

### **A Culture of Regional Cooperation and Empowerment**

Regional collaboration has increasingly become the defining force in local government today. The presence of councils of government and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) across the nation prove that regional collaboration is a better alternative in facing multi-jurisdictional community challenges such as transportation, homeland security and emergency preparedness, economic development, air and water quality, and aging, to name a few.

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) has witnessed the growth of regional communities in the past forty years, having provided member support to over hundreds of councils of governments and MPOs. NARC has addressed the needs of its members in policy and advocacy, training and technical assistance, events and information dissemination, and best practice sharing.

In sharing best practices of its members, NARC is able to showcase the teamwork of various individuals and groups who strive to improve a community's quality of life, as well as to provide inspiration that indeed in working together a lot more can be achieved. NARC is pleased to share a number of initiatives, which comprehensively address Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness issues, by the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) in Kansas, Missouri.

### **Regional Cooperation Enhances Capabilities in Metro Kansas City**

Political and professional leaders in the Kansas City metropolitan area have worked together to establish a regional homeland security infrastructure to oversee and guide the region's efforts to enhance capabilities to prevent, deter, respond and recover from disasters, including terrorist threats. The Kansas City area includes three Kansas counties along the eastern state line – Johnson, Leavenworth and Wyandotte; and five Missouri counties along that state's western boundary – Cass, Clay, Jackson, Platte and Ray. The region is home to 1.8 million residents over 3,800 square miles.

### **Regional Structure and Organization**

The Kansas City region has organized its homeland security efforts through a Regional Homeland Security Coordinating Committee (RHSCC), ensuring that duplication of effort is avoided, that resources are maximized, that all disciplines and jurisdictions are involved in planning and decision-making, and that all disciplines and the entire region are benefiting from the investments. In August 2002, the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) formed the RHSCC to oversee regional efforts to address new terrorist threats to the Kansas City metro area. MARC is the association of city and county governments and metropolitan planning organization serving the Kansas City region since 1972.

The RHSCC is composed of local elected officials, city and county managers, fire and police chiefs, public health and emergency medical directors, emergency managers, public works directors, and hospital and non-profit executives. The structure provides strong board leadership with a number of working subcommittees tasked to accomplish specific goals. The coordinating committee oversees the financial and programmatic aspects of the work, and reviews the status of all major investments on a bi-monthly basis, with reports that provide visibility on the status of grant resources to all stakeholders on an ongoing basis. A number of working subcommittees

ensures that local jurisdictions and expert personnel are involved in designing capabilities. The RHSCC oversees federal homeland security, public health and hospital bioterrorism prevention funds.

The regional structure and organization has been successful in large part because it has built a level of trust among local officials, it allowed for the region's efforts to become comprehensive in a short period of time, it takes advantage of professional local government leadership, it fosters open communication and constant dialogue, and it has worked from a position of consideration of and respect for all disciplines' needs. The Kansas City urban area organization is built on a regional culture of cooperation and has created a style of leadership that involves key local decision-makers that are empowered to make decisions, recognizing political realities and focused on the outcomes of a more capable region.

### **Regional Plan Development and Local Adoption**

Under the leadership of the regional homeland security committee, the region has updated the Metropolitan Medical Response System Bioterrorism Response Plan and developed a Regional Coordination Guide to address actions required during major events requiring regional response. The region worked together on the recent National Plan Review (Presidential Directive #197), and are developing coordinated local plans to address catastrophic events. A study of the region's special needs population is underway, expected to identify special needs populations and how to best communicate with each group prior to and during emergencies. The region began its work on interoperable communications by developing a three-phase regional interoperable communications plan, and is implementing the first phase in 2006. A regional MetroGIS Consortium was established in 2004 to coordinate the region's GIS resources and to share GIS information. This consortium worked with local emergency managers to prepare a Regional GIS Geospatial Homeland Security Strategic Plan, which will guide investments in GIS to meet emergency preparedness and response needs.

### **Regional Training and Exercise Program**

Kansas City area officials made the decision to invest in a coordinated system of training and exercise support for the entire region, with oversight by a multi-disciplinary committee that assesses needs and develops multi-year plans and event schedules. Funds are allocated for the committee's use in meeting these needs. The program offers a one-stop web-based calendar of all trainings, exercises, meetings and other events to maximize coordination of activities. The committee hosts awareness, operational and management training; train-the-trainer events; informational sessions and workshops; and regional and local exercises. The training and exercise program takes advantage of the regional Government Training Institute operated by MARC, which trains 10,000 local government officials annually.

### **Regional Coordination of Local Emergency Operations Centers**

Local emergency managers representing the largest jurisdictions in the Kansas City region, including the city of Kansas City, MO, have coordinated the purchase and use of Crisis Management software for their Emergency Operations Centers, WebEOC. Working together, eight major jurisdictions have designed a set of regional status boards and agreed to share web-based access of their systems with agencies within their cities and counties, and with each other. The regional boards create a "regional virtual EOC", allowing local emergency managers to

provide situational awareness during events, coordinate media releases, request and track deployment of resources and patients, and monitor the availability of shelter space.

