Report of the NN/LM Emergency Preparedness & Response Summit

Normalcy and Intelligence: A forum to discuss ways libraries and information professionals can strengthen a community's emergency planning strategy

Tuesday, May 6, 2014
Central Library of the Jefferson Madison Regional Library System
Charlottesville, Virginia

Panelists:

Ryan McCay, Emergency Planner, Thomas Jefferson Health District
Sammy Chao, Coordinator, Medical Reserve Corps, Thomas Jefferson District
Nick Drauschack, Disaster Services Manager Coordinator, Virginia Mountain Region, American Red Cross
Kirby Felts, Emergency Manager Coordinator, Charlottesville/Albemarle County/University of Virginia
Stacey Arnesen, Branch Chief, Disaster Information Management Research Center (DIMRC), National Library of Medicine
Charles Werner, Charlottesville Fire Chief

Moderator:

Dan Wilson, Coordinator, National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NN/LM) Emergency Preparedness & Response Initiative

Panelists (left to right): Charles Werner, Stacey Arnesen, Kirby Felts, Nick Drauschack, Sammy Chao, Ryan McCay, John Halliday, Director, Jefferson Madison Regional Library, at the podium

Discussion of a Scenario-based Event

Wilson: Suppose an EF2 tornado (wind speeds of 111 to 135 mph) strikes the southeast side of Charlottesville. What information sources would you rely on during the first three hours after the destructive tornado?

Werner: I'll be the first one responding. The first reports will come into our Emergency Operations Center (EOC). We are fortunate here in Charlottesville that all dispatches, whether county, city, or university, come out of one place, the EOC, unlike many other jurisdictions that are stove piped. During the Tornado Watch we will be watching for reports from Kirby (Emergency Manager Coordinator) and checking our apps, such as iNWS (Interactive National Weather Service). We are also watching radar on our smartphones and, if needed, adding extra staff. If a lot of calls suddenly come in to the EOC, our dispatch goes into a red flag operation, and I'll start talking to Kirby. Where are the calls coming from? What kind of property damage? What is the magnitude of the storm? Kirby then takes the information to the leaders of the city, county, and university to determine if we need to open the EOC. Then we move into response, which may include calling for mutual aid.

Wilson: When it's a watch, are you all using the same resources, such as the National Weather Service?

Felts: Yes, we follow Watches and Warnings from the National Weather Service. We are communicating with emergency planners and the public via phone, text, and email. The emergency management people would get more detailed or strategic reports. If a tornado hits Charlottesville, the 911 Center would blow up with phone calls.

Werner: And we would go into *windshield survey mode*, where we go out to determine magnitude. I may even take our city manager with me. At that point we are thinking strategically: who can we contact for assistance that hasn't been impacted by the tornado. A lot of prioritizing is happening at that point.

Felts: The first three hours it's a scramble. How big? How bad? I'm in the EOC determining who all I need to task to come in; in other words, I'm scaling of the operations.

Wilson: What's going on at Public Health?

McCay: We are using the information we are receiving from Kirby to determine how to scale our own operation. If it's an EF2 tornado, we are probably dealing with mass casualties, so we'd have to contact the Chief Medical Examiner [responsible for determining the cause and manner of deaths that occur under certain circumstances in Virginia] in Richmond, VA, to activate the Mass Fatality Plan. Like other planners here, we are in communications with our staff beforehand for mobilization purposes and to make sure they are personally prepared.

Wilson: What's the Red Cross doing? You are responsible for sheltering, right?

Drauschack: In Virginia, within the first 72 hours, the Department of Social Services is responsible for sheltering for a major event and some minor events. We are acting in a support role in the first 72

hours. In the first three hours, I need to think of it in a more regional perspective, so if an EF2 tornado hits Charlottesville, which is often protected a bit by the mountains to our west, my next concern goes to the more vulnerable counties in areas east of Charlottesville. I'm scaling, too, from regional, to divisional, to potentially a national response.

Question from an attendee: Where are you getting that information?

