

REGION 2 BI-WEEKLY

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CREDENTIALLING BEGINS

By Rob Ingraham

Nationally, seven FEMA cadres will kick off the agency's formalized credentialing initiative this month.

In the works since June, 2008, credentialing is the Agency's plan to establish a consistent process for training staff at all levels, "authoritatively demonstrating that individuals meet professional work standards required by their position and the Agency's mission," according to an Office of External Affairs announcement.

Cadres that will be the first to "migrate" into the process are External Affairs, Contracting and Acquisitions, Disaster Field Training, Logistics, Public Assistance, Security, and Information Technology.

Region II External Affairs Director Kristina Simpson is upbeat about the effort. "We're honored to be among the first cadres to take part in credentialing and I'm confident it will lead to better trained and more efficient employees. We're eager to join our EA colleagues across the country in this important initiative and we're all committed to ensuring its success."

Eventually all FEMA staffers—Permanent Full Time, CORE and Disaster Assistant Employees—will receive a proficiency rating based on a combination of training, course work, and deployment experience. There are four ratings: Trainee, Basically Qualified, Fully Qualified, and Expert.

When asked how the credentialing process will affect salaries, Pershette Wakefield, the Disaster Reserve Workforce liaison for Region II said, "Credentialing is not currently tied to pay. The thinking is *it will be* sometime towards the end of 2011. The intent is to migrate the workforce before addressing compensation."

"Our focus within this first year will be for at least 85% of the EA cadre to attain Basically Qualified credentialing standards, and for 15% to reach Fully Qualified standards," projected Brent Colburn, FEMA Director of External Affairs. The plan was developed by subject matter experts within the EA cadre, the Disaster Reserve Workforce Division (DRWD) and the Emergency Management Institute



Linda Colon, standing above, teaches a Basic Community Relations course to many first-time DAEs at DR-1857's Buffalo JFO. Beginning this month, course completion will be among the factors considered in establishing proficiency levels under FEMA's new credentialing process. ♦

Historically, credentialing has not been standardized and, although some cadres have been able to credential on their own, these efforts have been isolated, non-uniform, and uneven across the Agency. As a result, FEMA has struggled to deliver services that are consistent in quality and efficiency from disaster to disaster, drawing media criticism and mixed feedback from local communities and disaster survivors.

The first step in the process will be "data migration," in which individual employee credentialing data from multiple sources is transferred to a single database. Since 70% of personnel who are deployed are reservists, members of the Disaster Reserve Workforce will be migrated first, followed by PFT and CORE employees.

Each employee's data will be compiled into a "portfolio" and entered into a credentialing software tool. This portfolio is then compared to the position credentialing plan in order to determine the employee's credential "type," or proficiency level. For more information please visit

http://online.fema.net/office_management/drwd/credentialing.shtml

DISASTER & PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: New Administration; New Focus

With the transition period for the Obama Administration nearly complete, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano is calling for tighter federal agency integration in its commitment to the needs of people with disabilities in disaster situations.

A 2004 Executive Order from then-president George W. Bush, created the Inter-agency Coordinating Council on Emergency Preparedness and Individuals with Disabilities, and appointed DHS as the lead agency. As Chairwoman of the Council, Napolitano is requesting that the secretaries of all 15 of the federal executive departments and 10 other federal entities that make up the Council assign a representative and a contact person within their respective agencies as soon as possible. Napolitano is pressing for "integrating the needs and expertise of individuals with disabilities in our Nation's preparedness, response and recovery effort."

The Council focuses on nine specific areas of concern for people with disabilities in a disaster: emergency communications; emergency preparedness in the workplace; emergency transportation; health and human services; homeland security policy and operations; housing; non-governmental outreach; research; and state, local, and tribal government outreach.

In a related development, FEMA Administrator W. Craig Fugate recently responded to a letter from House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson that asked FEMA to establish regional disability coordinators to support the disability advisor at headquarters. While Fugate promised to "carefully consider" the idea, he emphasized he wants to avoid dealing with the needs of disabled individuals in a 'stovepipe' fashion, preferring to integrate planning for their needs into FEMA's overall responsibilities.

Fugate also highlighted recent progress in disaster assistance programs for individuals with disabilities, including establishing a network of functional needs support services in each FEMA Regional Office, setting up a cache of durable medical equipment to augment equipment at shelters, and developing training for

shelter managers to support disabled individuals using shelters for the general population.

