Disaster Lessons Learned - State Public Affairs Response
Agenda

• Overview
• Timelines
• Challenges
• Lessons Learned
• Questions
Kansas 2007 Disasters

- Dec. 31, 2006-Jan 2007 Winter Ice/Snow Storm - 44 counties
- May 4, 2007 Greensburg 95% Destroyed by Tornado/Flooding in NE KS - 32 counties
- June 30, 2007 Record setting floods in SE Kansas - 23 counties
- Dec. 2007 – Winter Ice/Snow Storm – 60 counties
- 2007 Disasters in Kansas typically fell on Friday nights before a holiday
- $400 million = cost of Dec. 31, 2006 and May 4, 2007 storms in KS (not including SE KS flooding)
Public Information Goals in Disaster

• Provide life-saving information quickly.
  – What happened, what the public needs to do/go

• Be accurate and timely.
  – Ensures public confidence
    (Be first, be right, be credible – CDC)

• Sustain getting information out when most media leave and move on to another story.
  – Use of local media, local radio transmitter signal, and flyers.
  – Elected officials can also assist in getting media attention.
Greensburg Overview

• May 4, 2007 - Greensburg received 20 minute warning of advancing storm system and tornado.

• At 9:45 p.m., the south central Kansas town was hit by an EF-5 tornado (Enhanced Fujita scale).

• 1.7 miles wide - traveled for 22 miles

• Greensburg had 95% destruction, remaining 5% heavily damaged.

• During first three days of the response, ongoing tornado watches/warnings in state
Friday Timeline

• **Friday, May 4** - Tornado hits Greensburg 9:45 p.m.

• **Calls from State Emergency Operations Center in Topeka with information** 10 p.m. - 11 p.m.

• **Media calls begin coming to PAO Sharon Watson’s cell # - local /national**

• **Phone interviews, live and recorded through Sat. 3 a.m.**
Landmarks Destroyed – Largest Hand-Dug Well and Catholic Church
Main Highway through Greensburg
Early Challenges

- No power
- No water
- No buildings in which to conduct operations
- During the first three days of the response, continued storm warnings in the area.
- Few tornado shelters - Court house and a few other basements were used for emergency workers, rest of town was evacuated.
Saturday Timeline

• Arrived 8:30 a.m. and assessed overall situation, public info

• On site media briefings with local officials Sat. morning

• Kansas Highway Patrol Trooper assisting with media logistics and media schedule from Saturday a.m./p.m. to Sunday p.m.

• Media briefings also include Adj. Gen. & legislators ---

  Messages focus on loss of life, search & rescue, infrastructure, what’s next
First Incident Command Post/Briefings
Media Interviews
Early Interviews/Public Affairs Support
Saturday Timeline

- Media are positioned on edge of town across street from Incident Command Post
- No access into town for media or anyone not specifically working on response (search/rescue)
- National media begin arriving early afternoon
- State PAO leaves Saturday night for Topeka, continuing interviews by phone, and returns Sunday to stay all week
State EOC - Topeka

- Joint Information Center activated Saturday
  - Other state agencies contacted for Public Information support
  - Overnight flooding in Topeka resulted in staffing issues for Public Affairs Office and State EOC
Challenges

• Saturday
  – Determining best point to take control of public affairs because disasters are locally controlled
  – Determining need for additional public affairs support
  – Determining best location for media to tell the story
  – Getting public affairs staff support in Topeka when flooding was affecting this staff and had own agency duties
Timeline - Sunday, May 6

- Media were moved to location in town near operations.
- General Bunting was busy conducting media interviews with national and local media in early morning hours.
- Governor traveled to Greensburg Sunday afternoon by car (weather prohibited flight).
- Media focused on loss of life, search/rescue, and damage/response
Challenges on Sunday, May 6

- Planned for Media Escorts (National Guard and Highway Patrol) to accompany news media to location in center of town for live morning television.
- Families returned to their homes – Media Escorts accompanied media to talk to families.
- Looting – misinformation about National Guard soldiers rather than Active Duty soldiers.
1. Incident Command
2. FEMA (Red Oct.)
3. Logistics, EOC
4. FIRE Operations, Credentialing, Public Information (JIC)
5. FEMA State Housing
6. FEMA Planning
7. FEMA Individual Assistance
8. Public Health
9. FEMA OPS & Logistics
10. FEMA IT Support
11. National Guard Operations
12. Army, Air Force (JOC)
13. Law Enforcement Staging
14. Law Enforcement OPS
15. Copy/Meeting Tent
16. Communications
17. Kiowa County Sheriff
18. City Hall
19. City Hall
20. Storage
21. National Guard
22. Salvation Army
23. Mental Health
24. EMS (staging)
25. FEMA Public Assistance for city
26. FEMA PA for city
27. EPA
28. Courthouse (Shelters on west side)
29. Sheriff’s Dept.
30. Small Business Association
31. Heart to Hearth (First Aid) Two blocks west on Florida & Main
Ongoing News Briefings
Greensburg Media Background Shots
Challenges on Monday

