Working Together

Featured in This Issue

Pictured on the Cover: Source: ©iStock.com/scanrail

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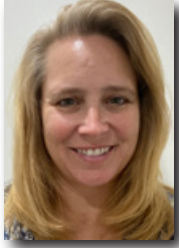Don't forget about last month's Journal! Click **HERE** to download it now.

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Working Together: Partnership, Training, Funding & Tolerance

By Catherine L. Feinman

When community stakeholders work together to prepare for emergencies and disasters, they will be better prepared and have more resources to face whatever threats, risks, and hazards are in their future. Four key aspects to consider when building community resilience are addressed in this June edition of the Domestic Preparedness Journal: public-private partnerships, training, funding, and tolerance

Partnerships that bring together people from different sectors, different disciplines, and different perspectives can identify and close gaps that otherwise may go unnoticed until it is time to respond to a crisis. At that time, it may be too late to overcome challenges and provide the most effective response possible. Tokyo Disney Resort in Japan leveraged its public-private partnerships in 2011 to reduce the operational impact and improve the decision-making process during a large-scale disaster that caused significant flooding across the region.

Training not only helps to develop physical skillsets but also mental skillsets. Effective decision making requires processing vast amounts of information, assessing risks, evaluating complex problems, and determining the best course of action based on those assessments and evaluations. Training to build such leadership skills will help mitigate the impact of the events that regularly occur as well as the low-frequency, high-consequence events that may happen only once in a lifetime.

Funding is what makes most preparedness and response efforts possible. Even organizations that are staffed with volunteers still need funding for equipment and other operational resources. One critical funding source for many public safety efforts is grants. However, to benefit from grants, agencies and organizations need to know the current process for finding, applying for, and using them.

Tolerance is the final topic addressed in this issue. Some level of tolerance is necessary for moving forward with plans and actions. No plan is perfect, not every task can be trained for and practiced, and not every resource will be fully funded and available when needed. Tough leadership decisions include determining what actions will be taken to achieve the best outcome possible with the resources available. Whether building partnerships, training personnel, or funding efforts, communities can continue to build resilience as long as they do not wait for perfect conditions.

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How the Best Get Better:
Partnerships & a Trifecta Disaster

By Judy Kruger & Scott Harris
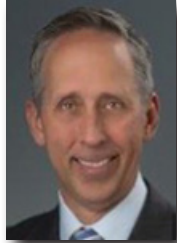
March 11, 2011, is known for the Great East Japan Earthquake (or 3.11 in Japan). The day started as a rainy and cold day when a 9.1 earthquake caused numerous aftershocks that led to power outages, created cracks in roads and buildings, triggered a massive tsunami along the east coast of Japan, and damaged the Fukushima nuclear power plant. Despite widespread damage that led to the deaths of nearly 16,000 people, Tokyo Disney Resort (TDR) withstood the impact due to engineering controls and numerous drills and exercises conducted at the resort in collaboration with the government (Central and Chiba government and local government) and private organizations (Oriental Land Company, OLC; Walt Disney Attraction Japan, WDAJ). Private-public partnerships (PPP) can help build a resilient infrastructure for communities and businesses and facilitate cross-sectoral coordination to deal with cascading events during a major catastrophe.

Only recently has the Emergency Support Function (ESF) #14 been established to represent emergency management's business and infrastructure capability. This function supports efforts to coordinate cross-sector operations, including stabilizing key supply chains among infrastructure owners and operators, businesses, and government partners. Companies like TDR have the primary responsibility of managing their systems in emergencies. Risk reduction is a multidisciplinary collaboration between the private and public sector organizations and is often initiated before an event. Partnership arrangements often require multiple in-kind resources and contracts from various organizations. In this case, TDR had planned for rescue supply storage, first aid supply storage, and food supply storage with the Ministry of Home Affairs and Fire and Disaster Management Agency.

Legacy Agreements Help Inform That Process

Tokyo Disneyland first opened to guests in 1982. Early on, the Oriental Land Company (licensed owner and operator of TDR) collaborated with local and national government agencies to ensure that they had systems in place to be able to care for park guests and cast members for up to 48 hours following a significant incident. Japan has well-defined regulations that apply to the public and private sectors and include preparation before and recovery following an incident.

The TDR Crisis Management Team shared operational guidelines with strategic partners to address operating guidance gaps and increase Japan's preparedness. Resilience-building efforts and operational integration before, during, and after the

Source: Scott Harris (2011).

trifecta were the foundation that led to success. Leading up to 3.11, TDR worked with the Crisis Management Team and Operations Training Team to test various communication tools and identify infrastructure failures. Together, they developed additional processes in agreement with OLC to better manage future events and better plan for fire, seismic activity, tsunami, and terror-related threats.

