Improving Understanding and Collaboration among First Responders

Sheldon Greenberg, PhD
Johns Hopkins University

Maureen Hennessy Benson, MA
Johns Hopkins University

Dave Blodgett, MD, MPH
Southwest Utah Public Health Department
Part Two of Four

Pre-Event
In the education phase of a crisis event:
  - Information that was gained from experience is distributed, whether through reports or training.
  
Distribution varies from culture to culture, but in general it begins at the lowest levels and continues throughout a responder’s career.

Some smaller agencies begin education at specialist level.
Pre-Event: Education—Law Enforcement

- What the education phase means to law enforcement:
  - Law enforcement education varies across departments and regions
    - For example, crisis events are debriefed occasionally but not as a matter of policy
  - Yearly in-service training sessions, which emphasize how to or how not to do things, rather than critical thinking or problems solving
  - Focus is on individual and his/her response
Pre-Event: Education—Fire Department

- What the education phase means to the fire department:
  - Continual training sessions
    - For example, to become a Firefighter II (the minimal level for career firefighters), fire department personnel must receive training in hazardous materials awareness
    - Most volunteer firefighters receive this training as well
  - After action reporting
    - Most career departments and some volunteer ones require “After Action Reports” on all major incidents
    - Reports are disseminated throughout the department
Pre-Event: Education—Public Health

- What the education phase means to the public health workforce:
  - Public health is relatively new to the first responder world, which means that some ideas (for example, incident command) are being taught now to public health students and workers
  - Education for public health shifting from emphasis on workday activities to crisis response
What the education phase means to private security:

- Training is generally determined by the specific job and the specific company
  - Some private security firms provide in-house training (but the amount of training and subject matter vary widely)
Pre-Event: Education—EMS

What the education phase means to EMS:
- EMS receives continuing medical education
- As with firefighting, EMS education emphasizes special training
- Training teaches EMS responders to approach all incidents carefully
In the prevention phase of a crisis event:
- Prevention is only possible in some cases
- Information that was distributed through education is applied, specifically to prevent future crises from occurring
Pre-Event: Prevention—Law Enforcement

- What the prevention phase means to law enforcement:
  - Culture focuses primarily on reaction, but has expanded its preventative efforts over the last decade
What the prevention phase means to fire department personnel:
- Prevention comes in the form of fire education and deterrence
- Can pre-plan in some instances
- Culture emphasizes reaction
What the prevention phase means to public health personnel:
  − One of public health’s strength areas is prevention, especially through education
  − Primary prevention vs. secondary prevention
  − Improving surge capacity
  − Creating plans for clinics and medicine distribution
What the prevention phase means to private security:
- Key player in prevention is due to the nature of the job
  - Patrolling, monitoring, controlling access
What the prevention phase means to EMS:

- Much like law enforcement agencies and fire departments, EMS culture does not emphasize prevention
Pre-Event: Recognition

- The recognition phase of a crisis event begins when an event (or events) are finally seen as something out of the ordinary.
Pre-Event: Recognition—Law Enforcement

- Law enforcement recognizes a crisis event when:
  - The organization’s resources are overloaded
  - The possibility for loss of life continues
  - The cause/source of the event remains unknown
  - Unexplained panic or fear exists in a community
Fire departments recognize an event as a crisis when:

- Resources are overwhelmed
- A situation doesn’t improve despite the best efforts of the personnel who are present and/or
- Firefighter safety is compromised
For public health personnel, an event becomes a crisis when:

- Available resources are overwhelmed
- Surveillance shows that the track of the problem (disease, radiation) will overwhelm current resources
- Calls for information from the public and other care providers exceed the ability to respond adequately
- An event demands all available personnel to work in excess of normal scope of duties
An important part of private security personnel training is learning to recognize events and notify the proper authorities and/or emergency response resources.
An event becomes a crisis for EMS personnel when a situation fails to improve (or worsens) and exceeds available resources and/or personnel safety is compromised.
The pre-event phase of a crisis event can be characterized by three distinct stages:

1. Education
   - Experience-based knowledge is documented, analyzed, and structured in a learning environment

2. Prevention
   - Knowledge that was gained from prior experience and transferred through education is applied and new means/procedures to prevent and/or mitigate the crisis event from re-occurring are developed

3. Recognition
   - Still technically part of the pre-event stage
   - Characterized by the instant that an event shifts from ordinary to a crisis event