

# REGION 2 BI-WEEKLY

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## ANNUAL EXERCISES WRIT LARGE *IMAT, DCE Join Annual Drills for 'Big Bang'*

The exercises had particularly nightmarish scenarios: Three Radiological Dispersal Devices (RDDs) explode at Newark International Airport, Downtown Newark, and the Meadowlands sports complex. A fourth is found un-detonated at the Jersey entrance to the Holland Tunnel. Simultaneously, an explosion at a Jersey City chemical plant releases a deadly plume of chlorine gas that wafts towards lower Manhattan.

These were the conditions the Region II IMAT and Defense Coordinating Element (DCE) were presented with last week as they assembled at the New Jersey State Police/Office of Emergency Management Regional Operations Intelligence Center in West Trenton (see photo below) to exercise federal and DoD assets in support of the state facing simultaneous terrorist attacks.

They were tasked with assisting the state in



investigating the attacks, and responding to incidents that would have left thousands dead from chlorine exposure and radiation.

The emotional, complex scenario was the IMAT's annual Operational Readiness Exercise, when HQ peers evaluated the 10 member team's ability to set-up an Initial Operating Facility (IOF) and their

capability to get online and move relevant files. The exercise was also part of the DCE's annual evaluation process, in which its ability to process and handle requests for assistance and the general command and control of all Title 10 DoD assets are studied and appraised.

In addition to several real-life injects, including daily press conferences and TV broadcasts, the week-long exercise also had to accommodate visiting VIPs – RA Lynn Canton and Col. Rick Fuentes of the NJ State Police -- as would occur in actual incidents, while still conducting tactics meetings, planning meetings, command & general staff meetings, as well as Unified Command Group meetings.

Both teams found the exercise very helpful in being able to practice in the exact location that FEMA, the DCE and NJ authorities would be co-located during an actual event. It allowed the teams to work out the best configuration of rooms for their operations, as well as providing a dry run for setting up the technical infrastructure needed to properly stand up the IOF, see below.



"We were rocking," said the DCE's Col. Robert Freehill of the IMAT-DCE-NJ collaboration. "When Saturday rolled around, we wished we could have kept on executing our mission, supporting our Federal partners and the New Jersey team. We didn't want to stop, and we learned so much we can easily do it all again. Furthermore, our teams are even more ready in the event of an actual response."

# IS CHANGE POSSIBLE?

That question underpinned six IMPACT workshops that took place in the Region last week.

The facilitated discussions were the follow-up to a Gallup survey of staff attitudes conducted agency-wide under the auspices of the B.E.S.T. (Building Engagement Strengths and Talent) Workforce Initiative in December 2008 and January 2009. The goal was to enhance employee engagement, and thereby office morale and work performance. All five divisions participated, as did the Office of the Regional Administrator.

As the survey data was old, and there has been a 52% increase in Regional staff since June 2008, as well as new regional and divisional leadership, facilitator Michele Verebelyi focused on the 12 criteria (Q12) the survey uses to evaluate employee engagement, which are illustrated by a pyramid, with the most basic questions of what an employee 'gets' walking in the door — *"I know what is expected of me,"* and *"I have the materials and equipment needed to do my work"* — as the base of the pyramid. Minimally everyone should be able to say 'yes' to these two questions.

The Q12 then details a hierarchy of engagement as the pyramid narrows, detailing interactions with supervisors — *"There is someone at work who encourages my development"* — to whether a person feels they 'belong.' Having "a best friend at work" denotes engagement. At the pyramid's pinnacle, questions deal with whether an employee feels they have opportunities to learn and grow: *"In the past six months, someone has talked to me about my progress."* After this explanation, the 12 criteria were used to guide discussions of the current state of employee engagement in Region II.

Ms. Verebelyi has a Masters in Organizational Development from Loyola University and 18+plus years experience creating change in workplaces. She identified *four challenges to behavioral change*:

- The workplace's current culture and its history;
- Engagement: whether people feel they are a part of the organization;
- Leadership support for change;
- An environment where people feel they can speak openly and truthfully without fear of repercussions or reprisals.

# IMPACT'S EFFECT

By Lynn Canton, RA, Region II

To be engaged by your work — *to be committed to specific outcomes; to be an active participant in a common project* — is not a touchy-feely issue; it is a bottom line issue. It directly affects how well we perform our jobs.

Because of that, the compelling effect and legacy of last week's IMPACT sessions must be more than "a good venting." It must be the beginning of a process by which we all — management and staff — acknowledge problems where they exist, and actively work together to find solutions. This is not a radical idea, but it may entail a radical change of behavior.

