

Governor's Emergency Communications Task Force Minutes, Tuesday, July 15, 2014, Meeting

Present: Commissioner Dora Schriro, *DESPP*; Brenda Bergeron, *DESPP/DEMHS*; Catherine Blinder, *Dept. of Consumer Protection*; Scott DeVico, *DESPP*; Kelly Donnelly, *Dept. of Education*; Paul Giguere, *CT Public Affairs Network*; William Hackett, *DESPP/DEMHS*; Samaia Hernandez, *Governor's Office*; Kathleen Kabara, *Dept. of Rehabilitation Services*; Gretchen Knauff, *Protection & Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities*; Stephanie Marino, *Dept. on Aging*; Richard Porth, *United Way of CT*; Steve Rabb, *FOX CT*; An-Ming Truxes, *Asian Pacific American Affairs Comm.*; Steve Verbil, *Division of Statewide Telecommunications (DSET)*; April Capone, *OPM*; Daniel Micari, *DDS*; Jonathan Slifka, *Governor's Liaison to the Disabled Community*; Chris Stan, *Department of Public Health*

Absent: Sulma Avenancio, *Univision TV*; Richard Branigan, *Red Cross*; William Gerrish, *DPH*; Angel Fernandez-Chavero, *Aspire Praxis*; Subira Gordon, *African American Affairs Comm.*; Maria Lino, *The Latino Way*; Emanuela Palmares-Leaf, *Latino & Puerto Rican Affairs Comm.*; Dr. Diana Rios, *UCONN*; Garrett Eucalitto, *OPM*; Tanya Barrett, *United Way 2-1-1*

Welcome and Introductions

Commissioner Schriro convened the meeting and welcomed everyone, thanking them for their attendance and unflagging engagement with this Task Force. The minutes from the May 28, 2014, meeting were reviewed and approved unanimously.

Roundtable, Briefings

Samaia Hernandez and Scott DeVico briefed the group on the work that their subcommittees performed since the last meeting. They convened a meeting between Connecticut Television Network, state government's television network (CT-N) and the state broadcasters. Steve Rabb from Fox and the CT Broadcasters Association were instrumental in bringing 18-20 media engineers together with CT-N to discuss further collaboration. CT-N provides a pool feed for coverage of events that are happening in state government. Paul Giguere of CT-N stated that the network has the capacity to send out video/audio to provide a live web stream from the State Emergency Operations Center. CT-N can provide the "embed" code and the stream can go out in a number of ways, including websites, Twitter feeds, etc... CT-N can tell who has tapped in, and when. One of the highest numbers of visitations to use the feed occurred during the recent storms.

Paul Giguere indicated that CT-N is moving from an analog switch to a digital switch. There is a phone call meeting with ATT and the broadcasters tomorrow (July 16) regarding the changeover.

The value of CT-N goes beyond emergency communications. If any website wants to link into any CT-N broadcast, it can be done for TV or radio or websites. The goal is to raise awareness of the availability of this service. For example, until the recent meeting, Spanish stations may not have been aware that they could provide a link to CT-N. Public agencies can also have access, either if the agency has fiber from the facility to the switch, or CT-N can put the file into a drop box, which allows the agency to gain access to the CT-N "on-demand" files.

Paul Giguere said that CT-N plans to have two cameras at the EOC, so that one camera can be dedicated to the sign language interpreter.

The Task Force discussed the possibility of using higher education institutions to provide translation services, perhaps with a partnership with the Board of Regents. Dan Micari of DDS stated that interpreters can receive certification. Paul Giguere pointed out that there may be liability issues, but that the use of certified translators should definitely be explored. Steve Rabb said that Fox 61 provides remote services for other Fox stations across the country, and that a similar remote translation service might be useful.

Paul Giguere asked whether, if CT-N provided an audio feed to the 2-1-1 Tele-Interpreters, they could translate by phone. Rick Porth of 2-1-1 said he could help look into this possibility.

Catherine Blinder asked whether American Sign Language is its own language, or whether there are differences in the use of ASL among different nationalities. Gretchen Knauff of the Office of Protection and Advocacy said that she believes there may be some differences.

Samaia Hernandez and Scott DeVico said that they will work with CT-N to craft a letter to broadcasters in the state regarding the availability of CT-N.

