

2009 National Conference on Community Preparedness



The Power of Citizen Corps



Post Conference Report

prepared by



March 2010

NCCP 2009 Post Conference Report

Executive Summary

The 2009 National Conference on Community Preparedness: The Power of Citizen Corps was highly successful, with 836 participants and a diverse program on grassroots and regional efforts. The partnership between FEMA, IAEM, and NEMA was crucial to the success of this conference. The attendance of emergency managers is critical to the success of bringing Citizen Corps Councils closer to state and local planning efforts and to collaboration with local government as well as the private sector.

IAEM, as the premier organization representing emergency managers, needs to be integrally involved in the planning and implementation of this conference. Moreover, as an organization with unique skills at conference management IAEM can bring its skills, resources, and technology to support conference planning in the future.

IAEM and its leadership wholeheartedly support an annual conference on national community preparedness, and IAEM stands ready through a cooperative agreement to lend support to FEMA to help develop and manage these conferences in the future.



About Citizen Corps

Citizen Corps is in its eighth year. Its mission is to bring communities together in a grassroots effort to instill personal responsibility and build community resilience. It was founded upon the understanding that citizens are vital partners in the welfare of our communities and in building community resilience. While the government provides critical services for a safe and secure America, it cannot replace the value of a prepared, informed public.

Citizen Corps Councils bring together community leaders from local government, emergency management and emergency service providers, hospitals, schools, volunteer and service organizations, businesses, faith-based organizations, and advocacy groups. Having all stakeholders at the table allows each community to be unified in its efforts to improve the health and safety of the community and to prepare for and respond to disasters through the tenets of civic engagement and personal responsibility.



The International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), which has 5,000+ members in 58 countries, is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to promoting the goals of saving lives and protecting property during emergencies and disasters. Information about IAEM can be found at www.iaem.com.

National Conference on Community Preparedness: The Power of Citizen Corps

What:

2009 National Conference on Community Preparedness:
The Power of Citizen Corps

When:

August 10-12, 2009

Where:

Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Arlington VA

Who:

Co-Hosted by the Federal Emergency Management Agency Preparedness Division/Citizen Corps and the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) in collaboration with the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) under a cooperative agreement with the Department of Homeland Security.

IAEM Staffing:

IAEM provided a total of 1,226.5 hours and 12 staff members to the 2009 National Conference on Community Preparedness.

Purpose

The purpose of the 2009 National Conference on Community Preparedness was to address a comprehensive scope of issues related to preparing America's communities for all types of emergencies and increasing resilience through collaborative planning, citizen training, and multi-sector participation.

FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate used the platform of the conference to confirm national leadership support for collaborative grassroots community preparedness and asked the conference participants to renew their commitment.

The 2009 National Conference on Community Preparedness: The Power of Citizen Corps was the second national conference on community preparedness and was highly successful.

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Participants

Participants at the conference included an estimated 836 federal and national organization partners, state and local elected officials, emergency management, fire and police services, public health and emergency medical services, non-governmental organizations, private business and industry representatives, advocacy groups, members of the public, and staff from the Department of Homeland Security and the International Association of Emergency Managers. The conference brought together partners from Citizen Corps Councils from every state and two territories.

DHS Leadership Keynote Speakers

The Opening Session began with several keynote speakers from the DHS leadership, including Jane Holl Lute, Deputy Secretary of Department of Homeland Security; Craig Fugate, Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator; and Karen Marsh of the National Citizen Corps office.



Deputy Secretary DHS Jane Holl Lute, FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate and Citizen Corps Karen Marsh.

Opening Session Speakers Reflect Key Partnerships

IAEM, NEMA, the White House, and the private sector showed their leadership support with distinguished speakers Russ Decker, CEM; David Maxwell, Richard Hatchett, and Bruce Lockwood, CEM, who all took an active part in the program.