Communication Networks

After the trifecta threats, local phone lines and the internet did not work. Cellphone lines were down temporarily until they were switched over to the emergency services to support communications. Emergency operations centers (EOC) at the park and city center of Urayasu opened to monitor events. The TDR EOC was open around the clock for almost 48 hours. Guidance from the Japanese Ministry of Transport informed TDR that the rail lines were closed and bus systems were not operable as the bridges closed in the Tokyo area. Messages were relayed via the public address system on a loudspeaker to communicate with guests and cast members. The EOC helped coordinate information, connect field operations, and bring in OLC engineers to inspect buildings to identify secure places to get out of the cold and rain. Cast members provided comfort to guests (handed out blankets, food, and water) based on their training. Satellite phones were available onsite at TDR in Japan to provide immediate access within the first 24 hours with domestic partners and U.S. leaders.

After all the buildings were inspected, guests were relocated to safety and were provided food and accommodations. At the guidance of OLC, TDR housed and sheltered in place nearly 30,000 guests and cast members for almost 24 hours after the seismic event. Following the 3.11 event, crisis management teams from TDR and operators in the U.S. met daily for one month to share updates regarding safety plans, lessons learned, and recovery efforts.

TDR is driven by addressing the needs of its guests, cast members, services, and facilities managers. Through PPP, the company created unique opportunities with the public sector to proactively collaborate with the government (local police, fire department, local emergency management offices, and community partners) to support coordinated response efforts and facilitate communication and information sharing. Relationship building takes time and effort but is critical to successful operations.

Since TDR was able to remain nimble in a rapidly changing environment and facilitate cross-sector information sharing, they could leverage their resources successfully. In addition, because OLC had a great reputation with the local government and Japanese citizens trusted the local authorities, guests flocked back immediately when the OLC's chief executive officer said it was safe to reopen TDR after five weeks of being closed.

Source: Scott Harris (2011).

Regular Drill and Exercises

Preparation and planning for major earthquake (intensity of ~6-7) exercises – facilitated by OLC in partnership with WDAJ and the Disney Global Crisis Management team from Burbank, California – include up to 350 cast members and 1,900 guests. They also engage in ongoing awareness programs (e.g., newsletters, videos, table pop-up cards, and other collateral information on initiation responses to fires, earthquakes, etc.) for cast members and guests.

Because it is common in Japan to experience earthquakes and tsunamis, part of the TDR operational plan was to conduct frequent small drills (~180 annually at restaurants, merchandise stores, attractions, etc.) and two annual table-top exercises in collaboration with all levels of government, park teams, and partners (vendors, police, emergency services, etc.). To this day, drills are conducted early in the morning before the park opens or after closing in the winter months to test smaller local situations around one of the attractions or sections of the park and include TDR cast members as victim actors.

Conclusion

Tokyo Disney Resort is one of the most integrated themed resorts in the world because the Japanese government has been so involved in disaster planning and preparedness to build resilience through PPPs. The introduction of cross-sector business and infrastructure coordination across operations to stabilize and increase communication led to all OLC parks and resorts worldwide and major business hubs having a primary EOC and a backup location.

Case studies are now being developed based on the benchmark that TDR had limited disruption in services following the trifecta disaster and reopened in a relatively short time. This benchmark emphasizes the need for preparation through regular drills, exercises, and training of cast members and guests to increase reaction time in crisis management.

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The Risk-Based Approach to Hazardous Material/WMD Incidents

By Tony Mussorfiti

Emergency responders need the ability to quickly identify all potential hazards, then predict the outcome at a hazardous material or weapon of mass destruction (WMD) incident to determine incident objectives, operational modes (defensive, offensive, non-intervention), and strategies. Additionally, the incident action plan (IAP) needs to be within the capabilities and competencies of available personnel and their personal protective equipment. Consider the following questions.

- What level of chemical protective clothing should be worn for a chlorine leak?

- Should a rescue be initiated at a sarin release?

- Which is the greater threat: biological agents or radioactive material?

There are no correct responses to these questions, that is until all the components of the incident have been addressed, then and only then can an IAP be developed. Otherwise, the IAP would be based upon incomplete, possibly faulty information.

The expanding mission for emergency responders drives the need for examining both current and proposed concepts of operations. As well, the development of various tactical and operational procedures to meet the anticipated demands created by a WMD event has distorted the established division between defensive and offensive response operations. The evolving mission for emergency response agencies drives the need for a review of operating guidelines to respond safely and effectively.