State Emergency Management Director Bill Hackett summarized the recent statewide exercise held annually as part of the Governor's Emergency Planning and Preparedness Initiative. The exercise was held on two separate days, Saturday, June 21, and Monday, June 23, so that towns with largely volunteer staff would have a weekend day to participate. Thirty-four towns participated on Saturday, and 132 towns and two tribal nations participated on Monday. The exercise was an excellent test of the state's Emergency Notification System—over 12,000 ENS messages were sent out.

One of the main focuses of this year's exercise was functional needs planning and communications, particularly with regard to sheltering and evacuation. The focus was in line with the issues being addressed by this Task Force. Dan Micari said that as a direct result of the exercise, Bristol convened a multi-member functional needs group

that has met several times already. Dan will provide the group with a summary of Bristol's activities as a best practice.

April Capone of OPM offered to help with any post-exercise outreach.

Commissioner Schriro indicated that plans are being outlined for next year's exercise, which she anticipates will focus on school safety. Rick Porth suggested that the exercise include child care centers, which the Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security have already included in planning, particularly through the DEMHS Child Emergency Preparedness Committee of the DEMHS Advisory Council. Mr. Porth said that he has heard that the annual exercise keeps getting better and better.

Bill Hackett suggested that the Annual Emergency Management Symposium held in conjunction with the CT Conference of Municipalities and DPH, with over 500 attendees, might be a good means of disseminating information collected by this Task Force.

Catherine Blinder reported out on the meeting of the subcommittee on identification of diverse groups. The subcommittee recommends further strengthening the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program. Bill Hackett indicated that there are over 6,000 trained volunteers under this program, which is administered through DEMHS. CERT teams could be established that include faith-based and neighborhood organizations, different languages and cultures, functional needs, etc. Dan Micari said that Bristol is setting up a functional needs CERT, through the town's Emergency Management Director, Harley Graim. Brenda Bergeron indicated that state statute allows for liability and workers compensation protection for CERT members that are properly activated by the local emergency management, fire or police official who is in charge of the team. One of the challenges to the CERT program is the establishment of teams in urban areas. Norwalk has developed its own program.

The subcommittee also recommended the development of signage, which has been very successful in Europe. Also, Catherine Blinder suggested that an ethnic media list, such as the new American Media Guide, which she has, will be a useful tool. Also, ham radio operators are an excellent resource for communications. Bill Hackett indicated that ham radio operators are stationed in DEMHS regional offices during emergencies and are an invaluable asset.

Review of Proposed Report Template

Next, the Task Force reviewed a preliminary template of the emergency communications report. The group discussed the need to get out public messaging regarding emergency preparedness across the state in as many languages as possible. Resiliency and preparedness are critical to the initiative, and we need to explore how to encourage changes in people's behavior. Yale and the National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are using a SEA grant to conduct a behavioral analysis on hurricane preparedness along the CT coast. Dan Micari said that DDS has 60-80 group homes in that area and is very interested in this study.

Jon Slifka and Gretchen Knauff indicated that the means to communicate with the blind and visually impaired varies depending on the impairment. Most individuals have web access.

The group discussed the need for municipalities to determine the demographics of their communities, and how their residents want to be communicated with. One simple method is to encourage the use of a simple battery-operated/hand crank radio.

Jon Slifka said that if the town lets its residents know that, for example, 30% of its residents have some type of need, that will help people feel like they are not alone and they may be more willing to self-identify when they can be assured that the information is intended for emergency use only.

Commissioner Schriro will be making two public service announcements at the end of the month to encourage people to sign up for the emergency notification system. Scott DeVico will look into having the messages translated into Spanish and the PSA provided in a captioned format.

Paul Giguere stated that he would like the work of this group to continue even after the reports are completed. Brenda Bergeron suggested that the group could become the Emergency Support Function 15, External Affairs, work group of the DEMHS Advisory Council, which would allow it to occupy a role as a policy group on public messaging. Also, in times of emergency, the group could supply members as needed for a short-term, mission-centric EOC ESF 15 Task Force to address specific issues, including the rollout of messages.

Next Steps

Commissioner Schriro indicated that the Task Force will continue to meet monthly. Members should consider what they would like the message from this Task Force to be. Any ideas on the report should be sent to Brenda Bergeron by July 23. Brenda will work with a small group to create a draft report. (Update: Report has been submitted.)

Next Meeting

A conference call on the report will be scheduled for Monday July 28. The next meeting will be scheduled for Thursday, August 28 from 1 to 3 pm in Room 348 at DESPP Headquarters, 1111 Country Club Road, Middletown.