Overview

The conference promoted discussion and collaboration on an array of issues, balancing topics from best practices in community preparedness to updated information on national policies, such as updates to the National Incident Management System and National Response Framework. The diverse program included a broad range of preparedness topics, such as partnering with the private sector to enhanced preparedness and response, reaching out to special needs populations – such as those with mobility, language, or age-related concerns – funding, volunteer liability issues, new research on citizen preparedness, and other areas related to the many aspects of all-hazard preparedness, prevention, response, mitigation, and recovery. Attendees:

- ✓ Shared best practices on collaborative emergency planning
- ✓ Discussed outreach and education for specific population segments
- ✓ Learned innovative approaches to funding
- ✓ Heard updates on DHS/FEMA initiatives
- ✓ Learned insights from recent research to improve community preparedness
- ✓ Heard about successful training programs and exercises
- ✓ Shared volunteer management practices
- ✓ Networked with other Citizen Corps participants

FEMA Recognition of Importance of EM Role

The importance of the partnership between emergency managers throughout the country and Citizen Corps continues to be emphasized by FEMA leadership and the staff of Citizen Corps, and this was clearly reflected in the content of the program presented in the 2009 National Conference on Community Preparedness. The collaborative and cooperative nature of that relationship was reiterated by FEMA leadership throughout the year in strategic planning and stakeholder meetings.

“Citizen Corps is proud to partner with local, state, and federal emergency managers directly and via their organizations, the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) and the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA).”
– from conference booklet

Advantages to IAEM Future Partnership

As part of IAEM’s support to the conference, IAEM brought its national leadership to the Emergency Management Roundtable scheduled the next day, immediately following the conference at the same hotel. IAEM strongly encouraged its members to attend both the conference and the Post-Conference Workshops in various promotions throughout the year. Literature and save-the-date cards were widely distributed in dozens of regional and other organizational national conferences in the months preceding the conference by IAEM members.

In June, IAEM heavily promoted the 2009 National Conference on Community Preparedness. At the IAEM 2009 Mid-Year Meeting at the Emergency Management Institute, several issues related to the National Office of Citizen Corps preparedness programs and IAEM’s participation on the Citizen Corps Council were reviewed.

Throughout the year, IAEM Board members were updated on the working relationship and conference planning by the Board liaison to the national Citizen Corps office. IAEM continued the partnership, through its participation as Chair of the National Citizen Corps Council Emergency Management/Public Safety Work Group and through its internal efforts on its Public-Private Partnership Committee.

Annual Conference Recommended

At the Nov. 2009 annual meeting of the Board of Directors of the International Association of Emergency Managers in Orlando, Florida, IAEM leadership took a unanimous position to support a continuation of a Cooperative Agreement with Citizen Corps to manage/support the National Community Preparedness Conference and supports a recommendation for funding for annual conferences.

National and International Membership

The synergy that helped to make this second conference such a success was the collaboration of Citizen Corps and emergency managers. As the largest national organization of emergency managers, IAEM was able to effectively promote the conference to its members, partner organizations, state and local government offices, and non-profit organizations all across the United States. Similarly, the National Citizen Corps Council promoted the conference through its network of local and state councils and regional offices. During the course of the year, IAEM, as a charter member of the National Citizen Corps Council, promoted the conference at other conferences, meetings, and stakeholder group workshops. IAEM sent a speaker to the National VOAD Conference to promote the conference through a work session on volunteer collaboration and opportunities through Citizen Corps. IAEM also provided speakers at other conferences to reach out to business continuity planners, volunteers, and communication specialists. NEMA promoted the conference at its annual events.

FEMA and EM Partners

The conference was made possible by a cooperative agreement signed between the Department of Homeland Security/FEMA Community Preparedness Division/Citizen Corps, the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), and the National Association of Emergency Management (NEMA).



Incoming NEMA President David Maxwell with Incoming IAEM-USA President Pamela L'Heureux, CEM.

