

DAMAGE ASSESSMENTS, MUTUAL AID RESPONSE AND MITIGATION

Is Your City Prepared For A Disaster?

by Susie Stonner

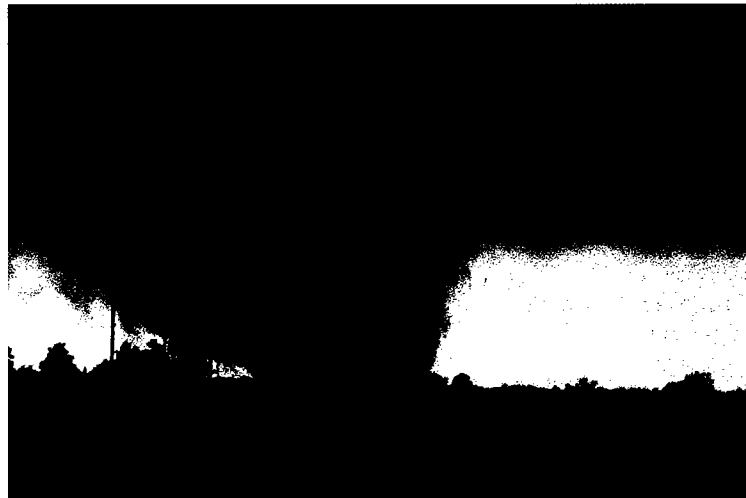
In the last two years, Missouri has experienced three presidential disaster declarations for an ice storm, flooding, severe weather and tornadoes. The cities that have an Emergency Management Director (EMD), a local response plan and regularly exercise their plan are better prepared to respond to and recover from a disaster. Cities with active local volunteer disaster organizations are better prepared to help their citizens recover from a disaster. Is your community prepared for a disaster? Remember, all disaster response starts at the local level and likewise disaster recovery is carried on at the local level long after state and federal assistance leaves the area.

Why Do You Need An Emergency Management Director?

An emergency management director (EMD) is an important integral linchpin in your ability to respond to a disaster. The EMD's responsibilities include identifying the community's hazards, updating the city's Emergency Operations Plan, exercising the plan, working with different city departments on disaster response capabilities, has a role in mitigation, establishes an emergency public information system and public awareness campaigns, and offers training to both elected officials and volunteers.

During a disaster, the EMD opens the emergency Operations center, works with city departments, coordinates city resources, collects damage

information, issues emergency information to citizens, coordinates debris removal, manages mutual aid response, coordinates shelters if needed,



Tornado approaching Stockton, MO last May.

works with local volunteers who will be helping disaster clients. Additional disaster responsibilities include escorting state and/or federal damage assessment teams to disaster sites in anticipation of state and/or federal assistance. The EMD must work closely with the city clerk or financial officer who keeps records on employee overtime, photo documentation of damages and invoices for repair work for possible reimbursement.

The Missouri State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) offers many free classes. The introductory class is Principals of Emergency Management. This three day class is offered once a quarter at different locations. Future classes will be offered May 20 in Raymore and August 19 in Joplin.

For more information see www.sema.state.mo.us.

Mutual Assistance

Mutual assistance is a vital part of the response and recovery efforts of many communities in the state. There are several separate sections in the Revised Statutes of Missouri (RSMO.) that address mutual aid plans, agreements and/or compacts. These sections collectively provide the Governor, the executive officer of any political subdivision, and any public safety agency (including, but not limited to, any emergency medical service, police department, sheriff's department, fire department, volunteer fire protection association and public

works department) the authority to enter into mutual aid agreements with other public and private agencies within and outside the state for reciprocal emergency aid.

The form that these agreements take varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Some have opted for informal "handshake" agreements while others have adopted formal written agreements.

Importance Of Volunteers/ Donations Management

One of the critical functions of an EMD is working with volunteers. These volunteers may be amateur ham radio operators, storm spotters, volunteers assisting with local events Citizens Corps members or CERT train-

ers. However, in the event of a disaster, the EMD will be working with volunteer organizations specializing in disaster response i.e., the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army and many church disaster response groups. These groups specialize in sheltering, mass feeding, clean-up and rebuilding homes after a disaster. These same organizations will manage donations that will pour into a community. There also are caseworkers working with citizens on crisis counseling, housing or utility deposits and employment opportunities.

Importance Of Accurate Damage Assessments

The preliminary damage assessment (PDA) process is the vital first step to recovering from a disaster. The PDA helps the affected jurisdiction identify and evaluate the magnitude and severity of a disaster. Officials in the affected area can then use the results of the PDA to allocate available resources and establish recovery priorities. It also forms the basis for any requests for outside assistance such as mutual aid and/or state assistance.

Each jurisdiction should establish a damage assessment process tailored to their situation and capabilities, and a primary point of contact for all damage assessment activities in the event of a disaster.

SEMA can help with these initial planning and training activities. Courses are offered in damage assessment and debris management. Contact your local emergency management director, the SEMA Area Coordinator for your jurisdiction or the SEMA Training Officer for information on these classes.