Drauschack: Before social media, we would go out in vehicles and take a look at it. Now, if we can follow social media, we can get an idea where some of the greatest damage is, and we send out our own damage assessment volunteers.

Even scarier than the 911 Center blowing up with calls is when it doesn't. - Felts

Felts: And in an event like this we would also be trying to figure out what is still working. Even scarier thing than the 911 Center blowing up with calls is when it doesn't. Again, this points to the value of social media in the event that telephone lines are down. Currently, at the 911 Center, we are not set up to receive calls for assistance from social media. Our system is 10 years old and it doesn't have that capacity.

Question from an attendee: Do you involve amateur radio people?

Werner: At the new fire station we have an antenna set up for our RACES (Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service) people.

Drauschack: We have one at the Red Cross building, too.

McCay: And we have one at the Public Health Office.

Arnesen: Are you using the radios for voice or digital communication?

Werner: Voice. When all other communication systems are down or overloaded, we will rely on RACES.

Felts: The person who is leading RACES is currently working on getting digital capability.

Arnesen: We have folks that are part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Amateur Radio Club that are working on a system that could provide emergency email communications at the desktop.

Wilson: Let's talk a little more about the period of time right after an incident such as this when you are trying to figure out the magnitude of the situation. What's the communications strategy to the public?

Felts: The initial information is confirming that there has been a tornado touchdown in Charlottesville. We'll also be sending out safety messages and where to go for help. If you are safe, stay safe. If you need help, here's where you can get it.

Drauschack: Once we open a shelter, Red Cross offers its "Safe and Well" service. "Safe and Well" facilitates communications within a disaster area to family members outside the disaster area. If any family members then come in from out of town, they will know that they are well along with the shelter location.

Werner: The communications would be a combination of traditional media (radio, TV, etc.), along with our website. We also use social media to send out information.

Wilson: What is that website?

Felts: communityemergency.org. All the PIOs (Public Information Officers) would be huddled with us at the EOC. Everyone is getting hit with a lot of information from all of the sites they manage.

Werner: The PIOs are tied to their jurisdictions. If it's a big event, we go into a Joint Information Center (JIC) to coordinate the effort.

Wilson: Let's talk about GIS (Geographic Information Systems). How do you utilize it?

Werner: I'm working with a group on developing a proof of concept called *Situation Room*, which takes into account all of the CAD (computer-assisted dispatch) data. Right now we are creating information packages, which will provide us layers of data, such as wind direction, road closures. We'll be pushing this information out to emergency responders and can choose which to make available to the public.

Felts: One of the major challenges to getting something like this up-and-running is the ownership people feel about their information. I need to look globally in order to see how things are interacting or not interacting. Everyone benefits from shared information.

Wilson: The goal then would be to have one site that pulls information from multiple areas and is active at all times. Is that going to happen?

I need to look globally in order to see how things are interacting or not interacting. - Felts

Werner: It is going to happen, as we are working on this as high up as the national level. We are working with GIS specialists and we are developing standards.

Wilson: How does this help Public Health?

McCay: It would help us make decisions and respond appropriately. GIS would also help us identify locations to set up commodity distributions. We could look at things like population density, pre-event and post-event, and the safest ways to get them in and out of the commodity distribution site.

Werner: Bottom line is that it puts us all on the same page at the same time. Even as the situation changes, such as downed trees.

Felts: We utilize GIS to determine, say, our Spanish speaking populations, so we can effectively communicate with them before, during, and after a disaster. We also have mappings that show us different economic layers or where additional support may be needed, such as elderly populations. We used this following our big derecho a couple years ago in order to get water to the elderly because it happened during a heat wave.

Wilson: Many of you have mentioned the need to have direct observations following a disaster. Let's talk about how you utilize your volunteers.

Chao (Medical Reserve Corps): First we would have to get approval from the Health Director to deploy volunteers. We will send out a call for volunteers through email and phone. That message will say what the event is, how many volunteers are needed, and what level of support (medical and or non-medical volunteers).