Staff from the FEMA Community Preparedness Division/Citizen Corps worked cooperatively and collaboratively with key IAEM officials and a contractor in the initial development of the program, invitation of speakers, facilitation of technical work sessions, and organization of the exhibit hall. IAEM members participated as speakers, and organized specialized Post-Conference Workshops including the Children in Disaster Workshop held on Aug. 12, 2009.

Program

The complete program, including speaker profiles, logistical information, and breakout session details, was posted on the IAEM web site and is available at: www.iaem.com/documents/NCCPPProgram072909.pdf



The 2009 National Conference on Community Preparedness drew more than 800 participants.

The conference brought together representatives from Citizen Corps Councils at the national, regional, state, and community level. The program was established and approved by FEMA's Community Preparedness Division/Citizen Corps, with input from the International Association of Emergency Managers. The program provided a retrospective of the past; highlighted new directions in community preparedness initiatives, funding, and collaboration strategies; and provided details on regional best practices in response to the Target Capabilities List and the Homeland Security Grant Program.

Program Highlights

The conference highlighted federal programs, public/private partnerships, and collaboration opportunities through Citizen Corps. Breakout sessions and specialized training and information workshops were organized around the full range of Citizen Corps activities at the grassroots and national level.

- ✓ On Day One, Amanda Ripley, author of *The Unthinkable: Who Survives When Disaster Strikes and Why*, provided insights into how the brain works in disasters. Karen Marsh presented findings on personal preparedness in America from the Citizen Corps survey. Both of these programs were extremely well received according to participant comments.
- ✓ On Day Two, the program opened with the presentation of the National Achievement Awards. (See Page 7.)
- ✓ On Day Three, Bruce Lockwood, CEM, presented an overview from the Commission on Children in Disasters, with a summary of the recommendations made by the commission in its preliminary report.

National Achievement Awards

A unique feature of the conference was the first-ever presentation of the National Citizen Corps Achievement Awards – Celebrating Resilient Communities for 2009. These awards recognized innovative practices and achievements of Citizen Corps Councils across the nation that continue to make our communities safer, stronger, and better prepared to manage any emergency situation.

It was a challenging process to narrow down the field among all the submissions that were presented. FEMA Administrator W. Craig Fugate, National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) Incoming President David Maxwell, and International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) President Russ Decker, CEM, participated in the selection process. Tim Manning, Community Preparedness Division, together with Decker and Maxwell presented the awards at a special ceremony.

It is worth noting the finalists in this report, since the presentation at the conference further educated participants on how communities can use the power of Citizen Corps in partnership with emergency management and the private sector. The incorporation of an awards program permitted greater participation at the state and local level for award nominees and winners.

“The finalists exemplified excellence in community emergency planning, fostering successful public-private partnerships, prioritizing collaboration, demonstrating creative and innovative local problem solving, and implementing sound programs that can be modeled for use by other communities.”

Outstanding State/Territory Citizen Corps Initiatives Award

- ✓ Arizona State Citizen Corps Council
- ✓ Illinois Citizen Corps Council
- ✓ New Jersey State Citizen Corps Council
- ✓ Ohio Citizen Corps Council

Outstanding Tribal Citizen Corps Council Award

- ✓ United Tribes Technical College Citizen Corps Council (ND)

Outstanding Citizen Corps Council Award

(serving a population under 1.5 million)

- ✓ Denton County Citizen Corps Council (TX)
- ✓ Fresno Citizen Corps Council (CA)
- ✓ Citizen Corps Monterey County (CA)
- ✓ San Ramon Valley Emergency Preparedness Citizen Corps Council (CA)

Outstanding Citizen Corps Council Award

(serving a population over 1.5 million)

- ✓ Arizona Central Region Citizen Corps Council
- ✓ New York City Citizen Corps Council (NY)
- ✓ Sacramento Region Citizen Corps Council (CA)
- ✓ Southeast Florida Regional Citizen Corps Task Force

Collaborative Preparedness Planning Award

- ✓ Contra Costa County Citizen Corps (CA)
- ✓ Cottonwood Heights Citizen Corps (UT)
- ✓ Douglas County Citizen Corps Council (KS)
- ✓ San Francisco Citizen Corps Council (CA)

