

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency

Muriel Bowser
Mayor



Dr. Christopher Rodriguez
Director

HOMELAND SECURITY COMMISSION
Thursday, August 13, 2020
3:00 – 5:00 p.m.
Virtual WebEx Meeting

Commission Member Attendees: Brad Belzak (Chair), Joanna Turner (joined from 3 - 4:30 pm), Ed Pearson (joined at 4 pm), Brian Baker (joined from 3 - 4 pm)

HSEMA Attendee(s): Chris White, Dion Black, Jason Rubinstein

Invited Attendees: Bryan Koon, VP of HSEM at IEM and former Director at the Florida Division of Emergency Management; Inaki Rezola, Operations Section Chief, Hillsborough County Fire Rescue, Office of Emergency Management, Tampa, FL

Brad: (Opens the meeting, addresses the Homeland Security Commission, and thanks the invited guests for joining and participating).

Note, no members of the public are present.

Bryan: In the State of Florida we have been activated for roughly 6 months. On the plus side, we are operating as a well-oiled machine. However, certainly an issue now is staff fatigue. This year, the ability to shelter people using past models is reduced due to social distancing. Personnel who would operate the shelters are also reduced because of COVID. In some cases, the volunteers are from among the older population, who are at higher risk.

Trying to be more surgical on evacuation technique is a big priority. Hurricane forecasts are still prone to error. Fortunately, we have generally erred on the side of extreme caution as it applies to evacuation.

Looking ahead, extra caution is needed and it's important to communicate to the general public about which evacuation zones they are in. Campaigns are underway to educate on evacuation zones and home safety assessments based on location in the state. Educating people to help them make better decisions (whether to evacuate) is the goal.

The other challenge is convincing some people to go to a shelter where there is potential congregation and explain why it's the best choice as opposed to staying in their home. That is the challenge the state is facing. Evacuation occurs at the county level, but it is everyone's interest to have consolidated information on a state and local level. This integrates policy makers, police, public officials, and the people. It calls for massive coordination and it is a giant logistical challenge. Executing this in real time is also a challenge. A lot of what we will do in hurricane

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season this year will be done without a practice run or exercise. The issue is, counties may typically have 20 shelters, but, during a storm, we would consolidate to use only a few. However, the interest in letting people spread out due to COVID would incline us to run more shelters.

Also, the demand to use shelters is likely to be higher due to job loss and challenges related to loss of income. We anticipate greater demand, especially as unemployment benefits run out.

Brian: Based upon your national perspective, are there any best practices coming out for sheltering people with special needs or moving skilled nursing facilities? What should we be thinking about?

Bryan: As a government, you want to clamp down and make sure they have real executable plans in place. One of the priorities we have in Florida is to make sure everyone knows the plan and that it is useable. Also, we want to make sure we are offering healthcare services and providing essential care. Transportation is also a challenging issue. We want to make sure we are only transporting vulnerable populations as needed.

Joanna: Mass care has become increasingly more complicated in the wake of the pandemic. You mentioned that the staff in Florida are working crisis after crisis. As you operationalize these plans, the question is, how do we keep people's eye on the prize?

Bryan: People will respond to inertia and momentum. That will get them through a few days or a week, but beyond that, it becomes a challenge. You must give people a break so they can recuperate. Hiring temporary staff support is something one should consider.

Citizens are also suffering from fatigue from the constant bad news and are facing mental health challenges. You must keep your pulse on society. For instance, people's receptiveness to evacuating will depend on their previous experience evacuating. It's about establishing empathy and connection. You also want to keep in mind the stress of schools coming back online and all other compounding stressors. You should keep in mind that messaging may need to evolve week by week.

Joanna: We should see if the Mayor needs statutory authority to deputize staff for mass care events. (Internal note for HSEMA follow up).

Joanna: Bryan, you raised a key transportation issue. How do you convince people to stay put or leave?

Bryan: It is a part of messaging and asking nicely. You can't really use law enforcement to stop people from getting in their car. Response is really driven by messaging. Also, in Florida, our assumption is that even in a bad storm, we may only get half the requested population to evacuate. We also have various strategies for the evacuation itself, such as opening the shoulder

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lane. You can only do this below a certain speed and go one-way on the interstate. However, everyone hates the one-way option. Even though it adds capacity, it sucks up a large portion of law enforcement personnel.

Joanna: Thank you.