### **Special Team Organization and Enhancements**

The Kansas City region made a decision to invest in a limited number of special teams to meet specific target capabilities. The teams ensure that the entire region will be served, and that duplication of resources is avoided. The teams have standardized protocols, equipment, and training, and train and exercise together to ensure that their response is most effective in a large-scale event. Special teams have been enhanced in areas of hazardous materials response teams in eight fire departments; seven bomb squads working with the FBI and ATF; one regional tactical team composed of eight squads capable of responding to a CBRNE incident; a series of mental health teams from local not-for-profit organizations; and six technical rescue teams in four fire departments.

### **Use of Technology/Regional Applications**

Regional Patient Tracking System: A web-based system that allows the region's over 40 Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agencies and 30 hospitals to use a standard triage tag, wireless bar code readers and database to track patient movement and balance patient loads from a mass casualty event. The system uses the same hardware technology as other tracking systems (personnel accountability), leveraging investments and reducing training time by personnel on equipment and limiting equipment stored in response vehicles. The Patient Tracking System enhances information flow to and from EMS agencies, public health, hospitals, emergency management agencies and not-for-profit organizations (involved in family reunification). The information is managed in seamless, secure system that is HIPAA-compliant.

Regional Metropolitan Emergency Information System (MEIS): A web-based regional data warehouse that allows local agencies to store and share information on personnel, assets and emergency plans and protocols. The system allows local agencies to store and maintain their personnel information, which will be uploaded to the region's personnel accountability system. The MEIS is currently being used by over 70 local agencies, and over 1,000 first responder personnel records are stored in the system.

Regional Use of Medicine Dispensing Software System (MEDS/PODS): The region's 10 local public health agencies (eight counties and two city LPHAs) and the region's 30 hospitals have agreed to use a standard software package to reduce the number of clinical personnel needed at a dispensing site. The MEDS/PODS software and wireless implementation allows LPHAs or hospitals to use automated medical screening and therapy recommendation based on standard protocols for determining appropriate preventive medications and dosage of those going through the dispensing site. The system allows for use at locations that are not pre-wired such as gymnasiums, a variety of dispensing site configurations and for equipment to be set up quickly without cabling.

Critical Incident Site Management System: The Kansas City, MO Police Department has developed a software system that allows police officers or other emergency responders on their laptops in their vehicles or in command posts to access information on floor plans, entry/exit points, staging areas and other information on critical facilities such as schools, government

buildings, chemical and utility plants and locations. The information will allow law enforcement and other first responders to more quickly access and respond to an incident at a facility, and to provide information to personnel arriving to offer mutual aid. Local law enforcement, fire and EMS agencies representing over 20 major jurisdictions throughout the metro area are working with the Kansas City, MO Police Department to pre-plan response with facility managers and enter the information into the easy-to-use system. Over 1,800 facilities have been identified and information collected and loaded into a central server for system application. The system has been used for actual events, including hostage situations and presidential visits.

### **Terrorism Early Warning Inter-Agency Analysis Center**

The Kansas City Regional TEW was established in 2005 to reduce the threat to public safety and security through a heightened level of inter-agency communications, analysis, and information sharing designed to anticipate and counter terrorism and criminal acts. The Kansas City TEW serves the eight county metropolitan region (UASI region) and operates through a multi-disciplinary public-private partnership. The KCTEW will collect, evaluate, analyze, and disseminate information and intelligence in a timely, effective, and appropriately secure manner, in coordination with local, state, and federal agencies charged with homeland security responsibilities, as well as private entities and the general public. The executive committee (or board of directors) that governs the Kansas City Regional TEW includes representatives from many disciplines (law enforcement, emergency management, fire service and EMS, public health and private business) and local and federal government agencies.

The KCTEW has a very aggressive outreach program that incorporates regular presentations and meetings with private sector partners, an active public website, [www.kctew.org](http://www.kctew.org) and encouragement of citizen reporting. The Kansas City Crime Commission and the local Business Executives for National Security are active private sector partners. A local business has donated computer equipment and furniture to allow the KCTEW to begin operations, and the Kansas City, MO Police Department is providing space for personnel and meetings.

### **Progressing as a Region**

The Kansas City region's public officials recognize that their communities face risks from natural and man-made disasters and that large-scale incidents will and have required the resources from multiple agencies. The level of cooperation among communities and disciplines in the metro area has created an environment for regional progress toward enhanced capabilities.

Many years of planning, analyzing and learning from experiences have brought the Kansas City region to this level of sophistication in emergency preparedness. Learning from this example, we find that at the heart of the region's success is the conscious decision of all parties to invest their concerted effort and resources for the greater good.

The Mid-America Regional Council is headed by Executive Director David Warm, who was recently presented with the Walter Scheiber award by the National Association of Regional Councils recognizing leadership excellence and its impact to the regional community. For more information, visit the MARC website at [www.marc.org](http://www.marc.org) or the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) website at [www.narc.org](http://www.narc.org).