Analyze, Plan, Implement & Evaluate Process

The risk-based approach (RBA) is a systematic process. Although not always linear, RBA is a continuous process until termination or transfer of command. The RBA incorporates the NFPA 470 APIE (analyze, plan, implement, and evaluate) process. The APIE process can be integrated with any response model for an all-encompassing assessment to reduce the risk and ensure an effective response.

Analyze Phase

This action starts with the receipt of the alarm and continues throughout the incident. Although this information is often not complete or accurate, there are usually indicators as to the type of incident (e.g., fire, medical, hazmat, WMD, etc.) and the reliability of the information (e.g., dispatcher reports, smoke, numerous victims complaining difficulty breathing, etc.). While responding, if the officer determines they need additional information, they should request it (e.g., any reports of life safety issues, product or

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container information, occupancy and location, or other incident-specific information). Upon arrival, the officer is required to establish the Incident Command System and provide a preliminary scene report on the conditions, actions, and needs (CAN report) based on their initial scene assessment.

Planning Phase

Planning a response involves understanding the nature of an incident and selecting a course of action that will have a positive impact on the outcome, enhancing the likelihood of a safe and effective response. Incident objectives are defined, and the operational mode is selected. Upon arrival, responders should initially take a defensive position until the hazards can be identified, outcomes determined, and a risk-benefit analysis has proven that an offensive mode is appropriate. While there is always a risk when operating in an offensive mode, the 2020 edition of the Department of Transportation's 2020 Emergency Response Guidebook states:

> *[T]his type of operation can place the responder at risk of exposure, injury, or death. The incident commander makes the decision to do this only if there is an overriding benefit (for example, to perform an immediate rescue, turn off a valve to control a leak, etc. (P. 360)*

Plans should be based on the analysis results of the hazards identified and outcome predicted. Plans should be within the training, resources, and capabilities of personnel on-scene. Planning is not a scripted process that tries to dictate tactics; rather, it should

provide a starting point for operations, adjusted as the situation changes and as facts are gathered. The incident commander needs to do the following:

- Determine if the personal protective equipment is appropriate,
- Identify the need for and type of decontamination (e.g., emergency vs. technical, mass casualty, ambulatory, non-ambulatory),
- Establish hazard control zones (e.g., hot, cold, warm, safe refuge area, casualty collection point),
- Identify required resources (e.g., hazmat group, safety officer, rapid intervention team, rehabilitation, EMS, technical rescue; law enforcement for security, perimeter control, crime scene, force protection; city, state, and federal agencies; public and private sectors).

Based on these factors, the incident commander shall develop and communicate the IAP. Ideally, the IAP should be written, even if just with a marker and a whiteboard. This allows for arriving responders to read the plan to catch up, which frees the incident commander's time of repetitive briefings. It also establishes a timeline.
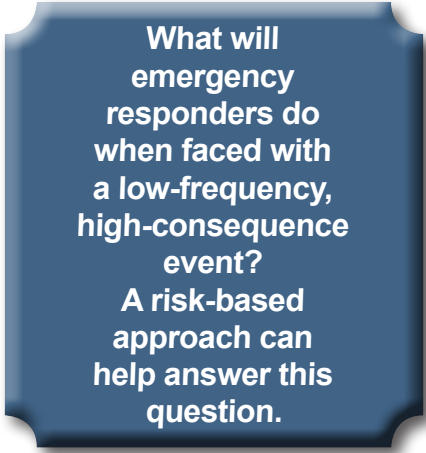
Implementation Phase

The third phase in the APIE process is putting the IAP with its specific action plans into effect. At this point, the responder has analyzed the incident to identify the hazards, predict the behavior of the product(s) and container(s), and planned the response. The goal of the implementation phase is to conduct and observe operations and outcomes.

> **What will emergency responders do when faced with a low-frequency, high-consequence event?**
> **A risk-based approach can help answer this question.**

Evaluation Phase

The APIE process is a continuous process that may require adjusting the IAP as conditions change or as new facts and circumstances are identified. The goal of the evaluation phase is to assess operational effectiveness. The evaluation process is always critical. If the objectives and tactics are effective, then continue until termination of the incident or transfer of command. If the incident is escalating, the incident's objectives and tactics may have to be altered to prevent additional harm to life, property, and the environment. The incident commander will need to provide a status report periodically as per local SOPs.

Termination or Transfer of Command

Termination is the final phase of the APIE process at which operations are concluded or the command is transferred to a responsible party, qualified contractors, or a local, state, or federal agency having jurisdiction. Upon termination, the incident commander must complete the following tasks:

- Assist in the incident debriefing and critique,

- Develop required reports and documentation, and

- Conduct incident debriefing and multi-agency critique if necessary.