Drauschack: We also would be contacting volunteers, beginning with our mass care folks. Our volunteers can do a number of things but our bread and butter is sheltering and feeding. Once we open a shelter, our immediate goal is recovery. What is the need? Financial? Damage assessment? We also have vendors who support us during a time of need. We would also be in communication with them, such as could you provide x amount of meals for a shelter here in Charlottesville?

Felts: It's important to have resources on contract so they can be teed up when needed. As for sheltering, we have a number of locations we can use; however, the exact locations are announced until we can determine the best ones based on the situation. As for CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) volunteers, which fall under my jurisdiction, they, among other things, can relieve a lot of the pressure from the 911 system. When the EOC is activated, we open our 979-INFO line, which is staffed by CERT volunteers. They triage a variety of non-life threatening calls.   Sometimes it's just the availability of someone to talk to. CERT volunteers can also be used for field support, such as water distribution and operating a chain saw.

Werner: All of this emphasizes the importance of businesses having a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) that take some of the pressure off of us. There are key things we can all do to be ready and self-sustainable. Think 72 hours without power. What will you eat? What will you drink? Have all of that on hand.

Wilson: Let's talk about how the library can help with all of this.

Felts: I think the libraries are a tremendous asset. For instance, the library could be used as a center for information, or as a place for folks to come and connect with neighbors. If the library has power, it could be the place for charging all of the gadgets that many of us can't do without. I like to think of it as a rest and relief hub. Libraries could be an anchor for community support. They could also be used as a non-tech communications hub.

Werner: Until I met with Dan (Wilson) a month ago, libraries never entered my mind as playing a role in disaster response. Libraries are about information, and they are trusted places that we can put information for the public. From my perspective, I think this is a huge opportunity that we are having this conversation.

Libraries are about information. They are trusted places that can help us provide information to the public. - Werner

Arnesen: And keep in mind that libraries are now covered in the Stafford Act and considered part of the critical infrastructure. If libraries are damaged, they can apply for funding to be relocated. I'm not sure if all libraries are aware of this. Coffee shops may provide free wi-fi, but they don't provide computers or help using them. Libraries can help with all of that.

Felts: Libraries can bring a sense of normalcy. And it's important to identify public gathering points away from busy areas, such as a fire station.

Chao: We could also use libraries as a volunteer reception center. Also, there are times when people want to volunteer, but they aren't connected to a volunteer group, such as CERT, the MRC, or Red Cross. And announcement could be made that volunteers are need and they should report to their local library. People know the location of their library.

Arnesen: And librarians can utilize some of their skills to assist in these efforts. We have skills that will likely be pertinent to the situation. Librarians should look for areas to volunteer that fit their skills and expertise, similar to the way a doctor or nurse utilize their professional skills in a disaster situation.

> *Librarians should look for areas to volunteer that fit their skills and expertise, similar to the way a doctor or nurse utilize their professional skills in a disaster situation. - Arnesen*

Werner: One of the things we've been thinking about is crowdsourcing. Could the library be used as a central place to coordinate a crowdsourcing effort? It would take the weight off of us and could become an important information center. If we give libraries the right tools, they could help manage that information. I think that's a really nice possibility.

Champ-Blackwell (DIMRC): We were talking about this on the ride here this morning from Bethesda. Wouldn't it be great for a library to get funding to purchase, say, 6 laptop computers equipped with the tools Chief Werner mentioned for use when a response is needed.

Werner: Along with some tablets.

Arnesen: And then all of this could be worked into table-top exercises.

Werner: Librarians could also help us determine the credibility of the information and filter out duplications.

Felts: Think of the power this would have if libraries were an information hub that could have direct contact with the EOC.

Halliday (library director, JMRL): This sounds great. Reference librarians would fit in well with this type of operation. A major challenge, though, would be power. If a library doesn't have power, then this can't happen. We would need generators.

Arnesen: We can't provide funding for generators, but through the Stafford Act you should be able to get them from FEMA.

Felts: If we worked this concept into our local plan, we could write it into our Hazard Mitigation Action Plan. If it's in our action plan, we can pursue that money.

Wilson: This region also has a bookmobile. How might a bookmobile fit into your disaster planning activities?