Preparing the Public Award

- ✓ Bradford County Citizen Corps (PA)
- ✓ Escambia County Citizen Corps Council (FL)
- ✓ Farmington Hills/Farmington Citizen Corps Council (MI)
- ✓ Nassau County Citizen Corps Council (NY)

Preparing Community Organizations Award

- ✓ Adams County Citizen Corps Council (IL)
- ✓ Independence/Eastern Jackson County Citizen Corps (MO)
- ✓ Duval County/Jacksonville Citizen Corps (FL)
- ✓ Detroit/Wayne County Citizen Corps (MI)

Volunteer Integration Award

- ✓ Cuyahoga County Citizen Corps (OH)
- ✓ Harris County Citizen Corps Council (TX)
- ✓ Northwest Fire’s Citizen Corps Council (AZ)
- ✓ Rowlett Citizen Corps Council (TX)

Program Development

IAEM and staff from the National Office of Citizen Corps planned the program content throughout the fall of 2008 and early winter of 2009. Following an initial strategy and organizational meeting in the fall, subsequent planning and coordination was achieved through weekly conference calls, email of planning documents, and meetings with the contractor at Citizen Corps national headquarters. IAEM provided an online system to collect speaker proposals. Citizen Corps national headquarters made the final speaker selections for all breakout sessions and workshops.

FEMA extended the invitations to the speakers. Once selected, speakers were contacted jointly by IAEM and Citizen Corps staff. The contractor assisted with hundreds of phone calls and emails to get speakers to submit their profiles and presentation summaries. IAEM staff collected the PowerPoint programs that would later be posted on the Citizen Corps web site. As the conference date drew closer, FEMA assigned speaker liaisons from among its regional and national staff. The 78-page conference program booklet was organized and printed with FEMA funding.

Participant Feedback

The highlights of the program, according to participant comments, were:

- ✓ Diversity of program content and presentations on best practices
- ✓ Diversity of program content to meet needs of rural and urban citizen corps councils
- ✓ Participation by a broad spectrum of the preparedness community
- ✓ Highlights of grants and other funding sources for Citizen Corps Councils
- ✓ Opportunities for networking among council representatives, subject matter experts, elected officials, and the private sector, including the vendors (although they were not officially part of the program)
- ✓ Handouts and takeaway materials such as CDs with the conference materials
- ✓ Summary of research findings

Recommendations for Improvement

The recommendations of staff and participants for improvement of program development and delivery include:

- ✓ Earlier deadlines for submission of speaker proposals
- ✓ Earlier notices on the web site of conference logistics
- ✓ Earlier announcement of speaker selections to assist state and local participants in travel authorization and arrangements
- ✓ Earlier access to program summaries for conference attendees to assess which breakout sessions to attend among competing sessions
- ✓ Special scheduled hands-on demonstrations, especially by CERT, MRC, and other partners and affiliates
- ✓ Best practices to include not only “success stories” but a toolkit with takeaway templates for plans, equipment lists, budget documents, and models of how to put together grant or funding proposals
- ✓ Additional time with vendors or representatives at nonprofit booths
- ✓ Additional opportunities for volunteers and students to attend as facilitators

In-depth Post-Conference Workshops

Specialized Post-Conference Workshops included:

- ✓ Planning for Children in Disasters
- ✓ Media Matters: Making the Media Work for You
- ✓ Neighborhood Watch Capacity Building
- ✓ Medical Reserve Corps: Psychological First Aid Training
- ✓ The Future of CERT: National Program Developments
- ✓ TCL Performance Objectives for Community Preparedness and Participation
- ✓ Engaging the Private Sector in Disaster Response and Recovery
- ✓ *(by invitation only)* Emergency Managers Roundtable

The Post-Conference Workshops were generally well attended. The Planning for Children in Disasters was a pilot course presentation, and a number of IAEM leaders, Board members, and Commissioner Bruce Lockwood, CEM, participated in support of the initiative. Programs that included information on CERT were very popular throughout the conference, and it is recommended that additional CERT workshops be planned, and information on best practices and national strategies be shared during the general conference sessions.