The RBA considers all aspects of the incident to identify the hazards and develop the IAP based on the level of training of the responders, the required resources, and their mission. This article provides a guide through the RBA concept, which is rooted in the decades of experience gained from training for and responding to a hazardous material or WMD incident.

Risk-Based Approach

The RBA allows responders to break down a complex and potentially overwhelming response into sections to aid decision-making. The six components of the RBA that must be addressed to develop a comprehensive IAP are:

- Product, container, and environment

- Training, resources, and mission

Initially, the responder needs to identify each harm(s) that the product, container, and environment each presents. If responders can identify the hazard(s) or threat(s) and their associated harm, they can then start to take protective actions. There are always several on-scene indicators to use to determine the type of incident (e.g., container shapes and sizes, placards and labels, signs and symptoms, occupancy or location, and intelligence information). The identification of harm is critical to protective action decisions throughout the incident. The value of the RBA is that it is a systematic approach to all phases of an emergency. Every incident is dynamic and a function of all on-scene indicators (product, container, environment) requires the responder to be able to adapt during the ongoing and often unpredictable event.

Product

There are many ways to classify products, but the reality is there are only four types of products we respond to; chemicals, biological agents, radioactive material, and explosive (energetic) materials. In order for the responder to predict the likely behavior of a product related to its container and the environment, they need to first understand the importance of the chemical & physical properties, along with the toxic effect of the product. Fundamentally, products are solids, liquids, and gases. The physical state gives us a place to start the analysis. Understanding chemical, physical, and toxicological properties, the terms used to identify them, and their significance in making decisions, all play a critical role to every level of emergency responder at a hazardous materials or WMD release. At the technician level, this knowledge and ability are necessary for the safety of the emergency responders and the public.

Container

Initially, identifying the basic classification of the container may be all that is required, such as Bulk, Non-Bulk, Pressure, Non-Pressure, or Special. The responder must survey the incident to identify the type(s) of containers involved and determine the potential harm such as, has the product been released or the potential for a catastrophic failure of the container.

Environment

Imagine the environment in the broadest sense (e.g., occupancy, location, topography, weather, infrastructure, exposures, and life). A WMD incident should be considered as a type of environment. While the response options at a WMD remain the same, the incident commander will have additional considerations (e.g., active shooter, hostile event [ASHE], InterAgency Board July 2016), and the need for law enforcement, for crime scene, evidence preservation, force protection, etc. In the event the incident has the potential to be a WMD event, the responder must make immediate notifications (e.g., dispatcher, units on scene, and in route).

Active Shooter(s)/Hostile Event (ASHE). An incident involving one or more individuals who or have been actively engaged in harming, killing, or attempting to kill people in a populated area by means such as firearms, explosives, toxic substances, vehicles, edged weapons, fire, or a combination thereof. NFPA 3000 2021 edition

InterAgency Board ASHE Guide (IAB July 2016)

InterAgency Board Improving ASHE Response (IAB September 2015)

At this point in the RBA process, the responder needs to identify the hazards and the associated harm(s) that each of the following presents (e.g., thermal, radiation, toxic, corrosive, mechanical). However, for an emergency responder to determine the safest and most effective operational mode, they first need to consider the three main components of the incident: product, container, and environment. The exact order in which they need to be analyzed is based on the component with the most information initially.

The components may present with small parts of information from all three or just one. For example, at some emergencies, responders may see a container prior to identifying the product. By understanding the type of container, the state of matter (in the container and when released) can be recognized. While at another incident, they may have information on the environment prior to the container. As such, and the scene dynamics may progress down the environment path until more information on the container or the product is known. Then and only then can the responder determine the types of harm.

Once the types of harm are identified, the following three factors need to be addressed before developing the IAP: training, resources, and mission. In other words, act within the current training, resources, and mission.

Training

Responders should only operate based upon their level of training. If a responder is a technician but is functioning at the operations level, they need to continue to operate at the operations level because they may not have the necessary resources to operate at the technician level. It is a common understanding in the industry that more lives are saved by firefighters at the operations level because they have the training, and resources (e.g., SFPC, SCBA, medical, water supply for decontamination) to provide protection from most hazards.

Resources

Responders should only operate within their level of training and with available resources. It is vital that the incident commander identify and request resources required to meet the needs of the incident. Resources might include hazmat group, safety officer, rapid intervention team, rehabilitation, EMS (BLS and ALS), technical rescue, law enforcement (security, perimeter control, crime scene, forced protection), city, state, and federal agencies, utilities, and public and private sector.

