

REGION 2 BI-WEEKLY

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HQ-FUNDED PLANS ADVANCE R-2 PRIORITIES 3 Plans Tackle Big Risks; 2 Near Half-Way Point

EDITOR'S NOTE: RA Canton has identified three Regional priorities for FY2012: Planning, THIRA, and workforce development/training. This is the first in a series of articles looking at all three, beginning with planning. Currently, Region II has four distinct plans in development, as well as a Planning Cell designed to provide cross-divisional support, integration and coordination of the Region's plans. An overview of the contractor-supported planning initiative follows.

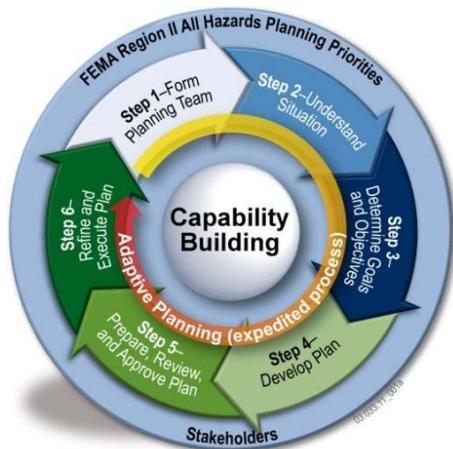
The evolving All Hazards Plan is considered the 'base plan' for all incidents in Region II. It will cover everything from floods (the Region's most common disaster) to wildfires to technological disasters, such as energy grid or dam failures, to acts of terrorism, and everything in between. Its development is being led by Lead Planner and Task Monitor Susan O'Neill. "The plan has to be broad enough to apply to any emergency, but specific enough to mount a realistic response," Susan said.

Susan is overseeing a team of three full time planning contractors and five part timers. The part timers include a technical writer, a meeting facilitator, geospatial analyst, a GIS specialist and a subject matter expert. Their one-year contract is being underwritten by Headquarters' Office of Response and Recovery.

In some ways, this is nothing new. Assistant Administrator for Response Bob Fenton notes that FEMA has had a catastrophic planning program that goes back about five years, but "we formalized this about two years ago, and utilize approximately \$8 million annually to support Region/State plan development." Currently, the three contractor-support plans being developed in Region II account for nearly \$3 million of the annual expenditure.

The three plans under development are: the R-II All Hazards Plan; the Earthquake and Tsunami Plan for Puerto Rico; and the Earthquake and Tsunami Plan for the US Virgin Islands.

Each has six stages of development. See right.



The All-Hazards' Plan is just wrapping up the data gathering and analysis of Step 2.

Next month, Region II becomes the first region to present its plan's Information Analysis Brief (IAB) to senior leadership in DC, to get buy-in on the plan's objectives. "We're the first up, so the pressure is on. All eyes are on us," Susan says.

Robert Rascher is the Lead Planner and Task Monitor for the US Virgin Island's Earthquake and Tsunami Plan. His team consists of four full-time contractors and four part-timers: a GIS specialist, a graphics specialist, a subject matter expert and a meeting facilitator.



From left: Contractors Mark Oswald, Ken Gordon and Deborah Kaeser, with Robert Rascher Islands during their Information Analysis trip. Team member Robert Porter is not shown.

During their recent fact-finding trip, Rob and his team meet with both territorial officials and the private sector. "They take tsunami planning very seriously," Rob said. "Their warning sirens are now installed, and while we were there they were training on them."

The territory has an existing tsunami plan from James Witt and Associates. "Our joint plan will build on the territory's existing preparedness and response plans," Rob said.

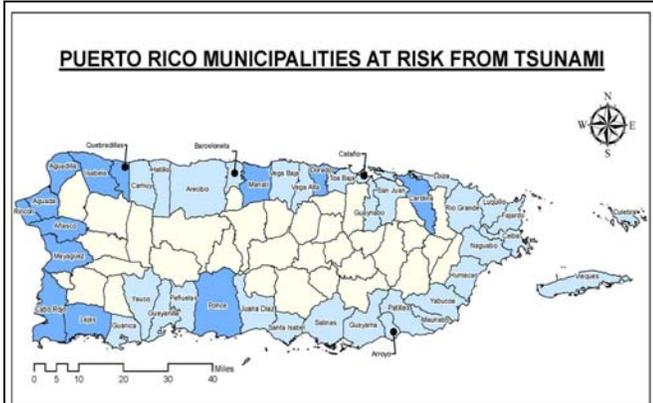
Beginning in September, the team has scheduled three separate three-day *Course of Action Workshops* in the islands with public and private stakeholders to hammer out their views on

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how the plan will achieve its objectives. “We have identified some private sector partners who are very into disaster preparedness and response, and who have a public service outreach program,” Rob said. “We are going to be leveraging them – and all the other stakeholders – for an executable plan.”

