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First Responder Preparedness Campaign for the Olympia Fire Department

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HLS 494 Practicum

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Concordia University

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Introduction

The city of Olympia, Washington rests just inland of one of the biggest tectonic plate fault lines in all of North America, this is what is known as the Cascadia Subduction Zone. Scientists believe that it is only a matter of time until there is a massive mega-quake due to the tectonic plates friction as we can read, “the plates are stuck, and the stress will build up until the fault suddenly breaks. This last happened in 1700: the result was an earthquake on the order of magnitude 9.0, followed within minutes by a large tsunami—much like the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan on March 11, 2011” (CREW, 2013). Much like the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan in 2011, the entire West Coast will be affected by such an event and the destruction will be unfathomable. This is just one of the many disasters/hazards that face the Pacific Northwest and the Olympia area. Because of these disasters/hazards, it is vital that everyone is as prepared as possible in order to preserve as much life as possible.

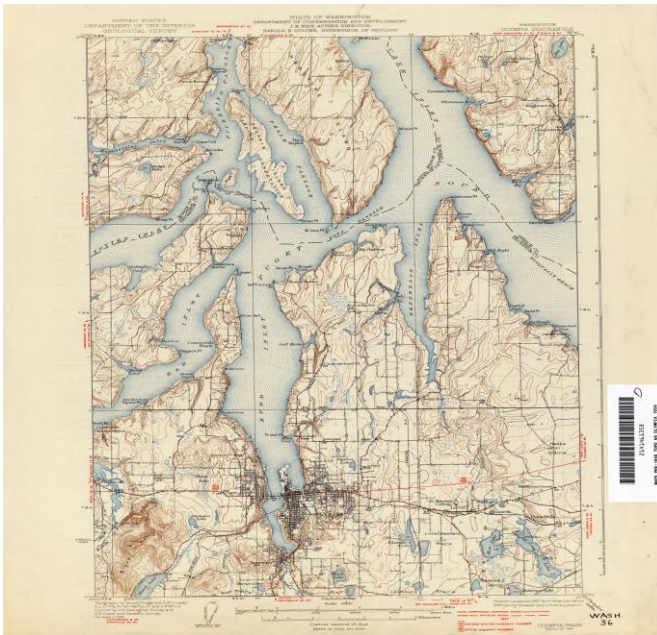
This paper addresses the functional aspect preparedness campaigns within the homeland security enterprise. The preparedness campaign will focus strictly on first responder preparedness. For this paper, most of the information applied was gathered through various meetings via phone calls and face-to-face interviews. The easiest and most efficient method to identify a fire department’s preparedness campaign is to simply call or meet with them and discuss what the plans are. In addition, it is also beneficial to

obtain the lay of the land around the area by walking/driving around and observing where there might be vulnerabilities, what the buildings/terrain look like, along with researching the possible disasters/hazards that the city faces.

Background

The city of Olympia rests a mere seventy miles inland from Washington's coast and is

Figure 1: Map of Olympia



split down the middle by inlets (see Figure 1). The city is fairly large with a population of roughly 50,000 citizens (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Because of the geographical make up, along with the amount of citizens, the city is susceptible to earthquakes, tsunamis, flooding, and much more. These

disasters/hazards become worrisome for first responders, as the possibility for a major catastrophe to happen is extremely high. Such a catastrophe could affect tens of thousands of citizens and their families.

Major disasters, such as a Cascadia Subduction Zone mega-quake and others, are not frequent. However, such disasters, and the amount of damage and destruction they can produce, remain worrisome. While the chances of such disasters occurring has historically been small, the chances of this mega-quake occurring in our lifetime has continually increased as scientists predict, “The longer the Cascadia subduction zone

goes without a major earthquake, the more the odds increase that it will happen soon” (Holter, 2018). A disaster of this magnitude will be a huge wakeup call for the area and all emergency services. This will show the importance of being prepared and implementing first responder preparedness campaigns.

Simply the idea of an earth shaking mega-quake and tsunami should put fear into the minds of citizens and emergency services first responders. This mega-quake and tsunami are going to happen and should be planned and prepared for accordingly. Preparation is the key to mitigating any disaster situation, “Disaster preparedness can prevent a bad situation from becoming worse. Emergencies come in many forms and having the right checklist, supplies and kit for any possible contingency can aid in making your family safe. Planning ahead also helps everyone understand what to do should a disaster strike” (Disaster, 2015). Proper planning and preparation will diminish the extent of the destruction and preserve the most amount of lives possible.

The Olympia Fire Department (OFD) does not currently have a first responder preparedness campaign in place for their employees. The stated mission of the OFD is “to Prevent Harm to people and property, Thrive organizationally and personally, and Be Nice whenever we can” (OFD, 2018). This mission directly relates to the purpose of this paper as this proposal is geared toward helping keep people safe and out of harms way. Both the OFD and the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) missions go hand in hand with one another as they both seek to protect its people and maintain organizational

integrity. This is evident when looking at the DHS's mission, "With honor and integrity, we will safeguard the American people, our homeland, and our values" (DHS, 2016).