Mission

The final factor the responder must address prior to developing the IAP is what is their mission (e.g., life safety operations, public safety sampling, mitigation, etc.). The RBA is a process by which one can establish the appropriate level of response. Managing the incident related to the operational task requires judgment to determine the incident objectives, operational modes, and strategies.

The RBA emphasizes the importance of empowering the responder with the knowledge, skills, and judgment that permits them to adjust as the conditions change or as facts are gathered. Using the APIE process, the responder starts by analyzing an event, using on-scene indicators to identify any potential types of harm, then determining the potential consequences, an "if this, then that" decision-making strategy, helping the decision-maker to pick the best option. At each decision point, the responder determines the appropriate course of action based on the facts, science, and the specific circumstances of the incident.

When combining the complexities of incidents with the pressure on responders to act in certain ways based on their organizational culture, training, and experience, an approach with a clear purpose is more efficient and effective than an approach based on a predetermined assumption that incidents are similar enough to warrant a list of responses.

The RBA stresses the importance of empowering the responder with knowledge, skills, and judgment permitting the responders to react to the dynamic nature of incidents

Preparation

Given the rarity of real-world experiences with low-frequency, high-consequence type events from which an emergency responder can draw upon, many do not have the experience base to rely upon in evaluating these complex problems and determining initial actions. As a result, there is a greater probability of responders being overwhelmed, increasing the risks to both responders and civilians. Scenario-based training using simulations (e.g., gaming, virtual reality, augmented reality) is a solution to the lack of real-world experience. Scenario-based training for an emergency response to a WMD may benefit responders by applying a blend of situational awareness with clear decision points. It is much less costly than drills and exercises conducted in the field and easier to involve more participants.

Given virtual training scenarios that reflect incident experience at low-frequency, high-consequence scenarios, participants virtually walk through these scenarios in real-time, with a real-world perspective. These virtual simulations allow responders to practice decision-making in simulated emergencies (e.g., mass casualty events, WMD, etc.), thereby providing experiences that can then be used to prepare for future situations. The simulation should be appropriate for individual or group training to present unique problem-solving and critical-thinking exercises. It is the next best thing to being in a live scenario. In some cases, it is even better, as there is no danger and risk involved to responders.

Tony Mussorfiti was a member of the Fire Department of New York (FDNY) from 1988 to 2010. During his tenure, he served as a firefighter, lieutenant, a hazardous materials technician specialist and a hazardous materials instructor. Along with Battalion Chief Robert Ingram, he established the FDNY Hazardous Materials Technician Training School and emergency response programs specific to terrorist incidents involving hazardous materials and weapons of mass destruction. The school has trained more than 10,000 members of the FDNY. He was assigned to the FDNY Center for Terrorism and Domestic Preparedness, where he was involved with the development of response protocols and drills and exercises for terrorist incidents. Since 2006, he represented the fire department and the city as a member or chairperson on the following working groups: NFPA 475; NFPA 470; and ASTM-E2601. Since 2003, he has been a member of the Inter-Agency Board (IAB) Training and Exercise Sub-Group. Additionally, he has been involved with the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Hazardous Materials Training and International Counter-proliferation Program in the former Soviet Union since its inception. He has been a technical adviser to Combating Terrorism Technical Support Office/Technical Support Working Group, in the development of training simulation programs for emergency responders to prepare for terrorist incidents.

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Public Safety Grant Programs
Changes – A 10-Year Review

By Kurt Bradley

Change is inevitable. As society continues to progress in the "digital age," so has applying for various federal grant programs. It is becoming almost impossible to apply to these programs via a paper application, as in the past. To remain competitive when applying for these grants, it is essential to constantly stay abreast of these changes or risk receiving a rejection notice instead of an award letter.

One change is the reduction of paper applications being accepted. The government is running out of the physical space needed to store applications done on paper. As a result, they have moved to electronic applications. The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995:

> [W]as enacted to minimize the paperwork burden for individuals; small businesses; educational and nonprofit institutions; federal contractors; state, local, and tribal governments; and other persons resulting from the collection of information by or for the federal government.

Many programs now require that the application be submitted electronically, and they will not accept a paper application at all. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey of 2016 (the most current year available), more than 89% of U.S. residents have a computer with broadband access. That percentage has most certainly risen. The government must also pay to rent storage facilities for all this paperwork, which has quickly become cost-prohibitive. Electronic submission and storage are the solutions.

The New Unique Entity Identifier

To comply with government regulations, applicants must register before applying. The previous process was to obtain a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number first, then register in the System for Award Management (SAM) and receive a Commercial and Government Entity (CAGE) code.

