National Capital Region (NCR) Regional Emergency Support Function #1 (RESF-1)

Transportation Tabletop Exercise

AFTER ACTION REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Exercise Date: November 28, 2006

District of Columbia Emergency Management Agency (DCEMA)
Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (Sponsor)
with technical support from the National Capital Region (NCR)
Exercise Training and Operation Panel (ETOP)

The following Executive Summary describes the findings of the After Action Report (AAR) of the NCR RESF-1 Transportation communications and coordination tabletop exercise (TTX) that took place in the National Capital Region (NCR) on November 28, 2006 and the lessons learned from the exercise. This exercise was the first of its kind for transportation officials and operators in the region. The AAR is a tool that documents the current state of transportation and transit operations for emergency response and provides recommendations to address gaps in capabilities observed.

The content, including issues and recommendations, presented in the AAR are based directly on the observations expressed by the transportation and transit operators who participated in the exercise, as well as feedback from transportation officials who observed the TTX. With that in mind, the AAR is not an in-depth technical document, but a review of the major topics identified during the exercise. It is important to note that the content of this exercise was developed by a working group of NCR RESF-1 Committee members and the scenario was tailored specifically for the NCR transportation community and how they respond to multiple emergency incidents.

This AAR is presented in the following format:

1. **Event Goals and Objectives** – information about the purpose of the exercise and its intended audience.

2. **Event Synopsis** – a review of the exercise scenario.

3. **Analysis of Critical Task Performance by Exercise Objective** – analysis of how exercise objective criteria were met.

4. **Recommendations** – corrective actions identified by exercise participants in order to address observed gaps.

The goals of the exercise were to:

1. Evaluate emergency communication processes and procedures between regional transportation operators and transit operations centers as well as transportation personnel in the field.

2. Identify common (informal) practices currently used during an emergency by transportation personnel and where gaps exist between formal and informal procedures.

3. Increase awareness of the roles and responsibilities of transportation and transit agencies to disseminate mission critical information.

4. Evaluate decision-making processes of transportation personnel during emergency response.

5. Identify communication tools used by regional transportation personnel during an emergency including, but not limited to email, Regional Incident Communications and Coordination System (RICCS), land mobile radios, and chat rooms.

6. Evaluate how regional communications assets such as the regional 800 MHz radio caches are requested and coordinated.

Although conducting the exercise and the subsequent hotwash identified gaps and recommendations (as presented in the full AAR), the greatest accomplishment of the exercise was an increased awareness of communications capabilities available to NCR transportation officials and operators. The exercise also provided the opportunity to develop a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of counterparts at different agencies. Another valuable accomplishment of the exercise was the identification of transportation and transit emergency response issues as well as the opportunity for the appropriate officials from the transportation, emergency management, and public safety community to address these issues through bodies such as the NCR RESF-1 Committee.

Major issues identified through the exercise include:

Issue 1: Some participants may not have been aware of interagency communication processes and procedures.

Issue 2: Not all of the participants at the operations level were aware of how information was propagated upwards within their agency and/or across the region.

Issue 3: Some agencies rely primarily upon informal personal relationships to facilitate incident information flow between agencies.

Issue 4: Some participants were unaware of criteria for escalating an incident from a local occurrence to a regionally-coordinated event.

Issue 5: Many participants were unaware of how their agency's operational communications contribute to the regional response operations of other RESF-1 members.

Issue 6: Some RESF-1 agencies lack an off-site coordination and decision-making mechanism.

Issue 7: Some agencies do not have access to available communication systems that would provide regional situational awareness.

Issue 8: A number of participants were not familiar with the regional policies and procedures for obtaining radios from the regional 800 MHz radio cache.

Overall, the NCR possesses the capabilities (both technology and procedures) to perform an effective response to multiple transportation emergency incidents. However, these capabilities are not used to their greatest potential due to reliance on informal relationships (as noted above) and the lack of general awareness of the various system capabilities. During the hotwash, practitioners noted some measures that can be undertaken to address these gaps. Some of these measures require little effort while others are a bit more ambitious in nature and ***require the support of higher-level Homeland Security, Emergency Management, and Transportation officials in order to implement***. These recommendations are as follows:

Recommendation 1: Formalize and coordinate emergency transportation plans for NCR transportation and transit agencies with the goal of having common operating procedures across the region.

Recommendation 2: Improve communications procedures and protocols between NCR RESF-1 agencies and increase awareness about available communications technologies. This can be accomplished through three steps:

- ♦ Formalization of notification processes (through updated plans)

- ♦ Improved data sharing capabilities (the RESF-1 Committee supports the development of the Metropolitan Area Transportation Operations Coordination (MATOC) Program as a mean to implement this recommendation)

- ♦ Improved voice communications capabilities and interoperability

Recommendation 3: Increased exercise and training opportunities for transportation officials and operators.

Recommendation 4: Creation of a transportation/transit operators subcommittee under NCR RESF-1.

Recommendation 5: "Quick Hits" for the NCR RESF-1 Committee including:

- ♦ Defining organizational relationships between NCR RESF-1 agencies

- ♦ Reaching out to Amtrak and CSX to participate in the RESF-1 Committee

- ♦ Developing a standard contact sheet with an emphasis on roles and responsibilities, not names

- ♦ Improving communications between Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) and regional transit providers

These recommendations are provided in more detail in the full AAR.

The NCR RESF-1 Committee will take the lead in implementing the recommendations outlined in the AAR, but support is needed from regional Homeland Security, Emergency Management, and Transportation officials. Any questions can be directed to a member of the NCR RESF-1 committee.

To obtain a full version of the NCR RESF-1 Tabletop Exercise After Action Report, please contact:

Jamie Quarrelles, Exercise Manager
District of Columbia Emergency Management Agency (DCEMA)
Jamie.Quarrelles@dc.gov
202-673-2101

or download it at:

http://www.mwcog.org/uploads/committee-documents/uldYXlo20070521141729.pdf