



9.11

10-YEAR
ANNIVERSARY

By Elizabeth Kellar

partnerships & resilience

STRENGTHENED AFTER 9/11

*Managers reflect
on progress*

TAKEAWAYS

- › Communication systems and relationships promote greater intergovernmental partnerships; personal relationships are critical and can help cut bureaucracy in major events.
- › Community policing complements the strengths of the state and federal governments because locals have connections with religious institutions, restaurants, people on street corners, and community groups.

WE ALL REMEMBER WHERE WE WERE ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001.

I was attending a meeting in downtown Washington, D.C., a few blocks from the White House. Like most, we watched television in shock and horror as one plane after another hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. We were proud and saddened by the thought of those brave Americans who rushed the cockpit over Pennsylvania to ensure that the fourth plane did not reach its intended target. Their actions undoubtedly saved many additional lives.

The situation in downtown Washington was chaotic. While we watched television images of White House personnel fleeing the building, we had to make our own decisions about whether to evacuate or shelter in place. There was no official advice, and there were conflicting reports about closed subway stations. Traffic was completely gridlocked.



many reminders that local government managers would provide leadership in the days and years ahead.

Bill Hansell, then ICMA's executive director, consulted with the ICMA Executive Board to decide whether to hold the ICMA Annual Conference, which was only a few days away. They agreed that if the airports opened we would hold the conference to demonstrate our determination to move forward as a country; sessions on security issues were added.

Members arrived in Salt Lake City that September from all over the world, including New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and Australia. A delegation from Indonesia kept its commitment to attend, and they were stunned and touched that ICMA Conference Director Ross Hoff had arranged for an imam to give the opening invocation. After the Mormon Tabernacle Choir sang patriotic songs, there was not a dry eye in the place.

September 11 Wake-up Call

Local governments saw homeland security as a federal responsibility before the attacks on September 11. "That event changed our mind-set," notes Kevin Duggan, ICMA's current West Coast liaison and former city manager, Mountain View, California.

"While the terrorism threat is not constantly on our mind, whenever we think about a large public gathering or who does business in our communities, we are attentive to vulnerabilities we had not previously considered."

Mountain View has a large federal facility, Moffett Field, which is the location for armed forces and the Ames Research Center, a NASA facility. Mountain View has a 25,000-seat amphitheater and is the corporate headquarters for Google. Relying on partnerships with other governmental agencies and the private sector, Mountain View has taken steps to harden potential targets and to reinforce security.

"There were virtually no systems in place to encourage communications or for local governments to play a role,"

"Truly resilient communities will be those communities that are planning for and implementing recovery systems long before any disaster strikes."

says Mountain View Police Chief Scott Vermeer. "Today, our police officers see themselves as having a role, and the federal agencies see local governments as a valuable partner."

"The federal investment during the past 10 years has done some real good," says Frank Fairbanks, former city manager, Phoenix, Arizona. The federal government pushed us to look at most likely terrorism targets and encouraged us to work with other local governments and the state to improve our security. While we have used considerable local government and private resources to address the issues, the federal government grants motivated us to do the analysis."

The city government jawboned the private sector and other agencies to convince them of the need to improve security, says Fairbanks. "We made the case for them to do the right thing and to make the necessary investments."

"Cities have played leadership roles by devoting time, energy, and resources to the homeland security challenges," he added.

Richard Brown, former manager of East Providence, Rhode Island, says that "Training, exercises, equipment, communications, and drills have raised our level of competence. We work better regionally and have made great strides in developing individual preparedness. I do believe that top official communication remains a problem."

ICMA allowed its staff to choose whether to stay or go; most left for home right away. Those who had a long, unexpected walk home were grateful for tennis shoes.

The next day, like countless others, I did my bit to show resolve. I went to work, driving past armored military vehicles and soldiers in the street. Turning on my computer, I saw the first message was from Roger Morris, then an ICMA vice president representing the international region. He wrote to express support and solidarity. It was the first of

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Over the past 10 years, local government managers agree, they have improved collaboration with the state and federal governments, strengthened communication systems, and built more personal relationships with key individuals.

Training and Partnerships Are Key Strategies

Training has been—and remains—critical to preparedness. Before the events of September 11, local governments focused their training on the most likely natural disaster their region might face.

In Mountain View and Santa Clarita that meant training for possible earthquakes. In Phoenix and Santa Clarita, wildfires were frequent, so there were regular opportunities to practice skills to prepare for and respond to that disaster.

“Practice, drilling, planning, and reviewing actions must be continuous,” notes Fairbanks. “The same processes and mechanisms are needed whether a community is dealing with a natural disaster or a terrorist event.”

“Creating teams, organizing, and command and control are the same for all disasters,” he explains. “It is important to focus on where the exposure is and how it can be prevented.”

Mike Van Milligen, city manager, Dubuque, Iowa, agrees. “The level of preparation 10 years later is much higher. And not just for terrorism but also for natural disasters since they require the same structure.”

