Improving Understanding and Collaboration among First Responders

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Part Three of Four

Event
There are five distinct stages within a crisis event
- Recognition
- Communication
- Response
- Coordination
- Mitigation
In the communication stage of a crisis event:
- Various groups take action to transfer and exchange information regarding the crisis

Many weaknesses and challenges exist
- Police, fire, and EMS generally communicate well because of a shared dispatch center
- Communication between these three and private security and public health is generally weak
The bulk of communication made by law enforcement is via radio telecommunications.
- Problems exist between jurisdictions and between agencies.
Fire departments communication focuses on exchanging information at the crisis scene

- Can be done many ways (radio, air horns)
- Initially, communication isn’t as important because fire departments use standard operating procedures
Event: Communication—Public Health

- Public health personnel communicate:
  - Amongst themselves
    - Cell phones, satellite uplinks
    - Often unreliable, no uniform method
  - With the public via risk communication
    - Most health departments have one or two individuals designated to talk with the media
    - Public health personnel are also taught the proper methods to communicate public health impacts of emergencies via telephone, Internet, or in person

- Public health risk communication can be delayed because of decentralized command and need to create unified message
Private security receives threat information from many sources and communicates them appropriately:
- Direct observation
  - Will use 911 after detecting a crisis
- Electronically
  - Fire alarms send information directly to the local fire department and the on-duty security officer
  - Burglar alarms are usually sent to the security officer and to the alarm company who attempt to contact the facility/security officer in order to determine if the alarm is valid

Calling 911 is the primary contact method when a potential crisis is detected.
In a crisis, EMS is linked directly to the firefighting communications
- Receives and relays information in the same way as firefighting
The response stage comes after a crisis event has been recognized and the potential for disaster has been communicated.

The response stage best demonstrates the cultural differences between groups:

- Fire departments respond as teams
- Law enforcement and private security respond as individuals
- Public health personnel might respond individually, but they are supported by a global network of experts and information
- EMS respond as teams generally
Police officers take great pride in responding rapidly and reacting correctly.
- Emphasis on rapid response means that they will often be the first on the scene.
If a threat is severe enough, multiple officers, and a supervisor will be sent to the scene.
Event: Response—Fire Department

- Fire personnel receive extensive training that focuses on a systematic approach to responding to emergencies.
- Standard assignments and the Incident Command System contribute to consistency.
- Standard procedures can always be augmented if the situation dictates doing so.
Event: Response—Public Health

- Public health response emphasizes immediate communication:
  - Within the organization (gather help as needed)
  - With officials at the community, state, and federal level
  - With the public via risk communication
- Other public health responses might include:
  - Continued surveillance
  - Delivering medicine and therapies
Event: Response—Private Security

- Private security personnel emphasis is on “observe and report”
  - In a crisis, use chain of command to communicate needs and to describe the situation
- Security personnel would also have access to critical information (for example, closed circuit cameras) that would improve understanding of the situation
Similar to fire services, EMS training emphasizes a systematic approach to crisis management.
Event: Coordination

- Coordination is the most challenging, and potentially the most critical, stage of a crisis
  - Demands understanding of other cultures and an appreciation of the strengths of other groups
Coordination within law enforcement units is often between specialized units, such as SWAT and hostage negotiation teams, and the general police force.

Little or no training given to typical first responder on coordination with other first responder groups.
Coordination for fire personnel goes through an established command post

- Command post provides periodic information updates, which are given to individual units
The public health workforce is a relative newcomer to organized first responder group work
   - Still serve important coordinating functions in a crisis

Public health personnel also serve in coordinating function before a crisis
Event: **Coordination—Private Security**

- Coordination for private security means assisting in any way possible
  - Probably will not take the lead in a crisis situation, but will work closely with other first responders
Like fire personnel, EMS personnel are trained to report to the established command post.

- Command post will provide periodic updates.
Event: Mitigation

- Emphasis in the mitigation stage is on minimizing loss of life and property damage.
- Mitigation could include the following:
  - Lockdown
  - Protecting a crime scene
  - Triage centers
  - Complete evacuation of a neighborhood or town
An important part of police culture is to contain a crisis, which could include evacuation.

Although evacuating others is an important job function and cultural concern, retreating from a crisis is not in law enforcement’s cultural code.
Mitigation for fire personnel is heavily dependent on first gaining information:

- Weather conditions, topography of the area, chemical nature of a substance (if one is present)

Like police, retreating during the mitigation stage for fire department personnel is a last resort.
Public health training emphasizes tracking health and recommending action to help stop the progress of disease or disrupt its transmission.

- As such, they are best suited to work with minimizing threats posed by bio-terror or chemical warfare agents.

Key part of public health mitigation duties is role in quarantine of patients.

Mitigation also means effective risk communication and mental health response.
As with coordination, private security in the mitigation stage relies wholly on instructions from other first responder groups.
EMS culture is based on mitigation

- Every aspect of their behavior deals with the containment of injury in order to treat and to transport
Event Summary

- During a crisis event, five specific stages can be identified:
  1. Recognition
     - A crisis is recognized as such, allowing for an appropriate response
  2. Communication
     - Information is transferred or exchanged regarding the crisis
  3. Response
     - Activities performed when responding to a crisis
  4. Coordination
     - Probably the most challenging stage
     - Requires multi-jurisdictional and multi-sector involvement
  5. Mitigation
     - Efforts made to minimize property damage and loss of life