Guided by the four challenges to change identified by the IMPACT facilitator (see lower left), the venting was a good start. Issues with the Region's current culture, and a history of grievances were spoken aloud and the world didn't end. And were any of us really surprised to learn:

- We were segmented by both division and branch?
- There is a fear of retribution for divergent opinions and/or approaches, and constructive disagreement is not encouraged?
- The new employee 'on-boarding' process remains a nightmare?
- There is a lack of civility in our discourse?
- Managers are perceived as poor listeners?

Probably not.

Although personally I was surprised to hear that I am perceived as being remote. It pains me, but I am determine to own it — meaning, I am determine to work on changing that perception by changing my behavior.

I have likewise directed the division heads to be attentive to (internalize) staff feedback, to acknowledge recurring patterns, and to institutionalize and continue an open dialogue, where people feel safe to speak frankly without fear of reprisal.

Given our stellar record in 2010 — servicing a total of 11 presidential disasters here and in the CAD — it's clearly not our performance that is our biggest challenge, but our behavior, how we treat each other. **I know we can fix this, and as the Regional Administrator I am determine that we try.**



# BACK AT HIS DESK REGIONALNOTES:

Heeeeeeeee's back.



For the past 2 ½ years Mark Walters, Region II's Director of Mission Support, has been the Director of the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA), serving under an Intergovernmental Personnel Act mobility program. While assigned to the Government of the Virgin Islands, FEMA continued to pay his salary.

Mark's assignment was to overhaul emergency management in the Territory. He did so by creating a new NIMS-compliant cabinet-level agency reporting directly to the governor, consolidating all the emergency management components that had been scattered throughout the government.

His first challenge was political: In 2009, Mark shepherded legislation through the VI Senate that established VITEMA and its budget. He then consolidated the territory's 911 Emergency Communications Centers, its Public Assistance Program and the its Office of Homeland Security – all of which reported to different agencies – under the VITEMA umbrella.

Mark also set up the first mass alert notification system, [VI Alert](#), created a Territorial Emergency Operations Plan and started the installation of a tsunami warning system which will be linked to VI Alert.

While effecting change, change also greeted Mark on his return to Region II: Not only has the name of his division been changed – from the Management Division to Mission Support – but so too has his physical offices, from the east to the west side of 26 Federal Plaza. In addition, the Mission Support staff has increased by 50 percent. “But I notice we still have snow here in February,” Mark lamented.

## GRACE UNDER PRESSURE:

***“It isn’t often that a Member of Congress calls me to speak glowingly of a specific staff member.”***

So wrote FEMA Deputy Administrator Richard Serino to Region II Senior Engineer Paul Weberg, thanking him for his work at a contentious community meeting in Valley Stream, NY.

Paul was part of the Mitigation team sent out to Nassau County to explain the science behind the county's new flood maps. Residents were upset and concerned about the impact of the new map's expanded floodplain on their flood insurance premiums and property values.

Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (NY-4), who represents the area, took the time to call Deputy Administrator directly to praise the entire FEMA team's performance, singling out Paul out for his exemplary work under very difficult circumstances. “I was thrilled to hear how well you and the other members of the FEMA team performed,” Serino wrote.

## TRAINING AND SUPPORT ACROSS DIVISIONS

Warren De Temple, a Technical Hazard Program Specialist in PNP, coordinated Radiological Training for the Region II's IMAT team earlier this month, supporting their stellar performance at their Annual Operational Readiness Exercise, which had a large Radiological Dispersal Device (RDD) component (see story page 1).

Sgt. Mark Teitler (right) of NYPD's Counter Terrorism Unit, explained NYPD's efforts to prepare and respond in the event of a radiological incident, offering specific awareness level training on RDDs.

This specialized training allowed FEMA to understand the basics of a radiological emergency, and how FEMA would be able to best assist our stakeholders, should such a type of incident occur within New York City or elsewhere in the Region.



# Eleanor Dimola



Region II suffered another wrenching loss this week with the sudden death of one its original staff members (and more recently, longtime DAE), Eleanor Dimola.

Eleanor began her commitment to government service as a secretary with Health and Human Services (HHS) in 1965. She was 19 years old.

She came to FEMA when the agency was founded in 1979, becoming a Contract Specialist in 1988. She “retired” in December of 1997, after 32 years of government service. But she returned to Region II the next year as a DAE Contracting Officer, serving in that capacity on presidentially declared disasters for the next 13 years, right up until her untimely passing this week.

Eleanor was the Region’s ‘go-to’ person for all contractual issues. She trained and mentored four generations of Regional II Contracting Officers. Her institutional memory and quirky sense of humor will be severely missed. Although they never married, she is survived by her soul mate.

Arrangements were still pending at the time of the Newsletter’s publication.