

# REGION 2 BI-WEEKLY

Vol. 3 Issue 11

June 10, 2011

## R-2 HOSTS 'FIRST OF ITS KIND' EXERCISE PRE-PLANNING FOR POST-DISASTER HOUSING DRAWS FEDS, STATES, NYCOEM AND HQ OBSERVERS



For all the talk about disaster preparedness, there has never been a forum that brought together all the stakeholders tasked with providing housing to disaster survivors — until last week. Region II, in conjunction with HUD, and the Regional Catastrophic Planning Team (RCPT) hosted a Mass Housing exercise, bringing together federal agencies with the housing leads in New York and New Jersey. The question: *After a disaster, how do you get people from temporary shelters into interim housing, and who coordinates that?*

As the lead federal agency in a post-disaster recovery, FEMA organized the exercise, which posited an earthquake in northern New Jersey that also affected New York City, and the suburbs of Westchester County. Participants were presented with a disaster scenario that left over 450,000 people displaced from their homes.

April Velasco, Deputy Regional Health Administrator for HHS, who participated as part of ESF-6, found the scenario helpful. "A lot of issues I wouldn't have thought through if I hadn't been there," she said.

"Nationally, this event was the first of it's kind," said Henry Comas, Operations Specialist, HUD. "It brought together disaster stakeholders *before* an

event to identify the most pressing issues we'll face. Significantly, we identified more questions than answers, but we also enhanced the federal-state lines of communications that are essential for our success."

Among the issues identified as needing clarification was the status of the State Led Disaster Housing Task Forces in NJ and NY — specific roles and responsibilities.

An After-Action Report is being prepared for RA Lynn Canton and HUD RA Adolfo Carrio. Additional exercises will be planned for each state individually, both to address state-specific issues raised in the drill, and to solidify the enhanced communications.

Ironically, this ground breaking initiative is the result of an off-hand remark made following the quarterly meeting of federal agencies in January. Mr. Comas mentioned to RA Canton there had never been a meeting of the post-disaster housing stakeholders... "Let's make it happen," she said.

"It was Lynn's leadership, but Devin (Kerins) and Iris (Epsenhardt) really followed thru on all the details and made this happen," Comas said.

# DEUCE COOP

## 2 Drills In 2 Weeks Test R-2's Plans and Execution

Last week's telework survey – launched by calls from MERS emergency alert system directing staff to log into their laptops before midnight on May 25th – gave R-2's COOP team a valuable insight. "We learned to be better prepared for the full scale exercise that took place this Wednesday," said Russell Fox, Preparedness' Regional Continuity Manager.

Between the recent email migration, which severed some connections to the G-drive, and the large influx of new employees, many of whom did not have their contact information entered into the MERS notification system, last week's bi-annual telework drill performed exactly as planned: It identified problems and shortfalls. The next day, Fox asked managers to ensure all the new hires were in the system. He also asked them to instruct staff **to call in in future drills even if they get the notification after the exercise deadline**. "We need to demonstrate connectivity," Russell explained. "For those who don't telework routinely, it's important to log in periodically, to ensure they have the latest computer updates, password changes and can connect to the G drive. That's why we do these drills at least twice a year."

This week there were two simultaneous COOP exercises: *Rising Storm III* entailed 40 federal agencies and the combined Federal Executive Boards (FEB) of New York City and Northern New Jersey. The second evolved from the FEB drill, but was Region 2 specific, calling for the devolution or handover of our operations to Region V.

This drill was evaluated by HQ's Eric Kretz, Director of FEMA's National Continuity Programs, as part of our two year review. Fox was in the control cell for the larger, FEB drill. His colleagues – Kevin Read, Orlando Olivera and Devin Kerins -- handled the second, issuing injects to the R-2 Emergency Relocation Group (ERG) team assembled in Ft. Monmouth.

In terms of connectivity, Wednesday's drill was a great success. Everyone (except the ERG) tele-commuted. The only people in the office were those with special permission.

In fact, the Region's COOP program as a whole is in terrific shape. When our plan was evaluated by HQ in January, all but one program area (Vital Records Management) was assessed as GREEN, i.e., 'good to go.' After Wednesday's exercise, in which command and control was transferred to Region V, Kretz was overheard saying, "Region 2 is cutting edge in devolution and continuity....an outstanding exercise demonstrated a very cohesive team."

Although Russell Fox is still reeling from the past two weeks — which he likened to stage managing a three-ring circus — he is already planning for next year, and how to redress the one deficiency of Vital Records Management.