The Disaster Process

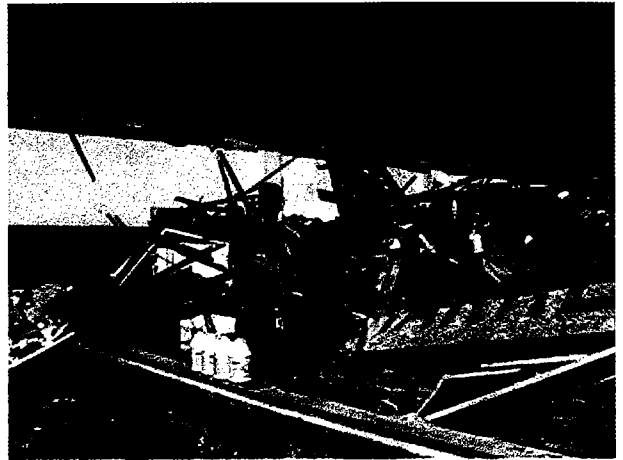
When an incident occurs within the state, the initial responsibility for response and recovery efforts rests

with the local jurisdiction. Each jurisdiction will conduct their own damage assessment to determine the magnitude and severity of the incident. They will then use this information to allocate local resources and determine recovery priorities. At any time during this process they may request state assistance.

Representatives from SEMA will conduct joint state/local damage assessments to verify the damages to public infrastructure, homes and businesses. SEMA will also assess the impact of the incident on the affected area. If it is determined that effective and efficient recovery from the incident is beyond the combined capabilities of state and local governments, the state will request a joint federal/state/local damage assessment.

Depending on the situation and based on available information, the Governor will decide whether or not to declare a state of emergency. This declaration will identify the incident, the affected area and types of assistance to be provided by the state. This declaration must be made before any assessment or assistance is requested from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

This joint federal/state/local damage assessment verifies the magnitude of disaster and its impact on the affected jurisdictions. Each damage assessment team will consist of a FEMA program specialist, a SEMA program specialist and a representative from the affected jurisdiction. Additional individuals such as hazard mitigation specialists and Small Business Administration (SBA) representatives may be added to the team based on the situa-



The Missouri National Guard at work in Jackson, MO.

tion. The local representative must be familiar with the locations of all damage within the affected jurisdiction. The number of teams used will be based on the number of affected jurisdictions and the magnitude of the incident.

Based on the information obtained during the joint damage assessment, the Governor will decide whether a presidential disaster declaration is warranted. SEMA will prepare the appropriate documentation and declaration request for the Governor's signature. This request is forwarded to FEMA Region VII. They review the request, make a recommendation and forward it to FEMA National for final determination.

If a presidential disaster declaration is received, it will identify the nature of the incident, the jurisdictions that will receive federal assistance and the types of assistance these jurisdictions will receive. Available assistance programs include, but are not limited to, Individual Assistance, Public Assistance, Hazard Mitigation and Small Business Administration assistance.

Mitigation Activities

Mitigation identifies a hazard and



Downtown Pierce City after tornado damage last May.

comes up with a cost-effective and environmentally sound way to lessen the impact damages in future disasters. The Stafford Act, which outlines disaster response and recovery funding, makes mitigation money available following disasters. Some examples include: buyouts of repetitively flooded homes, larger culverts for frequently flooded roads or bridges, purchasing weather transmitters and encouragement citizens to buy tone-alert weather radios or even burying utility lines.

SEMA is working with the 19 Missouri Regional Planning Commissions to write hazard mitigation plans for counties to include cities. The plans

SEMA offers free training classes to EMDs, public works directors and elected officials. Classes range from the principles of emergency management, damage assessment, debris removal, courses to CERT, donations management and WMD courses. Courses, dates, locations and application procedures are posted on the SEMA homepage at www.sema.state.mo.us. (Go to the blue sidebar, scroll down to training and click on the training link.)

WMD And Homeland Security

SEMA offers a variety of free weapons of mass destruction (WMD)

must be completed by November 1, 2004. In future disasters, counties and cities within counties must have a hazard mitigation plan (or in the process of writing one) to be eligible to submit mitigation projects for funding.

Training Opportunities Available

classes. To date SEMA has been approved for close to \$59 million from Department of Homeland Security and Office of Domestic Preparedness. The money is being used to enhance existing state and local response capabilities. SEMA's philosophy focused on expanding the capabilities of existing HAZMAT teams across the state. Today there are 28 recognized Homeland Security Regional Response Teams. The teams agree to respond to incidents within a 50 mile radius of their home base. SEMA may also task the teams to respond as to and supplement an organized response to a larger incident.

In Conclusion

Elected officials need to support their local emergency management director. They also need to be aware of their role and responsibilities during a disaster and the disaster declaration process.

In addition to disaster response and assistance, SEMA works with the Governor's Partnership on Disaster Response, the Missouri Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster, the Homeland Security Advisory, the 911 Coordinating Board, the Missouri Emergency Response Commission (hazardous materials) and the Missouri Seismic Safety Commission. Programs SEMA oversees include planning, flood plan management, mitigation, terrorism, training and exercises. SEMA manages grants from the Department of Homeland Security for Citizens Corps and CERT training and grants from the Office of Domestic Preparedness to equip and train the 28 homeland security response teams scattered across Missouri.

SEMA has nine area coordinators who work closely with county and city officials, EMDs, Local Emergency Planning Committees and disaster recovery efforts. Four area coordinators have offices in Springfield, Kansas City, St. Louis and Cape Girardeau. □

Susie Stonner is a public information officer with the Missouri State Emergency Management Agency.