FEMA has also made strides in providing communications to deaf people by purchasing communications equipment and deploying it to its disaster recovery centers and shelters. Fugate cited improvements in communications to those with hearing and visual impairments by assigning 16 sign language interpreters to recovery centers in California and Iowa after recent disasters in those states.

Marcie Roth, FEMA Senior Advisor, Disability Issues, is leading disability coordination Agency-wide, and is a principal FEMA representative to the Council.

"My role at the Council is to ensure that FEMA is well-represented and that we are participating," she said. She noted that FEMA representation on the Council has been increased since the change in Administrations and that the Council will be seeing many new faces in the coming months.

As a former executive director at the National Spinal Cord Injury Association, one of Roth's primary concerns is planning. "How do we better integrate people with disabilities in disaster planning? The needs of people with disabilities can't be an afterthought. It has to be part of the total preparedness effort." Roth echoed Fugate's concerns that FEMA "needs to avoid 'stovepiping,' and better integrate the various divisions in regard to disability issues.

Roth also hopes to recruit more people with disabilities to the Agency and encourage regions to hire talented people with disabilities. "There's lots of people [with disabilities] out there with the skills we need," she says. The current unemployment rate nation-wide for people with disabilities is approximately 60%. Representation in the federal workforce in 2008 was a dismal 0.88 percent.

"We need to focus on meeting the functional needs of people with disabilities, Roth said. "We've got to ask: What does it take for a person with a disability to maintain their independence during a disaster? If we can focus on functional needs, we can free-up medical personnel to concentrate on the acute care needs."

Roth explained that she's actively reaching out to over 300 disability-related organizations and stakeholders, and welcomes suggestions and comments from all regions. She can be reached at marcie.roth@dhs.gov

FACES OF THE REGION

LINKS REGION II TO SENECA NATION

By Dana Cudmore

Richard Flores (below) serves as the Tribal Liaison Officer for FEMA-1857-DR, the recovery efforts following the severe storms and flooding of Aug. 8 - 10 in western New York.

The liaison is responsible for maintaining open lines of communication and effective government-to-government relationships between FEMA and the Seneca Nation of Indians (SNI).

“Richard is the face of FEMA for many of the Nation,” said Art John, director of SNI’s Emergency Management. “He is always ready to meet with tribal leaders and disaster survivors to communicate the federal response and address any concerns or questions.” In the field, he serves as representative of Federal Coordinating Officer Jaime E. Forero.

His duties include making initial contact with the tribe through the tribal emergency manager. He explains FEMA programs to the tribal council and serves as point of contact for all questions and issues that may arise concerning the disaster.

In the fire service for 20 years, Richard was the fire chief for the Tohono O’Odham Nation in Arizona. In 2000 he returned to school to finish his master’s degree and in 2001 he was hired by FEMA as a Tribal Liaison Officer. Shortly after Sept. 11, 2001, he was recalled to active duty with the Navy and did three tours of duty for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Since joining FEMA in 2001, Richard has served as liaison with numerous tribes, including the Navajo, Seminole, Cherokee, Red Lake and St. Carlos Apaches.



John O'Connell

John O’Connell is a Senior Emergency Planner with a specialty in air operations. He’s working for the Mass Evacuation and Transportation Project (METP) within the Disaster Operations Division.

John recently retired from the Air Force after a 24 year career in which he piloted many different aircraft, ranging from the giant C-5 Galaxy transport to the small, single-engine C-172. As a C-5 pilot for the New York Air National Guard he directly supported the state and federal response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and activated for Operation Enduring Freedom.

After activation, he coordinated the safe delivery of personnel and equipment for more than 200 Operation Iraqi Freedom missions.

His air mobility background includes a tour at the Air Mobility Warfare Center as Deputy Chief, responsible for training the next generation of operational and logistical technicians, managers, and senior leaders. His background also includes emergency air and ground operations planning, as well as a broad base of commercial aviation knowledge. John is a rated airline transport pilot with 10 years of experience in the airline industry.

In his last duty position as Commander of Det 1 Northeast Liaison Region, he worked with the Department of Homeland Security on numerous exercises and developed an extensive expertise in the area of defense support to civilian authorities.

John is originally from New York City and currently lives in Toms River, NJ with his wife and four children. His hobbies include camping, kayaking, and war-bird restoration.