He wishes to thank everyone for their participation in the exercises, and the All-Hands Continuity training last week. ("Little Deuce Coup, you don't know what I got.")

## THE BEAT, LIKE GOV OPERATIONS, GOES ON

The CAD's Training, Exercise & COOP Coordinator Orlando "Landy" Olivera was in New York this week, assisting with the Region's COOP/devolution exercise (see above), but he also found time for his Manhattan debut at a downtown venue.

Back home in Puerto Rico, Landy performs two or three nights a week, but Monday's show at *Guantanamera* was his first gig in the Big Apple.

In addition to mandatory covers of "New York, NY," and "Guantanamera," Landy also performed songs from his first album "*Obviamente*."



# EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT: SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE

Twenty three officials from South Korea's Kyonggi Province, home to Seoul and 48% of the country's population, visited Region II last week for an overview of FEMA's work and its organizational structure.

Response Director Dug Salley detailed the mission of each of the five divisions, pointing out that his division focuses on efforts that are "life-saving and life-sustaining in the first 72 hours after or during a disaster." He then focused on the operations of the JFO, and fielded multiple questions.

It was then Dug's turn to ask questions: Who handles emergency management in Korea – the military? the government? The central government assumes some 70 percent of the responsibility, while provincial and local governments handle the remainder, he was told.

Based on the plaudits heard upon our guests' departure, it was a highly responsive session, though not only because Dug Salley's Response Division hosted it.

PNP's Terry Hoey worked with DHS's Federal Protective Service to enable the delegation to get promptly through security. EA's Bill Douglass was drafted to welcome the guests because of his three-year tenure working in Korea for the Daewoo Group, then one of the three largest business groups in the country. Looking for ideas for a recent assignment, EA's Terry Winters inquired whether they had public-private partnerships to combat disasters. (He learned that there are a few, but those companies actually receive government pay.) However, Terry's question was initially misunderstood, sending the discussion down a blind alley. It took EA's Jay Jun, who was also taking photos, to get the discussion back on track, using her fluent Korean to clarify the issue, and implicitly making the point to the visitors that emergency management is a universal language.



## ASSUME YOUR POSITIONS

Watch Officer Rob Ingram checks in LaShonne Bruce for the Response Division's "lightning strike" RRCC exercise last week.

The exercise was designed and conducted to test the effectiveness of our regional activation procedures. It began at 11am on Tuesday May 31<sup>st</sup> with a "no-notice" message instructing staff members at 26 Federal Plaza and 290 Broadway to report to the RRCC. All staff members were then asked to sign-in and identify which RRCC "shift" they are assigned.

Once they signed in, everyone proceeded to their assigned RRCC workstations to log-in. The exercise concluded with each individual reviewing their position-specific Task Book for the job they are assigned in the RRCC during an activation. Overall, the exercise was a big success with 118 Regional staff members signing in.

# FROM JOPLIN'S FRONT LINE

Region 2's contribution to the massive, national response to the tornado that ripped through Joplin, MO on May 22nd tornado has been both formal and informal.

EA's Community Relations DEA Yvonne Whitely sent this email to Cadre Manager Kristina Simpson:

*The destruction in Joplin, MO, is total. I have never seen something like this before. In contrast with all the devastation, it is awe inspiring to see all the volunteers that have come in from all over the country to help the residents of Joplin. It speaks of the caring heart of the American people.*



*The CR teams here, I think, are doing a phenomenal job when you look at the numbers of registered residents and the kudos we get on the streets by those residents. I have been stopped by people on the street and all they want to do is thank FEMA for being here helping the affected. It fills my heart with pride to be in CR to be able to help.*

The 'need to help' drove EA DEA Jay Jun to volunteer with the ASPCA, doing lodging coordination for the volunteers (there were 125 staff and volunteers during her four-day tenure), and coordinating reunification for the owners and strays. Jay estimates over 1,000 animals came into their temporary shelter, with about 330 successful reunifications.

The ASPCA paid for transport and provided lodging in onsite trailers. The trailers were equipped with surplus military bunk beds. As the last volunteer to join the team, the diminutive Jay was assigned an upper bunk, barely reaching the handles and steps. She is on the near right with her ASPCA team.

Significantly, Jay heard about the ASPCA opportunity from another young DAE in the Region, Natasha Henry, who monitors volunteer opportunities.

Natasha initially told me about it and I was initially going to go to Memphis for the flooding but they had enough staff so I couldn't go on the first round. Then Natasha sent me an email again saying that they need people for Joplin, and I jumped on board. (I just wanted to do direct service so I can feel like I am helping).

