

# REGION 2 BI-WEEKLY

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## R-2 PREPARED; FURLOUGH AVERTED *11th Hour CR Overtakes Week of Plans*

Last week, as Congress debated whether to pass a Continuing Resolution to fund the federal government, Region II's senior leadership — living the preparedness credo — planned for the worst...

Many of those preparations fell to the new Regional Counsel, Anthony Ruffini, at podium right, who had a steep learning curve. "I've never been through a furlough," he noted. "The last time it happened was 1996, and I was in my first year of college.

"But early last week, I personally realized the situation was serious when I began getting emails from Headquarters that began using the word 'hiatus,' instead of 'furlough.' Hiatus sounded so much more abstract. I just knew they meant business."

Anthony says his initial challenge was balancing the needs of FEMA Headquarters with those of the Region. "Headquarters needed us to comply with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) processes. Here in the Region, we needed to take care of our people."



Ruffini noted that many people in the Region live paycheck to paycheck. "The senior leadership decided early on that people needed to be kept informed. They needed to know their status and what options might be available in the event of an extended shut-down. That's why Lynn Canton (pictured above with Ruffini) wanted an "All Hands" meeting last Friday. She wanted everyone to know the shut-down plan."

Since only employees paid by Congressional appropriations would have been affected by the shut-down, Ruffini spent the early part of the week identifying the fund codes for each of the Region's more than 150 employees. He then drafted individual emails to ensure everyone had the legal notification of furlough required by law, and the exempt knew who they were.

As with many preparedness initiatives, this one happily proved unnecessary when Congress passed a Continuing Resolution at the 11th hour. "It was actually the 11th hour and 26 minutes — 11:26pm — when they announced the deal," Anthony said. "But I learned a lot, particularly that Region II works really well in a pressure cooker situation. Everyone pulled together."

A good thing for an emergency management agency.

A second positive outcome: Lynn and Deputy Regional Administrator Mike Moriarty had a wager on whether the shut down would happen. Mike will be buying her dinner.



Region II staff at "All Hands" meeting last Friday, hearing how the projected furlough would affect them, and getting instructions on a orderly work stoppage. Staff at the CAD and the Region's two JFOs tuned in via VTC.

# **REGIONAL ROUND-UP**

## **TRAINING TEEN CERTs**



The Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) certified its first class of student/volunteers as Teen CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) members last month, kicking off a pilot program in the Territory that replicates efforts in Puerto Rico and New Jersey.

Twenty-seven students of St. Croix's Seventh-Day Adventist School spent 20 hours over four days learning a range of disaster response skills, including fire suppression, above right, light search and rescue procedures, and CPR. The inaugural class, above left, will be asked to join VITEMA in future training, community outreach, and various exercise events.

## **IMAT-DCE COMMUNICATIONS EXERCISE**



The IMAT maintains VSAT and BGAN capability, left, which is tested every month. Last week, the team drilled with the DCE, to ensure seamless communications in the field.

IMAT Planning Section Chief Danna Lopez, below, works with Kirk Henderson, below right, to establish connectivity during the Comm Ex. Iris Epsenhart (IA) is at left.



# EA DAEs TRAIN AT THE CAD



A team of eight new External Affairs DAEs and two mentors were at the CAD this week, part of an EMI External Affairs Overview course to familiarize them with FEMA programs, Region II and the CAD's disaster operations.

The interns are from various regions, including Regions 4, 6, 7 and 9. One of the Mentors was Region II's own Caridad Martinez, a Community Relations Field Supervisor. Over the course of the two week program, the interns will also shadow several External Affairs functions at the CAD.

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**HOLD THE DATE:**

**APRIL 28**

**Take Our Daughters And Sons To Work<sup>®</sup> Day**

Now in its 18th year, this national public education program helps children discover the power and possibilities associated with a balanced work and family life. The program aims to go beyond "shadowing an adult" in their workplace, to prompting children to dream without limitations and to think imaginatively about their family, work, and community lives.

RA Lynn Canton invites all Region II parents and their children to join her in the Office of the Region Administrator at 9:00 am Thursday, April 28 for a child-friendly overview of the Region's business. Please RSVP if your children will attend, including both their names and age. Send this information to [Carri.Hoffman1@dhs.gov](mailto:Carri.Hoffman1@dhs.gov) and/or [Kristina.Simpson@dhs.gov](mailto:Kristina.Simpson@dhs.gov)

## **Blackberry Shortcuts**

**To move around a message list:**

To move **up** a screen, press the Shift key and Space key.