As of April 4, 2022, all federal grant applicants must obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number, which will now become the single number required to do business with the federal government. JustGrants uses SAM as the main information source in applying for and managing U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) grant funding. Organization information in SAM accounts is automatically updated in JustGrants, so it is important to have a SAM account and ensure that the entity information is current. This automatic process reduces the burden on award recipients to manually update information across multiple systems. It also helps DOJ validate the information from recipients.

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To receive funding, applicants must have an active SAM account. In addition, the federal government-wide policy at 2 CFR Part 25 (Universal Entity Identifier and SAM) states:

> [An] agency may not make an award to an entity until the entity has complied with the requirements … to provide a valid Unique Entity Identifier and maintain an active SAM registration with current information.

Entity information is publicly available in SAM. Simply visit www.SAM.gov, select "Search Records," enter entity information, and then view "POCs" (including the Electronic Business Point of Contact) within the Entity Profile. The UEI number will be located directly under the previous CAGE code that SAM was using, and the UEI number now will be used instead of the CAGE code. For those who are currently registered at SAM.gov, the UEI number has already been assigned and will appear under the former CAGE code. Those who are new to the system can register to receive a UEI.

The New Grant Systems

Other changes have been underway too. For example, on October 15, 2020, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), and the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) launched new grants management and payment management systems. The Justice Grants System (JustGrants) replaced the grants management system previously used by OJP and OVW, as well as the NexGen system used by the COPS Office. Additionally, the COPS Office, OJP, and OVW transitioned from using the Grants Payment Request System to the Department of the Treasury's Automated Standard Application for Payments (ASAP) system.

According to the DOJ, this transition to JustGrants and ASAP:

> This represents a significant IT modernization effort to develop and implement a single grants management system for all three DOJ grant-making components. It also gives applicants and award recipients new ways to manage their own entity information and users in the system. JustGrants offers the ability for applicants and award recipients to:
>
> • Authenticate each user with their own login and password
>
> • Manage multiple users and associate individual roles which govern access to information and tasks in the system
>
> • Assign users to one or many applications and award tasks and activities

The Importance of Checking the Right Box

Another notable change is the level of detail provided to justify the "need." That means that for a request to be awarded, statistical data must strongly support it. The more detail provided to support that need, the stronger the application becomes.

A computer often scores those little numbered boxes where information is supplied to the funding agency. The application must score high enough by the computer to ensure that it makes it to peer review, where actual people read, interpret, and score the application. Once the peer-review score is combined with the computer score, the application receives its total combined score. Hopefully, it is above the score recommended for the award.

Many grants are rejected because their combined score was a quarter of a point (0.25%) below the funding cutoff line. Applicants must take credit for the work an agency does or is asked to do. That is why it is essential to ensure that the numbers placed in those boxes are current and statistically supported enough to support the need.

The sheer volume of applications now received by the funding source necessitates that they are pre-screened before they are allowed to go to the peer-review panel. For example, look at what the last couple of years looked like for applications submitted to the Assistance to Firefighters Grant. Note the number of applications received versus the number of applications awarded:

• 2018 – 8,441 total applications submitted, 1,824 awarded; 8,005 were fire departments, with 1,614 awarded

• 2019 – 8,376 total applications submitted, 1,775 awarded; 8,008 were fire departments, with 1,696 awarded

• 2020 – 8,159 total applications submitted, 1,882 awarded; 7,805 were fire departments, with 1,808 awarded

As noted above, the vast number of applications versus the number of applications funded is extremely small. Therefore, it is critically important to use every opportunity possible to gain that extra point score.

All the data supplied in the fill-in-the-blank boxes is critically important to the computer program and the peer-review panel. If the review panel had to read every application received, it would take an excessive amount of time for them to do so, and the awards must be given promptly to be within the federal fiscal budget year. Therefore, the "need to be funded" should be considered on a "needed it yesterday" basis, and the detail provided is paramount to the application's chances of success or failure.

Notably, the days of filling out an application and submitting it are no longer two to three days before the deadline. Implementing the changes noted above can take a month or longer, so be prepared to enter the system and fill out the application for submission. Just gathering data and statistical information for a critical infrastructure listing can take several weeks to navigate, find, request data, and receive before being able to enter it into the system.

Preparation of an application to a federal grant program is a longer process than in the past. Not doing all the steps to apply and not being able to submit because an agency did not properly prepare will most assuredly result in a denial of funding. As Benjamin Franklin said in the 1700s, "A failure to plan, is a plan to fail." Although many things in the world of grants have changed, this remains as true as ever. Changes to systems and requirements will continue. Grants will continue to get more competitive. However, something else will not change: The more preparation that is done and the more detailed the application, the more likely it is to win a public safety grant.