Post-Conference EM Roundtable

Recognizing that a special partnership exists with state and local emergency managers, especially with our increasingly more active advisory role in defining national FEMA policies, an Emergency Management Roundtable was held in conjunction with and immediately following the National Conference on Community Preparedness. IAEM leadership was very appreciative of the opportunity to participate in a roundtable that provided a chance for an open and frank dialogue between Deputy Administrator Tim Manning, the staff of the Preparedness Directorate, and the leadership of IAEM-USA and NEMA.

Participants discussed the challenges to implementing effective preparedness strategies. The discussion opened on the state of the economy and its effects on critically needed resources, especially its impact on sustainability of local and state emergency management offices and programs. The dialogue quickly moved on to the top priorities for policy issues, toolkits, grants and other support needed to strengthen the preparedness function and remove obstacles at the local community level. One of the top priority discussion points raised by state and local representatives was the need for support to EMI for course development and enhancements to the training programs available to emergency managers, including an executive leadership program. There was an impassioned discussion on professional standards for emergency managers across all jurisdictions.

The value of the roundtable was highlighted, and FEMA is encouraged to include this with the next conference, and to continue the dialogue on an annual basis. Emergency management state and local leaders from NEMA and IAEM also should be included with the FEMA Preparedness Roundtable, as representing state and local interests of a unique nature.

Children in Disasters

One of the special focus areas of this conference was the partnerships that are bringing attention to the unique issues of children during disaster response and recovery. Commissioner Bruce Lockwood, CEM, National Commission on Children and Disasters, shared the timeline for the release of the commission's comprehensive study. In addition, a special offering of "Planning for Children in Disasters" was piloted after EMI had developed the program with IAEM, Save the Children, and the American Red Cross.

Facilitators

One of the successful strategies for supporting program delivery was the selection and assignment of CERT volunteers and students as facilitators for the breakout sessions. The facilitators remained in contact with the conference coordinator through the use of cell phones. Where phone service was not available, the facilitators served as runners between the Conference Command Post and their assigned rooms.

IAEM maintained radio communication with the hotel conference staff, so that audiovisual or other facility problems were quickly reported and addressed. The participation of key Citizen Corps national staff was especially important to introduce speakers – and during the question-and-answer portions of the program – for their intimate knowledge of Citizen Corps programs and other federal partner programs. A series of separate IT specialists floated among the sessions to handle any computer hardware or software issues.

Exhibit Area

Although it was separated from the conference, the exhibit area, which was organized and managed by IAEM staff, was a highly popular and well-attended event. The partners and affiliates of Citizen Corps were provided with a physical separation of their display booths from the commercial vendors. Food was provided in the exhibit areas for conference participants.

Challenges of Conference Management

The partnership between the organizations representing emergency managers and the federal government, while it was very strong in other venues and conferences throughout the year, showed some strain over the management of this conference. Late into the planning for the conference, attorneys for FEMA advised Citizen Corps staff that the conference had to become a federally sponsored and operated conference, not a cooperative effort. New administrative requirements were imposed on the relationship between IAEM and Citizen Corps, which dramatically altered the cooperative agreement and changed the roles and responsibilities of IAEM.

As a result, efforts became strained midway through the planning phase for the conference. There were delays in addressing registration issues, changes to promotional materials, and the overall direction was often confusing as to the final structure of the conference. Both IAEM and Citizen Corps staff recognized that these last-minute changes created problems for participants, speakers, and support organizations, and attempted to mitigate the problems as they sought to work their way through conflicting guidance from the legal office.