Marie Gonzalez is the lead Planner and Task Monitor for Puerto Rico’s Earthquake and Tsunami Plan. She too will create a Planning Team with contractors, including two Senior Planners; a Graphic Specialist; a GIS Specialist; an Analyst; a Subject Matter Expert; a Meeting Facilitator and a Technical Writer. Marie anticipates having the staff fully in place by mid- August.

Nevertheless, Marie is already collecting data. She points out that Puerto Rico has 44 coastal municipalities, of which 13 are recognized as “Tsunami Ready” (dark blue, below) under NOAA’s Tsunami Ready Program.



Puerto Rico’s last earthquake catastrophic response plan was developed by the USACE in 1999. “Everything needs to be up dated,” Marie said, “due to population increases, new developments, and revised data on elevations. We need to reflect current conditions. The plan needs to reflect the current updated data and the concrete course of actions to be taken in all areas.”

Marie anticipates the PR Earthquake & Tsunami plans will be exercised by April 2012, with the final document completed by May 2012. “It is a big scope,” she said. “We will be implementing the new planning doctrine that now requires the six steps in planning. It’s very important to stay on the right track from the beginning.”

R-II TOPS IN FIRE GRANT WORKSHOP ATTENDANCE

By Tania Hedlund
PNP Grants Branch Chief

If it’s summer, it’s workshop season for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program.

Over a six week period beginning May 31, Region-II completed 16 workshops in New York and New Jersey. The workshops were very well attended. In fact, Region-II had the **highest workshop attendance nationwide**, averaging about 25 per workshop. Six of the workshops had over 30 participants, and in Parsippany, NJ nearly 50 people turned out.

AFG consists of grants that are awarded to fire departments to enhance their ability to protect the public and fire service personnel from fire and related hazards. Available grants include Assistance to Firefighters (AFG), Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER). The workshops are designed to assist grantees with preparing their applications.

Although the PNP Grants Branch was down two staffers during workshop season, the branch’s creative planning and scheduling paid off. In addition, two other PNP staffers stepped in to help: Kevin Reed (a former firefighter) and Natasha Henry, as well as HQ-GPD staff and contractors from other Regions. The NYS Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Services Office of Fire Prevention and Control was also a tremendous help in pulling off this Regional coup.



Marie González, right, with two of her team, Giselle Rosario, rear left and Hugh Tosteson, left foreground.

DISASTER RESPONSE:

FROM HOUSING TO HOME

This year, April proved *it is* the cruelest month, with two separate outbreaks of killer tornadoes raging across the Midwest and South. When the dust settled, 382 people were dead, 239 in Alabama alone.

Region II FCO Justo “Tito” Hernandez was on-site less than two days after the second, deadlier onslaught, which claimed 344 of those fatalities. He was sent to Birmingham, where the JFO was set up for the first incident, DR-1971, and tasked with coordinating the implementation of a State Led Housing Task Force, the first time this response mechanism had been invoked in the State or under the National Response Framework.

Together with his state counterpart, Tito had to establish, coordinate and implement the response efforts of over 60 state, federal, local and voluntary agencies trying to serve the immediate housing needs of a decimated population.



Remnants of a neighborhood in Pleasant Grove, Al., hit by the tornadoes and straight line winds of DR-1971.

The Housing Task Force had three subcommittees, with the Immediate Needs – such as food, donations, shelter, wheelchairs, etc. – being served primarily by volunteer and faith-based organizations led by the Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives. FEMA and the State Emergency Management Agency led the Temporary Housing subcommittee with mobile home or assistance with rental properties, where they were available, and Habitat for Humanity and the Mennonites had the lead for the Permanent Housing subcommittee, which was directed by the Alabama Department of Consumer Affairs.

“More than 100,000 people were impacted,” Tito said. “Towns were completely leveled. No post office, no banks, no stores, nothing. People were living in cars and tents. In Tuscaloosa we registered over 10,000 survivors.”



Tito, standing right, briefs Congressman Bennie Thompson, seated left, of Mississippi, Ranking Member of the Homeland Security Committee, at the Birmingham JFO last month.

To many the challenge may have seemed overwhelming. To Tito – FEMA’s senior FCO, who stopped counting his disaster deployments at 100 – dealing only with housing for survivors focused his efforts. “I come from a background of human services. I started with FEMA in 1989 after Hurricane Hugo, when I saw a lot of people living in tents. I was determined that housing would not be an issue in this event.”

He says he was inspired by a brief note from Administrator Fugate, which he recited from memory: “‘Fast. Fast. Fast. Put survivors in front of the disaster process.’ I took that as gospel,” Tito said.

By the end of his deployment, more than 275 families were in mobile homes, many within two weeks of the disaster declaration, an unprecedented pace. An additional 56 mobile units were being installed as he got on the plane, and DR-1971’s Housing Task Force had been deactivated. “Communities are rebuild-



Tito, left with Jorge López, the PA Lead for DR-4004.

ing. Ten to 12 small cities are working to come back ‘green,’”

Tito reports. “I’m just happy to be home.”

After two and a half months in Alabama, Tito returned to the JFO of DR-4004, a PA disaster in Puerto Rico. Home.