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Building Capability:
Zero Tolerance vs. Acceptability
By Christopher Tantlinger

I n tool and die making, everything that has been created or molded for mass production in the past century has been meticulously carved, milled, lathed, and mathematically designed so that the raw materials of metals and plastics can be molded into a commodity. Parts and pieces must fit and work flawlessly together and connect with minimal friction. There must be tolerances that allow the parts to work together. If parts and pieces were machined with zero tolerance, the tool would either not work or only work a few times until it becomes heated, bound, or simply locked up. Machined parts require that a defined and measured tolerance be determined to allow it to work thousands of times, maybe tens of thousands of times flawlessly. The tolerance may be 0.001 (one-thousandth) of an inch, which means that there is space. Zero tolerance does not function in the mechanics and geometry of things that need to work together.

However, expectations when preparing for a disaster often include zero tolerance for:

- The loss of human life
- Needed but undeployed resources
- Improper shelter preparation
- Sub-standard housing
- Service failures

Of course, zero tolerance should be the goal in the modern culture of safety, but it is not realistically attainable. Problem-solving in emergency preparedness has become short-sighted because zero tolerance in some circles has become a buzz-worthy phrase to define actionable solutions. Emergency planning principles that consider the zero-tolerance mindset can lead to policy failures.

Unfortunately, zero tolerance has been adopted in many narratives. For example, China's zero-tolerance strategy has made it harder to recover from the pandemic. Or consider the zero-tolerance campaign for construction workers in California, which was overarching, sometimes unreasonable, or created gridlocked restrictions. This campaign initiative required a union contractor's pledge and nearly a dozen action items including a commitment to shut down a job if a perceived COVID-19 protocol was not being followed. Approaches for fluid work progressions should provide successful alternatives for solving problems and not burdensome stipulations.

For example, the zero-tolerance policy conflicts with mitigating [aggression and violence in health care](). Many references within health care and nursing journals have shown that de-escalation techniques work much better than the use of restraints and a zero-tolerance approach. In fact, they are considered last-resort measures. It is important to have practical policies, protocols, and procedures in place to manage aggression and violence in the emergency department. An emphasis on training and skill development, particularly communication and negotiation strategies, is imperative for all health care professionals.

Determining Acceptability

Zero tolerance is also a contradictory term. [Zero]() means the absence of magnitude or quantity, literally nothing. Whereas [tolerance]() is defined as the existence of opinions or behavior with which someone does not necessarily agree. However, the term zero tolerance has become so pervasive that it is often a measuring stick for determining acceptability.

The conquest to arrive at zero tolerance becomes problematic because it formalizes the notion that data, policies, procedures, and lines of effort must be standardized to have zero tolerance, with the next precipitating issue also requiring zero tolerance. Despite the narrative professing zero tolerance, people may still be dying, resources misused, costs mismanaged, etc.

When thinking about using this term, one must either define it or abandon it and define what tolerances are allowable. This will take more effort than saying there is zero tolerance but will explain more wholly what an operation should look like. For example, zero tolerance for persons to contract a virus or disease would require defining what one is willing to tolerate to avoid contracting something as organic and undefined as a microscopic killer.

Accepting tolerances in emergency management helps reduce friction and factions, creating a more collaborative environment. Identifying risks and hazards more openly rather than just creating an exclusionary mindset of zero tolerance should drive policy. Comparative analysis, data collection, operational orders, and mitigation tasks must be realistic and attainable to determine what is causing the parts not to match up and find out what works together. Without this type of tolerance, issues become bound up and create heated friction. This was seen repeatedly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