Roles and Responsibilities Changed Midstream

Initially, IAEM was specifically asked to handle the hotel rooms, catering, vendors, registration, conference brochure, flyers, save-the-date card, printed materials, transportation, audiovisual support, visitor web site, supporting information, and all logistical matters. IAEM could have managed this with its technology, trained conference staff, and resources. But these tasks soon changed their focus and level of responsibility to comply with the guidance from the legal office. As noted above, this hampered and seriously delayed planning efforts.

Staff at Citizen Corps did their best to meet the administrative requirements of the legal guidance that placed additional restriction on this conference, while still maintaining the open channels and cooperative spirit that had marked the development and implementation of the first national conference in 2007. This ruling presented unique challenges and artificial barriers to the partnership that existed between IAEM and NEMA and the Community Preparedness Division.

Many of the traditional fiscal paths used by a voluntary organization, such as registration fees, were closed to IAEM. The fee structure and sponsorships for the conference were dropped, eliminating the use of revenues and corporate sponsorships for meals, speaker costs, and social activities. Vendor sponsorships for special events had to be eliminated, and IAEM was forced to run a separate but concurrently operating exhibit hall adjacent to the conference. Vendors were generally not pleased that their materials could not be included in the registration packets. However, the high attendance at the exhibit hall allowed vendors to share written materials with attendees during their visits to booths.

IAEM and NEMA were suddenly excluded from much of the planning, including areas of private sector partnerships which were a part of the strength of IAEM's conference planning skills. IAEM continued to provide logistical support and organize activities such as the exhibit hall and online and site registration. But the new and sometimes onerous requirements of separation of roles and responsibilities delayed activities and resulted in confusion for the participants, staff, and partner organizations, and overloaded the Citizen Corps staff.

IAEM and NEMA are eager to help sponsor a series of national preparedness conferences over the coming years, and encourage FEMA to present these conferences on an annual basis. It is strongly recommended that as part of the recommendation for annual conferences, the requirements for federally sponsored conferences and workshops be reviewed and explained in detail with the partner organizations prior to engaging in the next conference, with the process being simplified wherever possible. IAEM strongly recommends that FEMA be allowed to utilize the conference management skills demonstrated by IAEM with other national conferences.

Evaluation Overview

The 2009 conference evaluation process was handled differently than at the 2007 conference. In 2007, an online attendee survey was prepared and conducted by IAEM, and the results were shared with FEMA Headquarters. In 2009, there were no evaluations made available to IAEM, so no statistical reports can be provided. Rather, the highlights and recommendations for improvement noted below are taken from compilations of the remarks reported to the facilitators and staff by participants, including the vendors who participated in the exhibit area.

Among the comments most often reported were the following:

- ✓ Almost all stated that they received information that they could use to help their communities after the conference.
- ✓ An equally high percentage of comments noted that they would recommend this conference to others if it became an annual event.
- ✓ More than half reported that the venue was adequate to their needs and appropriate for the conference.
- ✓ Very positive statements were made about the registration process, once it was opened. The major complaint was the delay in opening registration and the initial lack of information provided.
- ✓ Very positive statements were made about the on-site conference staff, facilitators, and conference support.
- ✓ High marks generally were given to the selection of plenary and lunch speakers.
- ✓ Participants valued the best practices shared by Citizen Corps partners and affiliates, as well as councils.
- ✓ Participants asked for a rating system for programs (such as elementary, technical, or advanced level) to help participants navigate through the variety of programs offered.
- ✓ Facilitators appreciated the briefing and the standard information packets that were provided to them. They would have liked better communication, since their ability to effectively communicate with the command staff varied widely.

- ✓ Participants generally did not provide feedback on each of the technical sessions, so it would be difficult to rate the speakers and programs for future consideration.
- ✓ There were frequent requests to provide more toolboxes with Citizen Corp literature, PSAs, and videos.
- ✓ The level of participation was impressive, as 836 participants was an extraordinarily high number for a national conference during tight fiscal times, with some state and local governments placing travel restrictions on their employees. This reflects a high level of interest in the program offered.

