

ISSUE BRIEF

Working Draft

Emergency Planning and Response

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Dated: December 10, 2010

Background-

The Alliance members have identified the need for effective emergency planning and response as a priority workplace concern within the 128 central corridor. This corridor is generally considered to cover the commercial activity along Route 128/ Interstate 95 from Route 3 in Burlington south to the Massachusetts Turnpike. Their concerns include the impact of highway construction on emergency access, coordinated use of secondary roads, and lack of communication during times of weather and other emergency scenarios.

Alliance members are committed to working with neighboring communities, local developers, and state officials in an effort to insure that emergency planning and response will keep pace with the increasing demands created by growth in local markets.

Catastrophic traffic delays resulting from two recent events- a significant winter storm and an electrical fire on the Winter Street Bridge in Waltham point to the need for more elaborate and thoughtful emergency traffic management in the region. Many of the key intersections along the central 128 corridor are not designed for extraordinary traffic challenges. Disjointed responses from local fire and safety officials often result in more complexity and challenges.

Such incidents represent critical concerns for the workplaces of members of the 128 Corporate Alliance. Member companies include: Fresenius Medical Care, National Grid, ImmunoGen, Massachusetts Medical Society, Adobe Systems Inc, Perkin Elmer Inc, Qinetiq/Foster Miller, and The Westin Waltham. These companies employ a workforce of over 4,000 along the 128 Central Corridor. Contingency planning to avoid past problems have been a critical focus of the Alliance agenda. The key to successful efforts requires the coordinated efforts of state officials, local governments and public utilities. The Alliance is committed to fostering this dialogue in a constructive and fruitful fashion to avert unreasonable delays while protecting the safety of the workforce.

Emergency planning and response is coordinated through a number of state and local governing agencies and committees. The following offers a brief summary of these efforts:

MEMA (The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency)—An agency tasked with the coordination of federal, state and local resources during emergencies and other disasters impacting the Commonwealth. MEMA offers leadership in developing response plans and coordinating resources at the various layers of government and any private resources. The goal is to mitigate and prepare for natural and man-made emergencies and disasters. MEMA operates within the Massachusetts Department of Public Safety and has a dedicated planning department that works with officials at the federal, state and local levels.

LEPC (Local Emergency Planning Committees)—Created in 1986 by congress, state emergency response committees were tasked with creating local emergency planning committees. These sub-areas were created regionally within Massachusetts and in turn in each city and town. Within the Northeast region sub-area a local emergency planning committee was formed. Among other things, the mission of each LEPC focuses on response plans, training of emergency responders (police, fire, EMS, public works, etc), planning exercises and the creation of a data base of relevant information. This effort has also resulted in the creation of a local emergency management program guide book as a reference manual for appointed representatives and municipal officials. One of the goals of the “guidebook” is to capture “best practices within the field of emergency management.” The guidebook is designed to address the four phases and related activities of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

Local Emergency Planning Committees—Cities and towns are tasked with creating local teams of police, fire, EMT, as well as officials from the health department, schools and public works. They are responsible for coordinated planning exercises that include independent facilitators and observers. The City of Waltham conducted such an exercise on May 5, 2000 with interesting parallels to the issues encountered with the December 13, 2007 snow storm. This exercise involved a tanker truck and spill of gasoline, as well as other injured motorists. Route 128 was hypothetically closed between Route 2 and Route 20. The exercise scenario also highlighted that “city streets were becoming gridlocked from traffic exiting 128.” It was further noted that media was on the scene and “police assigned to public information role” were requesting a broadcast message to “avoid 128 in the Waltham area.” Mass Highway also activated their “message boards warning people to seek alternate routes.” The exercise also included “another traffic accident on Weston Street, handled by Weston Police Department and State Police.” It is not clear, but would appear that the Weston Police Department or any other neighboring communities did not participate in the exercise. The scenario also indicates that state police had an “Incident Command Specialist available as a resource”.

While it is not clear how this exercise played out it appears that all participating local officials were from Waltham. In an effort to complete this paper, we hope to resolve the following questions:

1. What types of emergencies apply to LEPC protocols?
2. What responders have the LEPC guidebook and follow the protocols?
3. Who is responsible in leading the response effort during an emergency?

Options-

Increasing awareness of communications resources – It is apparent that communication resources currently exist for emergency cases at various levels – state police, state highway and local media among others. It is not clear as to how this can be optimally coordinated at the company level to increase awareness for employees.

Increasing multi-jurisdictional responses – While regions and cities and towns are tasked with planning and response coordinated efforts it is not clear to what extent these efforts involve joint community exercises. This is extremely important in the patchwork of communities that line the 128 corridor.

Increasing scenario planning – The current planned exercises would appear to effectively target high level emergency threats – terrorist attacks, environmental catastrophes and medical trauma. The next level of emergency threats appears to attract less attention. The emergencies encountered recently along the corridor relating to weather threats and fires must also be prioritized in planning and response efforts.

Position of the 128 Alliance-

Short-term Outcomes

1. Coordinate a gathering among neighboring communities to access current joint strategies and needs.
2. Identify federal and state funding streams that might help support planning efforts.
3. Work with Mass Highway, District 4, to identify coordinated communications programs for companies and their employees.

Long-term Outcomes

1. Have the 128 corridor service as a model pilot for a coordinated emergency response planning effort.
2. Develop a web-based 128 corridor communications tool that provides up to the minute status on emergency treats and options for companies and their employees.

References-

“Table Top Exercise Summary”, Waltham Local Emergency Planning Committee, May 5, 2000