McCay: I think information dissemination is the big opportunity with a bookmobile. Having a way to provide the correct information at the point of need is critical. Before coming to Charlottesville, I managed Point of Dispensing (POD) in New York City. Our biggest concern was information put out about vaccines for a particular outbreak, such as H1N1. Managing information was also difficult during Sandy. A bookmobile could help with all

of this and could also help collect data.

Drauschack: I think a bookmobile we be of most value to us for distributing information before the event.

Mike Peebles (American Red Cross volunteer): A bookmobile could help us with our "Safe and Well" service.

Werner: A bookmobile would be of great assistance in getting all of our information to the public.

Felts: What are the capabilities of the bookmobile?

Halliday: It has electricity, it has internet, and it has a generator. The public could use a bookmobile to fill out FEMA forms and power up devices.

Felts: That would do so much to sooth people and to help them feel a little more normal.

Drauschack: And if for nothing else, we'll ask to use it to pick up volunteers. [Laughter from attendees]

Wilson: Following a disaster, what apps are you using?

Werner: How much time do I have? [Laughter from audience] Here's the list:

- Active911
- Action Scanner Pro
- Tunein Radio (transmitters might be down but they can still broadcast through the internet)
- Earthquake
- WISER
- Intellicast
- Disaster Alert
- FEMA
- VDOT 511 (road information)
- NIMS ICS
- iTranslate (language translator)

Arnesen: We have a page of disaster apps that can be found at the following URL: http://sis.nlm.nih.gov/dimrc/disasterapps.html. It's really important that you know whether your app works without connectivity. We recommend that you put your phone on airplane mode to find out. We have also created several apps, including the following:

- WISER (HAZMAT incidents)
- REMM (Radiation incidents)
- CHEMM (Chemical incidents)

Felts: One of my favorite apps for weather is WeatherBug. In addition, I have all of the Red Cross apps and the ERG (emergency response guides). I also have a lot of bookmarks and ReadyVA, the Virginia version of Ready.gov.

Arnesen: And a reminder for all of these apps to make sure your notifications are turned on.

Drauschack: We have recently added a Flood app to go along with Tornado, Earthquake, First Aid, and Hurricane. All are free and available through the App Store or Google Play.

Chao: For the MRC, our alert system is called Virginia Volunteer Health System. Right now it's only available on Internet Explorer, but we anticipate a smartphone option to be released within the next couple of months.

Comment from attendee: What seems to be missing is a *road map* for the public on how to prepare for a disaster. Information like where is the closest library.

Drauschack: The Red Cross apps touch on preparedness quite a bit. And we are always willing to go out in the community to talk preparedness. Last September, for instance, we did two preparedness sessions at the Northside Public Library.

Felts: It often comes down to information seeking behavior. Usually, it takes something to be threating or just happening for people to show interest. To provide local content on an app costs money, and it would be a challenge to come up with content that would remain fixed following a disaster.

Drauschack: We could also look into setting up disaster preparedness information kiosks at local libraries.

Comment from attendee: There is probably a place for libraries for being recognized as taking the lead in providing disaster preparedness information.

Chao: The Medical Reserve Corps also has a lot of free personal preparedness materials online.

Felts: We could work with the libraries to develop a quarterly schedule where the different groups display their preparedness information. We could also train library staff on how to function as a hub for disaster information.

Werner: I can see librarians helping to inform the public on the best disaster apps, which would be another component of developing the library as the hub for connecting people with disaster information.

Wilson: Let's close by summarizing the ways librarians, and people who work in libraries, can become players in their community's emergency planning. Volunteer opportunities are available with CERT, MRC, and the Red Cross. As Stacey mentioned earlier, librarians should look--or create--roles that utilize their professional skills. In addition, a free, self-paced, Disaster Information Specialization Program is available through the Medical Library Association (URL: https://www.mlanet.org/education/dis/). And, finally, from an institutional standpoint, reach out to the emergency planning coordinator in your area. As you can see from this discussion, emergency planners are very receptive to new possibilities.

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