Some local governments have had more practice in dealing with disasters than they would like, whether hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, or an earthquake. Ken Pulskamp, city manager, Santa Clarita, said his community has learned many lessons over the

years from its experiences with the 1994 earthquake and multiple wildfires.

“We have learned that we cannot get anything done without a partnership. When there is an emergency, we deal with the county, the state, the National Guard, and water agencies. We’re all in this together, so it’s important to have relationships in place before disaster strikes.”

Community Policing Provides a Solid Foundation

Local governments build on their strengths, and that includes community policing in the city of Mountain View. “The principles of community policing work well with the expanded responsibilities to detect and address potential terrorist threats,” says Chief Vermeer. “That includes building trust with the community and asking residents to share and report crimes or suspicious activities.

“Local police have connections with religious institutions, restaurant owners, community groups, and people on street corners. Because we have a relationship built on trust, people will tell us if they see something odd.”

Training has helped officers learn how to handle such situations as a routine traffic stop that reveals something suspicious. The system allows the officer to document what is going on, check the terrorist watch list, and ensure that the matter is handled discreetly to allow ongoing surveillance, if needed.

Local government connections with community groups and individuals complement the role of state and federal agencies. Programs like FEMA’s Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) are a natural extension of community policing. “Residents know that it’s a different world we live in today,” notes Duggan. “Being well prepared allows them to be better able to help their neighbors in a disaster.”

Communications Have Improved Greatly – and Not Enough

“It is now possible to share information between cities, the state, and the

federal government,” says Fairbanks. “We have protocols and ‘peopleware’ so we know how to work with each other more effectively.”

Pulskamp is complimentary about technology improvements, but he worries that the price remains too high for local governments to acquire the radio equipment that is needed for interoperability. “While we have a goal for all of the local governments in the Los Angeles area to be able to communicate with each other, we still rely on workarounds. In Santa Clarita, we work with ham radio operators and volunteers who can circumvent some of the communications barriers.”

Mountain View has a reverse 911 system that allows it to contact thousands of residents in case of an incident. Getting compatible equipment in all of the local governments in the region is a big challenge.

For starters, Mountain View, Los Altos, and Palo Alto share the same hardware and use the same software for emergency dispatching. All operators see the same screen and follow identical protocols. That makes it possible for Palo Alto to take over dispatching for Mountain View, if needed. It also is cost-efficient and encourages ongoing consolidation, an important consideration in an era of tight budgets.

Federal investments have enhanced communications in many places. Dubuque now has a countywide emergency responder training facility with a fire training tower and headquarters for the countywide emergency radio management agency. All the radio systems are located there so when the command center is activated, policymakers from multiple jurisdictions can gather in the same place.

Sometimes federal requirements can impose major costs on local governments. “There will have to be significant dollars spent over the next two years to modify radio systems,” says Van Milligen. “It’s a big challenge that re-

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quires an expensive solution. There's not money behind it, just a mandate."

Sustaining Preparedness in an Era of Tight Budgets

Local governments can take pride in the relationships they have built, and many have enhanced mutual aid agreements. Large states like Florida and California now have agreements in place that allow them to send teams into other parts of the state to assist with major disasters.

But these improvements can easily become neglected. To sustain preparedness, constant attention to emergency plans, training, technology, and equipment is essential. "It will be hard to keep up-to-date when budgets are tight and there are fewer staff," observes Duggan.

"Local governments have to explain why this remains a priority and why resources beyond police and fire personnel are essential to prevention and preparedness. No one wants to come up short if there is a disaster. It is a professional responsibility to undertake reasonable due diligence to protect our communities."

"Budget reductions and the loss of federal funds result in cutbacks in homeland security efforts," noted

Brown. "In order to reduce the impact, homeland security should be integrated into all our activities and not be seen as a stand-alone program. More emphasis needs to be on developing capabilities and not buying stuff. Public safety expenditures and programs need to be restructured to deliver specific outcomes rather than just employ traditional police and fire services."

Communities also need to pay attention to how they align with FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate's "Whole of Community and Maximum of Maximums" paradigm, says Lee Feldman, city manager, Fort Lauderdale, Florida. "We will need to embrace the *National Disaster Recovery Framework* as it is rolled out. Truly resilient communities will be those communities that are planning for and implementing recovery systems long before any disaster strikes."

ICMA continues to advocate that the federal government support a system that would allow credentialed teams of local government personnel to be deployed across state lines to provide the full range of services needed after major disasters. In the meantime, local governments do what they can to help each other, sometimes on an ad hoc basis.

At the end of the day, people are the ones who detect, prevent, respond, get trained, and adapt to reality on the ground. They also help each other recover and rebuild after major disasters.

Local government managers play a key role in ensuring that the people in their organizations and communities develop the resilience and capabilities that are needed to handle the unexpected disasters ahead. **PM**



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