



State and Local Approaches

Erie County, New York

Response Readiness Emergency Preparedness Team

The Erie County, New York Response Readiness Emergency Preparedness Team was established in September, 2001, following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The Team's mission is to design and implement plans for training, equipping and positioning the County's emergency responders, as well as the citizens of Erie County and the surrounding areas, for an effective response to natural or man-made disasters of all types.

To address the primary objectives of response readiness and emergency preparedness, the Team formed several multi-disciplinary planning subcommittees: Public Health, Emergency Services, Infrastructure Protection, and Law Enforcement. Each subcommittee assessed the county's current capacity in their focus area, identified needs, and developed strategies and proposals to fill gaps and remedy areas of concern. Moreover, the subcommittees successfully engaged a number of regional and strategic partners. According to the Erie County Executive's Office, these partnerships accelerated regional planning, strengthened the concept of regionalism, and expanded the scope of many priority projects.

The Team concept introduced by Erie County is one approach being implemented at the state and local levels to prepare emergency responders to safely and effectively respond to incidents of terrorism involving weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The Office for Domestic Preparedness (ODP) has not evaluated this approach, and the sharing of this information should not be interpreted as an endorsement. Those interested in the specific details of this approach should contact the project director identified at the end of this bulletin.

Public Health

The Public Health Subcommittee, working in collaboration with the Erie County Department of Health, as well as state legislators, found several areas for improvement in Erie County, including a lack of digital medical information and broad bandwidth infrastructure connectivity in the healthcare system, nonexistent volunteer equipment, and a lack of programmatic funding to complete, staff, and run a

regional BioSafety Level 3 laboratory.

As a result of the assessment, Erie County implemented the Erie County Public Health Emergency Response Plan, a regional plan designed to build a public health infrastructure capable of withstanding potentially catastrophic biological, chemical, radiological, or naturally occurring emergencies. To carry out the strategic vision of the Plan, Erie County established the Regional Office of Public Health Emergency Preparedness (ROPHEP).

ROPHEP is currently involved in three programs that will correct the public health issues identified and create an enduring infrastructure for long-term preparedness. These projects include: the Regional Public Health Biosurveillance and Training Center, Regional Medical Decontamination Facilities, and a Regional Medical Communication and Information Management Program.

The eight-county Regional Public Health Biosurveillance and Training Center, a program of new construction, renovation, and strategic linkages, will leverage digital information collection and analysis and provide for state of the art training and response capabilities. Regional Medical Decontamination is a program to construct decontamination sites in western New York that will each have the capability to provide training, as well as manage thousands of contaminated casualties. The Regional Medical Communication and Information Management Program is a project to implement the use of digital resources and information so that health departments, hospitals, health professionals, and the general public can be provided with instant alerts on developing public health emergencies, as well as initial guidance on how to handle those emergencies.

Emergency Services

The Emergency Services Subcommittee brought together all public safety providers, including law enforcement, fire services, emergency medical services, and emergency management, to assess response readiness and preparedness planning, as well as to reassess current plans and address potential terrorist activity in the western New York region.

This subcommittee found that a single, interoperable public safety communications network is Erie County's greatest requirement for the ten counties represented.

Despite the challenge of securing funding, the Emergency Services Subcommittee has been successful in working with state officials to make western New York the first area to be part of a statewide wireless communications network. Under an MOU currently being developed, the New York State Wireless Network would provide the infrastructure and framework to support an 800 MHz communication system as part of this statewide system. Erie County would be able to house components of the system in a new Erie County Public Safety Campus currently being designed.

Infrastructure Protection

The Infrastructure Protection Subcommittee, comprised of leaders from the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning, as well as the Parks Department, Budget Office, Water Authority, Sheriff's Office, Erie Community College, Erie County Medical Center and the County Attorney's Office, identified two areas that require better protection: Erie County's public buildings and facilities, and the County's information technology systems.

To enhance security measures at Erie County facilities, multiple renovations and upgrades are planned. The County has already committed funding for a state-of-the-art Point Addressable Fire Alarm System, a Closed Circuit Television System, and a card-oriented Door Access Control System for some key buildings. Other facilities are also slated for renovations and upgrades. These security improvements will bring Erie County facilities up to current safety and security standards, and will provide an increased capacity to deal with issues related to homeland security.

To improve Erie County's information technology systems, the Erie County Department of Information and Support Services has also begun to implement a Strategic Disaster Recovery Plan. This Plan has three main components: provide for a standardized data system, network all municipalities to the Erie County system in order to provide back up data storage and redundant access to information for the municipalities, and allow for the protection of information in the event of a catastrophic event.

Law Enforcement

The Law Enforcement Subcommittee, composed of leadership from the Erie County Sheriff's Department and Erie County Central Police Services, is focusing on coordination, cooperation, and communications in the public safety sector. To address these priorities and provide a means of mitigating terrorist threats and activities, several

programs have been established: the Erie County Public Safety Campus, the Regional Emergency Surveillance and Critical Response Unit (Project RESCU), and an improved Information System Infrastructure.

To be located in downtown Buffalo, the Erie County Public Safety Campus is a multi-discipline, multi-jurisdictional campus that will house an emergency operations center, a training academy, a communications center, a forensic laboratory, an evidence processing unit and information systems. This campus will enable public safety to operate cooperatively across all of Erie County.

The goal of Project RESCU is to provide upgraded equipment and technology to Erie County so that local, state, federal, and international public safety officials will have access to comprehensive surveillance by air and water, as well as an expanded response capacity for incendiary devices. New equipment purchases will include: two helicopters with the capability to provide visual surveillance and live video broadcasts, a remote robot capable of examining and handling suspicious devices, a larger patrol boat, underwater cameras, and infrared search devices.

Providing an effective response to any conceivable emergency situation is the vision of the Information System Infrastructure project. Emergency Services and Central Police Services have been in discussions with New York State regarding combining local communications with statewide communications and locating resources within a Countywide Emergency Operations center.

For More Information

For more information about the Erie County Emergency Readiness and Response Planning Team or Erie County's regional preparedness efforts, contact Carl J. Calabrese, Deputy County Executive, at (716) 858-8500 or by e-mail at calabrec@bflo.co.erie.ny.us.

For additional information on ODP *State and Local Approaches* bulletins, contact Gabrielle Meszaros-Parada at (202) 307-6061.