One cannot solve complex issues with the demand to "make the solution fit the problem," and punitive actions rarely offer longstanding solutions. Merriam Webster defines [zero tolerance]() as "a policy of giving the most severe punishment possible to every person who commits a crime or breaks a rule." Although emergency response should never be punitive, one [2022 study]() found that the global lockdowns and mandates used to reduce COVID-19 mortality rates had a punitive effect. Attempting to maintain societal norms by forcing an ideal that cannot be collaborative, compassionate, or collectively for the good of the whole of society will likely fail and possibly create a never-ending cycle of failures.
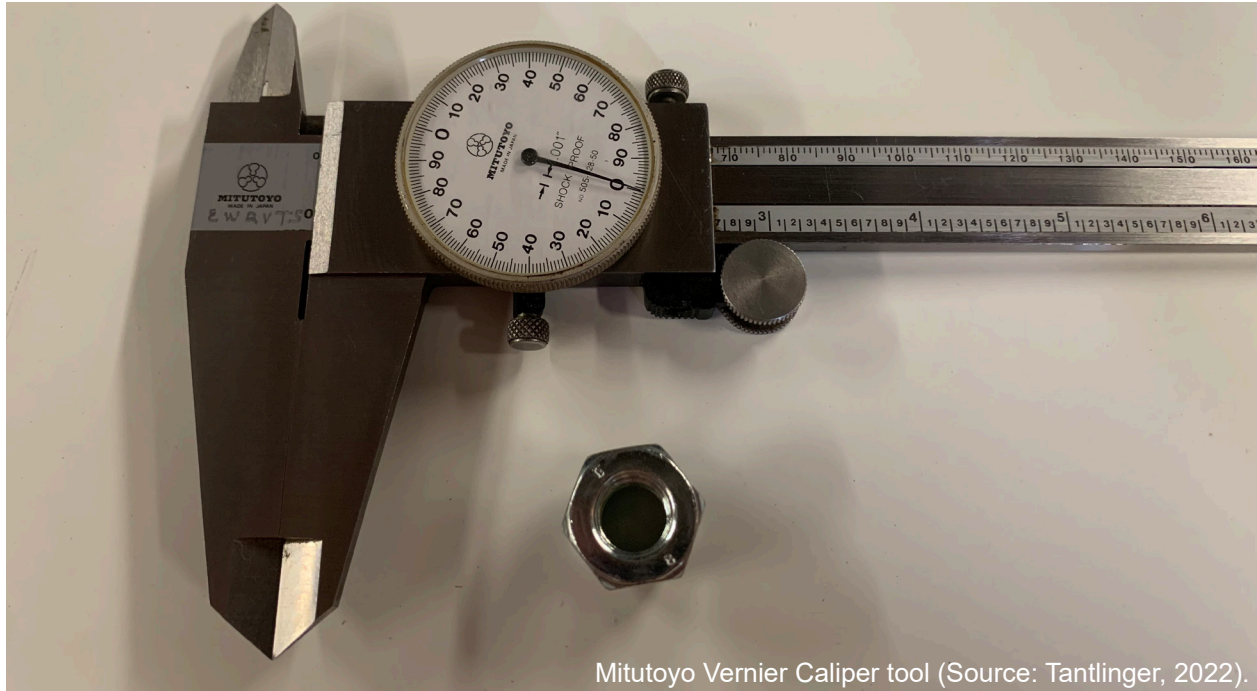
Mitutoyo Vernier Caliper tool (Source: Tantlinger, 2022).

Changing the Narrative

Imagine removing zero tolerance from the discussion and coordinating the emergency management phases on the foundation of tolerance to see how close all the players can work together. Considering society has been faced with an emergency that has killed many people, events must be handled better. Take the challenge to use creative and critical thinking skills to progress through a problem and hone professional tolerances:

- Do not use demanding, punitive language to define a way through a problem or emergency.

- When planning, exercising, responding, or mitigating, reframe incident thinking, communicate, promote unity, and drive toward resilience rather than resistance. The development of community lifelines and their guiding principles to collaborate all the pieces will win hearts and minds.

- Decentralize old emergency management programming and create a new positive equilibrium of agencies with relevant partners and stakeholders.

- Visualize the exercise and discuss the intended consequences ensuring that the components are not relying on zero tolerances.

- Welcome legitimate opinions then discuss, debate, and decide promptly using tolerances that may elicit better decision-making.

- Remove dissension, debunking, and discrediting efforts in professional narratives.

- Challenge the team to prove an idea through tolerances. What the conversation reveals may be surprising. Try to provide at least three reasons why it will work and support it by citing meaningful research.

- Overcommunicate. Recognizing that communication is often a problem during incidents, define objectives succinctly and communicate them repeatedly. The cadence of the incident will be disrupted or derailed by zero-tolerance policies; remove them. With discretion and tolerance, the resolution will be closer than imagined.

Improving the future requires working together and understanding tolerances to build capability and acceptance of core principles.

Christopher Tantlinger is the deputy emergency management coordinator, Westmoreland County Department of Public Safety, Pennsylvania. He serves as chief of the county HAZMAT team. He has 27 years in the fire service, is past president of the Fire Chief's Association of Westmoreland County, and is a proboard-certified HAZMAT technician. He serves as a rescue technician instructor for a rescue tool manufacturer. Activities include serving on the board of the Pennsylvania Association of Hazardous Materials Technicians. He is a cum laude honors graduate of Saint Francis University in Loretto, PA, with a BS in criminal justice and holds a professional certification from the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency. The author can be contacted for more information or to discuss collaborative ideas at: ctantlin@co.westmoreland.pa.us