



The Silver Jackets – Many Agencies, One Solution

Background

The National Response Plan issued in December 2004 by the Department of Homeland Security provides the framework for collaboration between Federal, state, local, and tribal agencies, in addition to, nongovernmental organizations, private-sector, and emergency management entities in order to prepare for, respond to, and recover from major disasters. The planning and implementation of preventive solutions to these disasters have typically been achieved through individual agency processes and procedures. Even though many agencies and local governments have been successful with maintaining strong partnerships, overall national interagency collaboration for pre-disaster activities has been intermittent.

Because flooding is the nation's leading natural disaster, as a starting point, an interagency pilot program with focus on flood mitigation was implemented. The pilot program, named the Silver Jackets, involves the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and state officials serving as lead facilitators in establishing an interagency team at the state level. This pilot program to-date has shown nothing but success.

Purpose

This concept provides a more formal and consistent strategy for implementing an interagency approach to planning and implementing measures to reduce the risks associated with natural hazards. The Silver Jackets Program will serve as the mechanism for developing and maintaining interagency partnerships and collectively moving towards solutions to high priority issues. This program will also provide opportunity to identify barriers to collaboration between agencies, such as conflicting agency policies or authorities, and to elevate recommendations to the next level.

The primary goals are to,

- Find ways to leverage available resources and information between agencies, especially with national programs such as FEMA's Map Modernization (MapMod) Program and USACE's Levee Inventory and Assessment Initiative;
- Provide hazard mitigation assistance to high priority communities targeted by the states' mitigation plans;
- Define a process for interagency communication;
- Increase and improve public outreach in the area of risk management with the establishment of a united Federal effort;
- Gain familiarity of each agencies' processes and programs to better advise the public; and,
- Create a mechanism to collaboratively solve issues and implement activities.

Structure

The program proposes establishing an interagency team for each state with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the State National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) coordinator, and the State Hazard Mitigation Officer as standing members and lead facilitators. The lead facilitators work together to keep key stakeholders involved, the team focused, and help set team priorities based on the needs of the state. The state level was selected because it is a common boundary for all entities and is key in emergency response and risk management planning. Also, the state provides the direct link to local governments and communities.

Adjunct members would include representatives from other interested Federal agencies who would be available to assist when needed. It may be appropriate to include representatives from Native American tribes/nations as either adjunct or standing members in some states in which they constitute a relatively high percentage of the population.

Resources

Providing staff resources for participation in the Silver Jackets Program will be the responsibility of each agency. Resources for hazard mitigation activities associated with the team will be accomplished through the individual programs of each agency within the constraints of available budgets.

Training

One of the many benefits associated with this effort will be to promote better understanding of each agencies missions and programs among team members. Prior to deployment of a Silver Jackets Team, members should receive training in the mitigation programs of each Federal and state agency. It is recommended that standing team members from FEMA and USACE spend 1-2 weeks working at the office of their counterparts. Funding for this training will be jointly shared between agencies.

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