- Media escorts - Families allowed to return
- Ammonia tank leak
- Communication gaps between Incident Command, Law Enforcement Command, Operations – resulted in misinformation in number of dead and rescues
- Governor comments on National Guard equipment shortages (national issue) and it increases focus on Guard response
- Still misinformation by media regarding looting
  Media focus on residents returning to homes and later in day focus shifts to Guard equipment
National Guard Equipment and Response is Focus of Media Attention
Heroes and Signs of Hope
Tuesday

- Interview requests from national media/local media on National Guard response and equipment shortage

- Two new faces on media interviews: Mayor and school superintendent - both brought hope to the scene

- Stories continued on # of dead and extent of damage

- Questions continued on rumors of rescues
President Visits Wednesday, May 9
Most Media Left Town After President’s Visit - Residents Left in Need of Information
Greensburg Community Outreach:
1610 AM Radio & Flyers
Disaster/Media Challenges:
Locating & returning guns to residents, and housing the animals
Disaster/Media Challenges: Debris Removal/Safety Concerns

- Landfill/burn pit - hazardous materials, asbestos, U.S. 54
Disaster/Media Challenges: Too Many Donations Arrived
Transition of State Public Information Staff Begins Thursday, May 10
Public Information Support from State, KS National Guard, County, and City

• State Public Affairs Officer – stayed 1st week with support in from Adjutant General’s Department public affairs staff in Topeka at Emergency Operations Center.

• Several State Agency Public Information Officers served in Greensburg, SE Kansas flooding disaster and State Emergency Operations Center in Topeka.

• 184th Air Refueling Wing – Wichita (KS National Guard)

• 105th Military Public Affairs Detachment – Topeka (KS National Guard)

• County Public Information Officers

• City Public Information Officers
Public Information Team
Transitions/Responsibilities

- Previous public information team spent approximately four hours, sometimes more, to train the replacement public information teams or individuals arriving in Greensburg.
- Teams were responsible for providing daily updates regarding the disaster response to Topeka for inclusion in a news release to media.
- Teams responded to local media questions on site.
- Teams continued updating local radio transmitter (1610 AM) and producing flyers for distribution around town.
- Teams assisted with public meeting planning and general coordination of information for disaster response.
Lessons Learned: Communications

- Ensure communication flow between command operations and public affairs on site early in response: reduces misinformation
- Ensure communication flow between on site Public Affairs staff and State EOC (Topeka) Public Affairs staff.
- Use of Public Information Officers from state, counties, cities and military worked well (sent in first replacement team on fifth day). However, need to continue to build these teams.
- Equipment needs are vast when there are no building, no power, no printers/copiers.
Lessons Learned: PAO Vehicle

• On site Joint Information Center Vehicle needed:
  
  – print news releases, post news conference times, have location where media know to come for answers
  – need ability to take the vehicle back and forth from incident command to media location
Lessons Learned: Staffing/Training/Community Info

• Ongoing disaster in NE/NC Kansas (flooding) at same time as Greensburg tornado: Plan for multiple simultaneous disasters

• Public Affairs Staffing in Emergency Operations Center/Greensburg: Plan for EOC and on site PA support, possible policy to ensure staff support

• Tasks for Emergency Operations Center Public Affairs Relief: Train other Public Affairs staff to work in EOC

• Be ready to support both media info and community info flow
Lessons Learned: Rumors/Talking Points/Elected Officials

- Need staff for rumor control and for monitoring media reports
  - Staff currently in Topeka Public Affairs Office unable to assist in this role during significant crisis, due to other demands.
- One message with clear agency talking points
- Be prepared to be interviewed anytime – one voice/face helps media
- Elected Officials – will also be interviewed. Share disaster response information with them regularly to keep them up to date.
Overall Results

Sustain:
• Regular, frequent news briefings from first day.
• Single Point of Contact in first week
• Address rumors early
• Use media escorts, enforce media control (KHP, Guard)
• Sustain getting information out in weeks to follow
• Transition Public Information Teams carefully

Change:
• Improve staffing, training in Incident Command, JIC
• Ensure communication channels early
• Anticipate elected officials needs as much as possible
Overall Public Affairs Result

- Positive media coverage of emergency response, both local, state and federal
- Positive media coverage of state emergency management and National Guard role
- Positive feedback from media on media escorts and other media information process
- Ongoing efforts to provide residents with daily updates on local radio signal (state communications equipment)
- Ongoing efforts to provide informational flyers to residents throughout town on daily basis
- Smooth transition of PIO teams through June, returned to locals
Questions?

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