



Help Is Out There

How the TERT Program Can Assist PSAPs

BY CHRIS FISCHER

As we approach the close of another active and devastating hurricane season, I'm excited to report on the success of a program implemented in response to lessons we've learned from previous natural disasters.

In the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita in September 2005, APCO International testified before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation hearing on the Hurricane Katrina response, specifically on communications issues exposed by the storm. In his testimony, then APCO President-Elect Willis Carter offered recommendations to improve local, regional and national interoperability; improve planning and training for disasters; establish common incident command structures at all emergency response levels; and ensure public safety communications networks are built and maintained to withstand worst case scenarios. He suggested mirroring telephone central offices supporting 9-1-1 tandems in locations sufficiently remote to allow for quick restoration of 9-1-1 services.

One of the greatest challenges after these disasters, however, was not technological in nature. It was maintaining adequate communications staffing levels.

Both Florida and North Carolina had telecommunicator mutual aid programs in place prior to Katrina, but their efforts were confined to providing assistance within their own states. The effort of the North Carolina team to deploy into Louisiana after the 2005 storms and the difficulties associated with that deployment led to the recognition that the program should be promoted on a national level and that awareness of the program should be heightened with local, state and federal emergency management agencies. To address this problem and expand on the North Carolina and Florida programs,

APCO International and NENA joined hands to more fully develop the Telecommunicator Emergency Response Taskforce (TERT) through the National Joint TERT Initiative (NJTI).

NJTI offers a comprehensive program that includes assistance to individual states in developing programs that establish predetermined and preselected trained teams of individuals who can be mobilized quickly and deployed to assist communications centers during disasters. States that have a TERT program in place or are in the planning process include Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas and Wisconsin, among others. Recently, TERT was officially added to the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) resource list.

Hurricane Ike recently devastated areas from Texas to Illinois, and TERT teams responded to meet the challenge. Damage to agencies in these areas included everything from loss of power to the total destruction of facilities. As I write this, telecommunicators are deploying to the affected areas to provide much-needed relief.

"The pre-planning and rapid response of TERT telecommunicators to provide assistance and relief to stricken communications centers clearly demonstrated the value of such a program," says Doug Edmonds, co-chair of NJTI.

No matter if the response was to support the Catastrophic Medical Operations Center in Houston, or police, fire and EMS operations in Galveston County, or Seabrook City or Bridge City, Texas, we are very proud of the telecommunicators who rose to the occasion and assisted their fellow telecommunicators during the worst of times. (For more about the TERT re-

sponse, see "Prepare Dispatchers," p. 16.)

NJTI is working with the following government agencies and allied organizations to implement TERT and provide mission-critical disaster assistance to communications centers nationwide:

- The Office of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) for federal credentialing of telecommunicators deployed through TERT;
- The National Emergency Managers Association (NEMA) to establish typing of TERT resources for inclusion in EMAC;
- The International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) to alert emergency management personnel to the availability of TERT resources;
- A Blue Ribbon panel of telecommunications experts to develop and establish a standardized TERT training curriculum, with assistance from the DHS's Emergency Management Institute; and
- TERT coordinators from individual states to standardize the process and procedures related to TERT, including FEMA-required paperwork for reimbursement.

APCO is encouraged by the steps already taken and will continue to work with communications centers, our association partners and the federal government to ensure the highest level of preparedness for our members and protection for our citizens. **||PSC||**



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