Brad: in terms of resiliency, in DC we are becoming increasingly focused on the waterfront. Now, it is one of the east coast's greatest locations to visit. It also poses some significant concerns due to flooding. Could you share best practices on resiliency you have used in Florida?

Bryan: There are a few things I've seen that were successful. I've always aimed to increase desire for people to choose a better option. (Draws example of air bags and seat belts). You are starting to see this implemented in Miami. Consumer demand is pushing the issue on enforcement for building codes and general infrastructure requirements to be above the flood zoon. Mitigation investments save time and money in the long run. FEMA, for example, has an enhanced mitigation program that awards strong state plans with grant incentives.

Brad: (Thanks Mr. Bryan Koon for his time).

Inaki Rezola joins the meeting.

(Commission provides introductions).

Joanna: Thank you for meeting with us. Can you speak about the impact of COVID on your ESF 6 plan?

Inaki: In Tampa, we rank high in terms of catastrophic hurricanes. We are up there with New Orleans and New York City. We can have up to 30 ft of storm surge in this type of scenario.

FEMA's guidance says for risk sheltering you need 60 square feet per person. Risk space is limited to begin with. Now, it's a matter of whether we can still make space and adjust for COVID. We looked at previous shelter registration data. Most people do not evacuate by themselves. They go with loved ones or family. We developed a formula that says everyone gets a certain amount of square feet in the shelter. For families, we are considering the model of adding 20 square feet per family member. Through this approach, we are revising our old model to accommodate families being together while being efficient with space. Also, our goal is to screen people coming in so if they come in with symptoms, we try to isolate them and shelter them. Taking additional precautions like using hand sanitizer, individual food packaging, etc., are all added steps we are taking. If our numbers go up from a shelter, on the back side, we can encourage non-congregate options (such as using hotels). There are other challenges. In terms of transportation, we have had some resistance. Every day we learn something new that we actively work to apply, like using water bottles in school instead of faucets (to account for issues related

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to water contamination). Schools are trying to transition away from water fountains to the devices used to refill water bottles.

In addition, we are focused on post-disaster planning. The Red Cross says they can't support a shelter with more than 50 people. From our end, it is hard to meet the sheltering need with many small shelters.

Brad: Regarding the issue with Red Cross, is that an issue of the Red Cross not willing to staff? How do you mitigate this when they won't staff a shelter with over 50 people?

Inaki: The shortage of resources to take care of people is also a part of the issue. So, the question is how you manage a potentially deadly virus when people are still hurting? We still must open shelters. We must evacuate them from hurricane zones.

Joanna: Where did you come up with the 60 square feet per person calculation?

Inaki: We developed that based on our data inventory. We found that people often came to shelters together. We could accommodate the desire for people to stay together and be efficient with space. We used data to determine the additional 20 square feet added to the initial 60 square feet would be enough.

A cruise ship setting is a perfect example for comparing sheltering in the context of COVID. If the ship is sinking, everyone is getting on a lifeboat, regardless of COVID. We must think about the same notion in the context of catastrophic events.

Brad: We are never accounting for simultaneous catastrophic events. Very few will allocate budget for that. We always must do more with less. Especially when it's a one in one hundred-year storm.

Inaki: At the end of the day, we must mitigate and think about how we can serve the people and respond effectively. There are things we can do as a community from a mitigation standpoint. But, when your homes are devastated, how do you deal with it?

Brad: We are looking for innovative approaches. (Mentions Deaf Link app). Do you have any tech. approaches you may recommend?

Bryan: Right now, the state has a company working on an app for non-congregate sheltering. We have been giving them technical guidance. We have professors helping us develop shelter registration applications. We are working with both in tandem.

Brad: Can you speak further about the app.?

Inaki: It removes the element of registering for shelters, in person. The goal would be to allow shelter registration without paper. Then, when you get to the shelter, all you do is check in. Then,

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we are transmitting the individual's info in our EOC so we can track populations, manage resources, occupancy, and so forth.

Brad: Will the app use data analysis? How expansive is that?

Inaki: We would tie it into our heat map. Again, right now we are trying to build this out. The non-congregate app is one we are trying to apply for shelter use. But again, if we opened shelters tomorrow, it would have to be paper registration. If we opened shelters 2 months from now, that may be the time we need.

Brad: Thank you so much for your time.

Meet is briefly reopened to the public. No members of the public are present. Meeting is adjourned.