To move **down** a screen, press the Space key.

To move **to the top** of a message list, **press T**.

To move to the **bottom of a message list**, **press B**.

To move to **the next date**, **press N**.

To move to the **previous date**, **press P**.

To move to the **next unopened item**, **press U**.

To move to the **next related message**, **press J**.

To move to the **previous related message**, **press K**.

**On a web page**

To **zoom in** to a web page, **press I**.

To **zoom out** from a web page, **press O**.

For a complete list of Blackberry shortcuts:

[http://docs.blackberry.com/en/smartphone\\_users/deliverables/11298/Shortcuts\\_38809\\_11.jsp](http://docs.blackberry.com/en/smartphone_users/deliverables/11298/Shortcuts_38809_11.jsp)

# FEMA FLEXIBLE; ROCK-SOLID FOCUS

By Phyllis Deroian



Dorothy Ower, left, has been with FEMA since 1996 and from the first, she's been 'FEMA flexible.'

Dorothy started in Planning in a regional office in Springfield, NJ, working on the paperwork for a disaster declaration, but they needed someone for a PDA in the Albany area, and she was tapped. Being so new to the agency, Dorothy didn't have a credit card to rent a car, so she traveled to Manhattan, got the card and headed north. Her team lead didn't show up until late the following day.... Once the JFO opened, Dorothy was deployed as a Planning Specialist. But since it was a small disaster, she also wrote IA reports. When the FCO needed an executive secretary, Dorothy took on that assignment.

Dorothy has worked in all 10 Regions, crisscrossing the country from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico, and east to Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. She has served in almost every section of a JFO: Planning, PA Data Processing, Operations, Individual Assistance, Community Relations, and at a DRC, before joining the FCO cadre as a Chief of Staff and sometime DFCO.

She feels one of her biggest contributions to FEMA occurred in 1997-98 when she was deployed to headquarters to join the team that developed the FCO cadre. (It did not exist prior to 1999.) Before that, the Response and Recovery Division Director served as the FCO in a JFO or an FCO was designated by the Region. Dorothy's team was tasked with developing standards for FCO recruitment, establishing test and selection criteria, and preparing a comprehensive FCO training program. Congress approved the initial group of 25 FCO positions, of which 19 were part of the first group hired and trained in 1999.

Dorothy not only watched the JFO's operations evolve — with a FCO at the helm — but also remembers when FEMA was a stand-alone agency, had "Cabinet" status, and the declaration request process had fewer steps. Her institutional memory is an asset she brings to each deployment. "No two disasters are alike," Dorothy says. "The more you work, the more you understand the bigger picture. Experience helps me to understand how synergy in a JFO works, and why it is so important."

Although Dorothy has seen a lot of changes (and affected many), one thing continues to impress her: How DAEs' outside experience complements the FEMA mission. "Staff coming on board bring with them expertise that fit their FEMA position. This helps make the organization a success in a very short time," she says.

Before joining FEMA, Dorothy was an Associate Manager for Prudential Healthcare Systems (Prucare) for 15 years, overseeing three departments and more than 60 employees.

Dorothy is routinely deployed as a Chief of Staff (COS) for the FCO but on small disasters such as her current deployment, DR-1954-NJ, she serves as both the COS and the DFCO. Her biggest challenge in this dual role is not overseeing two positions, but building a sense of team in a JFO where there is a diverse composition of personnel. "And doing that often requires flexibility," Dorothy says.

But for all her 'flexibility,' Dorothy is steadfast in her focus. "While procedures and regulations can be frustrating both to DAEs and applicants in the struggle to keep up with changing requirements, the most important thing is the people, Dorothy says.

"The people who train and mentor us, our FEMA family who come together, often as strangers, to begin operations, and the local, county, state and federal people... We all form an alliance to bring response and recovery efforts to the people we serve. FEMA is in partnership with the public. You can't quantify the human factor."



RA Canton, right, stops by Dorothy's desk in the JFO for an update on DR-1954-NJ.