

Fauquier County Emergency Management Capabilities and Status

Overview:

Fauquier is the 5th largest county in Virginia, geographically spanning 660 square miles, bordered by seven other counties and situated between the high growth urban areas to the north and east and rural areas to the west. Working closely with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) Fauquier's Emergency Management system continually updates its planning and preparedness efforts to enable responses to or from these various planning districts.

While there has recently been a significant redirection toward terrorism planning and preparedness, Homeland Security starts with Hometown Security and we must not forget our most common and most probable threats in Fauquier which are weather, transportation accidents and domestic violence. Furthermore, while there have been significant efforts nationally and specifically in our greater metropolitan areas to prepare for chemical and biological terrorism, the far greater threats continue to be basic explosive devices.

Planning Initiatives:

In 1998 a significant increase in terrorism planning and preparedness by public safety agencies had been launched, although not recognized very much by the media. Since 1999, however, the following events have been the cause for more significant planning initiatives both nationally and locally.

1999-Columbine High School Shooting, Colorado

Y2K- The potential computer and systems catastrophe

Natural Disasters such as Winter Storms, Tornados, Hurricanes

September 11, 2001 Attacks and associated Terrorism Incidents

Anthrax threats of 2001

Evacuation planning of the Washington Metropolitan Area

National Interjurisdictional Incident Management System (NIIMS)

The following Planning & Preparedness Activities have been completed or continue to be ongoing:

EOP- Emergency Operations Plan: This is mainly an administrative manual containing policies & procedures for managing Emergency Incidents consisting of 210 pages and is continually updated.

Sheltering Planning & Preparedness- Our sheltering operations are broken into two categories, *Expected* where we have lead time to set up a shelter such as a winter storm and *Unexpected*. Many thanks to our Fauquier Chapter of American Red Cross, Fauquier County Public Schools and Department of Social Services, who provide significant support in this area.

Haz-Mat Transportation Plan – This is primarily the operational response portion of the EOP. A full version has been distributed to all Fire Rescue Companies and Law Enforcement Agencies in Fauquier County to include the State Police. The mapping portion of this 265 page book has been provided to every law enforcement patrol unit. These maps detail evacuation routes, evacuation distances and zones and other important transportation routes such as railway and major intersection detours.

Schools response training with School Administration and Principals has been conducted through a cooperative effort with the Sheriff's Office and the Department of Fire & Emergency Services.

Per Federal requirements, Fauquier Emergency Management participated in a regional initiative led by Jeff Walker of the Rappahannock Rapidan regional commission to complete our individual and regional Mitigation Plan. This plan pre-qualifies improvement projects and identifies both regional and local needs which may be eligible for federal grants to reduce the impacts of future disaster situations.

The Planning District-9 Health Department/Emergency Preparedness Task Force has been and continues to meet at least quarterly to address public health preparedness. This included an extensive plan based on a smallpox outbreak. This group led by the regional Health Director, Dr. Lilian Peak, and our regional Health Department Emergency Planner, Kathy Hatter, has further worked with the regional localities to prepare for chemical and most specifically biological incidents.. In September 2004, a regional drill for mass medical response and medication dispensing was held at the Madison Volunteer Fire Department. Last year this group coordinated two flu clinics, one in Culpeper and one in Warrenton, during a flu vaccine shortage which proved to be an excellent drill for Mass Medical Response. Most recently the group was briefed on the threats of influenza and the possibilities of a Pandemic.

The Fauquier Hospital Emergency Planning Committee led by Gene Monago has been meeting monthly for several years. This group has coordinated numerous drills to ensure the preparedness and response capabilities of Fauquier Hospital. Fauquier is also a member of the Northern Virginia/Metro Hospital Alliance, which shares a communications system and support in preparedness and response activities.

Fauquier also benefits from support through the NOVA Emergency Managers Group which shares information with Fauquier as needed.

We are fortunate to have the support of a very qualified and capable VDEM Regional Coordinator, Bruce Sterling assigned to Region II consisting of 15 counties. Bruce has a fire department background, serving in many capacities in the Portsmouth, VA Fire Department. Bruce responds to incidents as needed such as our recent tornado events and supports our Emergency Management planning and preparedness as needed.

Fauquier is included and regularly attends the NOVA Fire Department Chiefs Group which meets monthly. Through this group, Fauquier receives support and inclusion in regional policies & procedures to better enable us when responding into or receiving assistance from our neighbors to the north and east.

As required by federal mandate we have adopted by BOS Resolution the policies & procedures related to the National Interagency Incident Management System (NIIMS). The greatest asset of this system is accepting and practicing the concept of Unified Command at multi-agency and multi-jurisdictional incidents. While we have been practicing this system on major events, in June we conducted a Command School which included a large table top exercise called Abbottville, which is a scale model of a large town. We plan to repeat this annually. Training on NIIMS and Unified Command continues to be required at various levels by the DHS (Department of Homeland Security) through VDEM in order to be eligible for Federal Funds from the Dept of Homeland Security.

Most recently, we implemented a community alerting system paid for by federal funds called City Watch. This is an automated telephone dial up system which provides emergency voice advisory information to residents in selected or wide spread areas. The first test of City Watch was during the recent rain event October 9-10 which brought flood conditions to Remington.

Response Activities

Updating emergency plans includes educating the prospective personnel and departments of their expectations. All county departments and employees are considered part of the county emergency management team and have been briefed as to what their role is per the EOP. This includes not only the Public Safety Departments and General Services, but also Finance, Procurement, Human Resources, Parks and Recreation, Schools, etc.

Since 1999, the following incidents have tested some or all of our Emergency Management Response capabilities including activating our Emergency Operations Center, Declaring Local Emergency status, receiving State and Federal Declarations, activating emergency shelters to include the schools, limited evacuations, loss of utilities, damage assessment, and cost recovery.

- Columbine, Colorado School shooting
- Tornados: Total number of 5 Since year 2000
- Severe Winter Storms total number of 4 since year 2000
- September 11, 2001 Terrorist Attack
- Hurricane/Tropical Remnants total number 5 since year 2000

Weaknesses Identified in our Emergency Management System and Correction Status

- Prior to 2004, our old low band Radio Communications System presented significant limitations for responses to all emergencies. Thanks to the BOS, our new 800 mhz radio system has greatly improved our Emergency Management System
- Inadequate Emergency Operations Center- The current location is in the Office of the Department of Fire & Emergency Services next to the 911 Center. Space is a critical issue. The Warrenton Police Department is an alternate location and used for pre-briefing of expected incidents. An improved EOC has been identified and listed as a critical need in the Fire Rescue Modernization Plan
- Depth of personnel experienced in Emergency Management. Too few personnel within our Public Safety Departments had extensive knowledge/background and capabilities associated with Emergency Management. It is necessary to have more staff knowledgeable to manage the various components of the Emergency Management System. Over the past 18 months, we have significantly expanded our personnel's capabilities in this area by re-establishing our full time Training Division which supports emergency sheltering. Additional Emergency Management Training of the DFES Battalion Officers has improved the speed and capabilities of activating the EOC, and most recently the new Fire Rescue Safety Officer will support Logistical needs for the Fire Rescue Volunteer personnel.