

Overview: Riverside County embarked upon a novel approach to emergency management by integrating three programs to form a single, all-hazards department, known as the Emergency Management Department.

Challenge: Previously, the County of Riverside organized emergency management much like other counties throughout the nation. There were three multi-faceted emergency management programs responsible for similar activities in separate departments. The traditional emergency management program was a division of the fire department. Public health disaster management and emergency medical services were both within the public health department. Each program had its own set of operational directives and personnel. There was little to no coordination across disciplines, gaps in coordination, and a duplication of effort.

Innovative Solution: The County of Riverside acknowledged the need for collaboration to join these programs and create new partnerships and interdependencies. On May 12, 2015, the Board of Supervisors approved the creation of a single, collaborative, all-hazards department that reports directly to the County Executive Officer. This innovative approach to emergency management creates a stand-alone department that is better prepared to tackle challenges together through shared best practices. The integration of these three programs creates a seamless department known as the Emergency Management Department (EMD). Personnel now efficiently develop response plans, conduct training and exercises, respond to incidents, coordinate volunteers, and manage grants with an all-hazards approach. This creates resiliency as Riverside County is now better positioned to plan for, mitigate for, respond to and recover from natural, health, medical, and terrorist-related disasters.

Originality: As a pioneer in combining the three duplicative emergency management programs that exist throughout county government, EMD did not have a playbook for best practices in implementing shared programs. Instead, EMD navigated through uncharted waters to find ways in which cost savings could be realized while leveraging shared programs and incorporating EMD's mission and vision throughout organizational realignment and assignment of responsibilities.

Cost Effectiveness: The budget for the newly created department was formed using 11 grant funding streams awarded from the state and federal governments, as well as revenue from local jurisdictions for emergency management planning. Due to the reliance on grant funding to support the department's mission critical functions, EMD's net county cost was only \$2.8 million in FY 16/17. This net county cost will be reduced by 10 percent in FY 17/18. The financial benefits of this comprehensive emergency management model include: the ability to leverage grants, leverage expertise and skills, as well as reduce program and administrative overlap. Achieving economies of scale and performing essential functions with increased efficacy is a direct result of combining funding streams.

Results: The County of Riverside is now better prepared to respond to and recover from disasters, as evidenced during the Jan. 18 - 23, 2017 storm series. The success of the January Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activation and ongoing recovery was possible due to collaborative planning. The Jan. 2017 EOC activation implemented winter storm plans seamlessly and EMD received numerous accolades from stakeholder agencies on the enhanced flow of communication and comprehensive intelligence shared on the incident. This activation gave EMD an opportunity to perform a coordinated activation with traditional emergency management, emergency medical services, and health disaster management. As a result of EMD's leadership during the Jan. 2017 storm damage, the Riverside County Board of Supervisors and Governor of California proclaimed a local emergency, respectively. These actions led the President of the United States to declare a major disaster in Riverside County, thus paving the way for federal and state financial resources. The County of Riverside is leading the way by integrating emergency medical services, public health disaster management, and traditional emergency management. As a result of this industry-leading management system, there is a new model for emergency management in the nation.

Contact:

Kim Saruwatari
Director, County of Riverside Emergency Management Department
4210 Riverwalk Parkway, Suite 300
Riverside, CA 92505
(951) 358-7104 – office, ksaruwatari@rivco.org