaders can select courses they want individuals to take, and assign them to the appropriate employees or volunteers via our KDS. Doing so allows that training to be managed."

The tool helps organizations track and manage staff competencies, e-learning, classroom training events, and third-party training and exercises. The system can feed competency certification data to a crisis information management system and interact with the Volunteer Coordination Center to enroll and provide just-in-time training for spontaneous volunteers at a public health incident.

"By helping disparate and unaffiliated public health organizations communicate in times of crisis, the system ensures a chain of command and communications structure to make sure there is a coordinated effort from volunteers on up," says Boone. "We provide the tools, system, and training expertise so local public health and community and hospital leaders can build a coordinated system with specific policies and procedures," he says.

In March 2005, the Volunteer Coordination Center began the deployment of its PHVU in Augusta, Georgia, in cooperation with the East Central Health District, Advanced Practice Center there. The project was funded by a grant from the National Association of County and City Health Officials. The program trains

## American Red Cross Response to Hurricane Katrina

The devastation of Hurricane Katrina has reminded all Americans that they must be ready to handle the aftermath. This Gulf Coast storm will NOT be forgotten.

+ Nearly three million overnight stays in 1,150 shelters across 27 states and the District of Columbia

+ More than 174,000 Red Cross workers from all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands have assisted the relief effort.

+ During this effort, the Red Cross has trained more than 74,000 people in specialized disaster relief skills.

+ The Red Cross, in coordination with the

Southern Baptist Convention, has served nearly 15 million hot meals and more than 10 million snacks to survivors of Hurricane Katrina.

+ On a single day, more than 1 million meals were served.

Statistics as of September 30, 2005

public health employees as well as volunteers in the Medical Reserve Corps in standardized procedures for operating in mass casualty incidents such as a bio-terrorist attack, natural disaster, or pandemic disease.

The training and communications capabilities proved invaluable for public health agencies serving Hurricane Katrina evacuees, claims Gary Zgutowicz, the district's biological training coordinator. "PHVU is the primary source of training for our employees and Medical Reserve Corps personnel. The training is specific to our needs and unique to our district," says Zgutowicz.

The Georgia project will produce a system that assesses individual training needs, assigns learning to individuals based on their job and unique needs, and monitors their progress against a specific learning plan. To date, some 20 hours of instruction have been created.

### Other training programs abound

Countless other security-related training programs are active in governmental organizations at all levels. Among them:

- The Office for Domestic Preparedness funds a program for first responders in chemical, biological, and radiological emergencies. Called the Domestic Preparedness Equipment Technical Assistance Program, it trains firefighters and hospital and EMS personnel in the use of detection, personal protective, and decontamination equipment.

General Physics Corporation provides operations and maintenance training for the program via mobile technical assistance teams that visit emergency response organizations. The program avoids sending responders to a centralized training facility, says GP executive Scotty Hager. The mobile trailers enable hands-on training on real equipment, saving actual response equipment for real emergencies, he says.

- A top priority for the Department of Homeland Security is a program called US-VISIT, which helps secure U.S. borders and enhance the immigration system. It is part of new security measures that begin overseas and continue through a foreign visitor's arrival to and departure from the U.S. Digital, inkless finger scans, and photographs, are among technologies employed to determine whether the person applying for entry is the same individual who was issued the visa.

The administrators of the technology are trained in its use by Global Knowledge, a Cary, North Carolina-based training company. Global Knowledge reaches the far-flung student base with its virtual classroom e-learning platform that mirrors the instructor-led experience behind firewalls using Secure Socket Layer technology and an advanced encryption

tool. "Using this platform, individuals can do role-based training specific to their needs on the exact hardware and software they need to learn," says Kevin Rogers, vice president of government sales. "Instructors use VoIP technology to talk one-on-one with a student or address the entire class." Rogers says the company can create a course once and deliver it for self-paced e-learning, instructor-led and virtual classroom delivery, depending on the client's needs.

- While a large focus of government training is devoted to full-time professionals, the continual training needs of volunteers are being addressed in numerous government and private programs. The federal government is relying increasingly on volunteers through the creation of programs such as the Citizen Corps, which seeks to tap the perceived well-spring of heroism and selflessness among Americans after 9/11. The administration hopes that Citizen Corps Councils will be established to champion public education and outreach, training, and volunteer service.

Other programs and partnership organizations, each with their own training needs, have also been established. They include the Community Emergency Response Team Program, administered by DHS to educate people about disaster preparedness and basic response skills; the Fire Corps to promote the use of citizen advocates to assist fire and rescue departments; an expanded Neighborhood Watch Program to incorporate terrorism awareness and education into its existing crime prevention mission; and Volunteers in Public Service to assist law enforcement programs.

During future emergencies, such volunteer organizations are expected to play important response roles. "If we have a major event where vaccinations are required, the volunteers in the Medical Reserve Corps will staff inoculation stations throughout the country," says Tim Boone of MC Strategies' USA Prepare Division. "We need those volunteers, and they must be well trained," he says.

Charles Reneau, director of Georgia's East Central Health District, urges corporate trainers to join the brigade by making emergency training available to their workforces, and by promoting them. "Companies could easily make time available for employees to access these programs in the work environment, and set up a training center for it," he says. **TD**

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