For the next event, IAEM would strongly encourage FEMA to maximize the chances of success and increase attendance by planning at least a year in advance. Again, with adequate lead time, IAEM management believes this event can exceed 1,000 attendees.

Conference Promotions

Information was posted on the NEMA and IAEM web sites as soon as the language was approved by counsel of DHS. Logos from each of the organizations, as well as DHS and Citizen Corps, were promoted with published materials. Both IAEM and NEMA sent repeated notices out to their membership (IAEM—5,000 members; NEMA—275 members and associate members). Both IAEM and NEMA provided placement notices in their conference brochures about the upcoming National Conference on Community Preparedness.

The National Citizen Corps Council Office sent out an initial notice regarding approval of Homeland Security grants for attendance at the conference and encouraged each state to have representatives. Later, they sent out notices through their mass mailings when the conference switched to “by invitation.” IAEM published and distributed the save-the-date postcard and flyers. IAEM published updated programs online in multi-color versions. As part of the conference takeaways, IAEM staff worked with FEMA staff to design the promotional bags and identify sources for the hand sanitizer giveaways.

Volunteer Support from CERT and Students

In addition to facilitators for each of the breakout sessions, IAEM worked with the Montgomery County (Maryland) CERT team to provide volunteers to assist with registration and to support the command staff for the conference. A special thanks is offered to Montgomery County CERT and FireCorp, who helped with room facilitation and collecting comments for the post-conference report. IAEM provided a volunteer coordinator to track contact names, daily schedules and hours, and assignments. Students from Virginia high schools assisted with registration. A student from Montgomery County FireCorp, Molly Christian, did her summer internship on helping with the conference. Citizen Corps used the Incident Command System to organize the efforts of the volunteers, and everyone was able to function well under the system. FEMA recognized volunteer efforts with certificates of appreciation following the conference. In total, more than 325 hours were contributed by volunteers from IAEM, Montgomery County CERT, and high school students in support of this conference.

Registration

The conference was originally planned and advertised to offer a multi-tier pricing arrangement. Participants would be offered savings by early registration. The fee structure was dropped in 2009, when the conference was changed to a format of “by invitation.” After Citizen Corps Councils, speakers, and DHS staff had registered, the on-line registration process was opened for a brief period – generally on a first-come, first served basis – for a small number of slots that were available. There were no complaints about the “free registration,” but comments were made about food pricing and parking costs, most commonly from those out of town and not familiar with prices in the Washington, DC area. Additional opportunities for one-day registrations were encouraged.

Media

A media advisory was issued, inviting the media to attend the 2009 National Conference on Community Preparedness: The Power of Citizen Corps. FEMA External Affairs assigned staff as the Public Information Officer for the conference, and provided opportunities for interviews.

Suggestions for Future Conferences

Disasters du Jour

Participants asked that there be more sessions on “Disasters du Jour,” with actual responders as speakers, especially from CERT, Citizen Corps Councils, Medical Reserve Corps, law enforcement, Neighborhood Watch, and elected officials.

Social Activities

Some participants suggested that formal evening activities outside the hotel be offered to enhance the Washington, DC visitor’s experience.

Summary

The 2009 National Conference on Community Preparedness: The Power of Citizen Corps was the second national conference on community preparedness, with 836 participants. A diverse program on grassroots and national efforts was highly successful. The partnership between FEMA and IAEM and NEMA was crucial to the success of this conference. The attendance of emergency managers is critical to the success of bringing Citizen Corps Councils closer to state and local planning efforts and to collaboration with local government as well as the private sector.

IAEM, as the premier organization representing emergency managers, needs to be integrally involved in the planning and implementation of this conference. Moreover, as an organization with unique skills at conference management, IAEM can bring its skills, resources, and technology to support conference planning in the future.

IAEM and its leadership wholeheartedly support an annual conference on national community preparedness, and IAEM stands ready through a cooperative agreement to lend support to FEMA to help develop and manage these conferences in the future.

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