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A Training Partnership That Began With a Grant

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by UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND CENTER FOR HEALTH AND HOMELAND SECURITY

Wed, October 15, 2014



Since 2005, The Center for Health and Homeland Security (CHHS) has partnered with the Baltimore City Mayor's Office of Emergency Management (MOEM) on numerous efforts to improve the safety and security of the region. As an academic consulting agency based locally out of the University of Maryland, Baltimore, CHHS

has worked with a variety of agencies in Baltimore over the years to support preparedness efforts. With a staff of more than 60 professionals with expertise in law, counterterrorism, emergency management, and public health, CHHS provides hands-on work to clients across the city and around the world, and shares resources and best practices to enhance clients' internal goals and objectives.

Initially, CHHS staff members worked with MOEM and the Baltimore Urban Area Work Group to assist with homeland security grant applications and grants management. In 2006, CHHS led the effort to write MOEM's Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASDI) grant application, which was eventually given a perfect score by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, thereby securing critical funds for sustainment and improvement of emergency management efforts. Because effective grants administration requires full awareness of programmatic details, the CHHS staffers became more involved with substantive MOEM projects, including planning and program management services.

In 2009-2010, CHHS had three staffers working directly for MOEM, supporting grants, developing a strategic plan for the region, and overseeing numerous city subcommittees. One former CHHS staff member, Calvin Bowman, moved on to work directly for MOEM as a senior policy advisor and chairman of the Baltimore Urban Area Security Initiative. That move helps preserve the cooperative relationship between the organizations. Over the years, CHHS has expanded its work with the city, as well as stakeholders in the region, to include planning for emergencies, supporting the city's emergency operations center, and, most recently, conducting exercises to test a variety of capabilities.

These exercises focused on a wide range of topics, including 911 call centers, continuity of operations planning, and large-scale incidents in Washington, D.C., that may affect the Baltimore region. The findings and recommendations for improvement from each of these exercises have helped increase preparedness and response capabilities for Baltimore City. Below is a summary of each of the exercises conducted by CHHS with MOEM.

Baltimore City Communications & Call Center Tabletop Exercise

In October 2012, CHHS and MOEM conducted a tabletop exercise that tested the city's emergency communications network and capabilities, in addition to its continuity plans. Emergency communications are critical when responding to major incidents, as well as for the city's day-to-day operations. The Baltimore City Communications and Call Center Tabletop Exercise presented scenarios that would impact communications capabilities and impede 911 services and facilitated discussion among senior officials – including MOEM, the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore City Police Department, the Mayor's Office of Information Technology, and the Municipal Telephone Exchange. The exercise identified ways to enhance current capabilities and increase the overall preparedness and response of emergency services.



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Baltimore Metropolitan Local Capability Exercise

CHHS supported MOEM in conducting the Baltimore Metropolitan Local Capability Exercise in April 2013. The tabletop was one of four related exercises that were part of the Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program, each focusing on the consequences of the explosion of a 10-kiloton nuclear device in Washington, D.C. The tabletop concentrated on the impacts of evacuating the population from D.C. to the Baltimore area, and then considered impacts of nuclear fallout on the Baltimore region. Issues included transportation and evacuation management, command and control, communications infrastructure, public messaging, and impacts on the supply chains within the region. CHHS led the development, facilitation, and evaluation of the exercise.

Baltimore City Continuity of Operations Tabletop Exercise

In November 2013, CHHS supported MOEM in the development of a Continuity of Operations (COOP) Tabletop Exercise. The purpose of the exercise was to bring together stakeholders from city agencies to discuss and review their COOP plans. COOP plans ensure that agencies are able to continue performance of essential functions following a disaster. Participants had the opportunity to evaluate their COOP plans during a mock weather event that affects the city. Lessons learned and recommendations for improvement from the exercise were then taken back to each participating agency for inclusion in their COOP plans.

Star Spangled Spectacular

To prepare the regional stakeholders for the largest event in Baltimore's history, CHHS developed a mock disaster exercise in 2014 for the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), which involved coordination among participants, including MOEM, a month before the events. The first part of the exercise explored a mock weather scenario: a tornado affecting the Festival Villages and the Inner Harbor during the height of the Star Spangled Spectacular. Although it was merely an exercise, the scenario gave participants a chance to discuss their roles, responsibilities, and actions if such an event occurred. As the mock scenario unfolded, first responders quickly reviewed their approved plans and openly discussed the activities their agency would be involved in as a response to the tornado.

In addition to the mock tornado, exercise participants also were presented with another scenario: a mock terrorist attack during the celebration and an explosion aboard a military vessel located at Locust Point. Overall, the exercise offered stakeholders – including local, state, and federal partners – involved in the Star Spangled Spectacular an opportunity to discuss all aspects of response to a potential incident during the event.

Information for this article provided by:

Vernon Herron, MS, is a senior policy analyst for CHHS. Before joining CHHS, Vernon Herron served as the deputy chief administrative officer for public safety and director of homeland security in Prince George's County, Maryland. He also served more than 27 years in the Maryland State Police where he progressed through the ranks to major. As commander in the Maryland State Police, he led the Violent Crime Strike Force. He is a graduate of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Academy, holds a Master's of Science in Management from Johns Hopkins University, and a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice from the University of Maryland, University College.

Laura Hoch, MPlA, CHHS exercise and training program manager, joined CHHS in December 2010 as a policy analyst. In 2013, she was named exercise and training program manager where she leads the center's efforts to develop and evaluate clients' operational response plans for a variety of hazard scenarios. She graduated from Allegheny College with a degree in political science and received a Master of Public and International Affairs from the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public and International Affairs.

Alexandra Podolny, JD, CHHS associate director, joined CHHS in May 2005 as a law and policy analyst. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from the University of Maryland, College Park, and a Juris Doctorate from the University of Maryland, Francis King Carey School of Law. As an associate director since 2007, she has responsibilities including the oversight of several Maryland Emergency Management Agency planning projects, interoperability efforts, and supporting local emergency operations agencies in D.C. and Maryland. She also has supervised numerous continuity of operations planning projects for state and local agencies, academic institutions, and various other organizations.



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