

## **King County Office of Emergency Management Podcasts**

### ***Disasters: Are you ready?***

#### **EOC Operational Tips II**

November 2006 was the wettest month “ever” in Washington State. We had over 15 inches of rainfall during the month. With that amount of rain, flooding was probably a given.

It had been almost ten years since we’d had a significant flood in King County. And, the largest scale activation we had experienced since then was the Nisqually Earthquake in 2001. Which leads me to share with you some of the operational things I’ve learned and in some cases, re-learned from operating in response to disasters.

First is that we believe in an all-hazards approach to disaster preparedness. Having said that, there are some peculiar aspects to each type of hazard. For us a volcanic eruption would cause a need for evacuating selected valley areas that could be impacted by a lahar or mud flow. A hazardous materials release might cause people to “shelter in place.” So each event can be slightly or significantly different from one another.

For our flood event we found that over the ten years we had experienced significant staff changes both in our office and at the King County Flood Warning Center, and while our respective staffs had pre-coordinated for the current flood season, going through an actual event led us to recognize that we still need to sort things out like roles and responsibilities. Which is pretty normal, the key is to follow-up with folks post event and implement procedures and training to hopefully avoid a recurrence.

This flood event was a larger regional event with much of Western Washington being affected. One of the things I tell my staff to do when giving an operational briefing or writing a situation report is to first paint a picture of what is happening nationally (if appropriate), at the state level and other surrounding counties. This puts things in perspective as to what is happening here locally in our part of the world and where we might fit in the area of resource allocation of federal and state resources. When doing a briefing, use a map to

brief off of. It allows you to organize your thoughts and move north to south, or east to west, etc. For people who might not be familiar with the geography of your region it allows them to better understand where events are taking place in relationship to places and issues.

One last item I “re-learned” was to always triple check any phone number that is going into a news release for the public, or anyone else to call. I had learned this lesson years ago when I worked as the Operations Unit Manager for the State of Washington and sure enough, the lesson had to be relearned again. The “pain” of not doing the triple check will hopefully stick this time in my memory bank.

Lastly, nothing improves readiness like having exercise events. Two years ago we did a simulated bus and train bombing exercise called “Double Trouble” and when the London Subway and Bus Bombing a few months later sent us scrambling to be sure we had a handle on our local situation the preparedness and lessons learned from our practice event paid off handsomely.

So, here is to continuous learning and may all your disasters in 2007 be small ones, like spilled milk at the dinner table.