Problem Definition

The lack of a first responder preparedness campaign is a serious issue for the OFD as it creates many problems should a serious disaster take place. This is a major issue facing the OFD because if their first responders and their families are not well prepared, they will not be able to effectively do their jobs and protect and serve the citizens of Olympia. Failure to perform the job properly and effectively will fundamentally place many lives at risk. It is well known that, "First responders who are well-prepared will have the peace of mind to focus on the task at hand, rather than worrying whether their family is taken care of" (DHS, n.d.). Clearly, first responders who are well prepared for any situation are going to perform at a higher level than those who are not. This problem exists either because the OFD does not have the proper resources, has not facilitated the proper resources in these specific areas, or they have not had enough time to fix this issue. In order to solve this problem, the OFD needs to look into where their resources are being spent and divert some in order to resolve these issues.

Analyzing Solutions

Potential Solutions

Figure 2: Potential Solutions

Potential Solutions	Continuing with the status quo	Creating a comprehensive First Responder Preparedness Campaign	County/State wide requirement of First Responder Preparedness Campaigns
Pros	No extra funds would have to be delegated to this option. It would also be the simplest as employees would still be solely responsible for themselves and their families.	Would bring peace of mind to all first responders and their families. It would also allow first responders to do their jobs to the best of their ability and more efficiently.	All departments would be required to have a First Responder Preparedness Campaign, which in turn would bring peace of mind and allow first responders to perform at a higher level.
Cons	Nothing changes, first responders and their families will still be unprepared.	Would require some funds/resources to create and implement.	This would require a significant amount of resources as well as potential policy change.

To combat their lack of first responder preparedness the OFD can do one of three things (see Figure 2).

- Option One:** they can choose to continue with the status quo and do nothing. With this option, the benefits would include not requiring the delegation of any extra funds. Additionally, this would be the easiest option as first responders would be solely responsible for themselves and their families. However, the disadvantage of choosing this option is that nothing changes and the first responders and their families are still unprepared for disaster situations.
- Option Two:** the OFD can create their very own comprehensive first responder preparedness campaign that encompasses all possible disasters/threats to the Olympia area and its citizens. The benefits of this option would be the peace of

mind it would bring to all first responders and their families. Additionally, it would allow for first responders to do their jobs more efficiently and to the best of their abilities in a disaster situation. The disadvantage of this option is that it would require funds/resources to create and implement.

- **Option Three:** there could be a County/State wide requirement for all fire departments to implement first responder preparedness campaigns. The benefits of this option are that all departments would be required to have a first responder preparedness campaigns in place for their employees, which in the end would bring peace of mind not only to first responders, but to their families as well. The departments would also know their employees would be performing to the best of their abilities. Despite such benefits, the downside to this option is that a significant amount of resources would be required. In addition, new policies would need to be written.

Recommendations

Based upon an analysis of all the options listed, Option Two is recommended because it is the most practical and cost efficient strategy. To begin implementation of a preparedness campaign, the OFD should take these actions:

Actions:

- Create a Survey

Create a survey for all of OFD employees to take in order to gauge the level of preparedness within their homes. They should then collect these surveys, determine how prepared or unprepared their employees and their families are, and finally decide if they want to proceed.

- Make a Decision

Moving forward would be done by either sticking to the status quo, purchasing personalized preparedness plans, or by creating their very own comprehensive first responder preparedness campaign. Overall, the best option for the OFD would be to create their own comprehensive first responder preparedness campaign. By creating their own preparedness campaign, the Olympia Fire Department is preparing and helping their first responders and their families.

- Bring Peace of Mind

The peace of mind that a first responder preparedness campaign would bring is vital for OFD's employees to do their job to the best of their abilities. While this would necessarily be an investment for the OFD, it will be well worth it in the end, as they would see vast improvements from their employees in crucial situations.

- Create a Comprehensive Campaign

What the OFD is in need of is a comprehensive campaign for how its employees can prepare themselves and their families in the event of a major disaster/hazard. Since there is no preparedness campaign currently in place, this will all be the most up-to-date version of a first responder preparedness campaign that the OFD possesses. When creating a first responder preparedness campaign, there are three simple steps to follow. These steps are to build a kit, make a plan, and stay informed.

Next Steps:

1. Step One – Emergency Supply Kit

Assemble an emergency supply kit for oneself and one's family. As suggested by FEMA, it is vital for, "Americans to have some supplies on hand so that you and your family can

survive for three days if an emergency occurs” (DHS, n.d.). However, the State of Washington has recently updated their guidelines and now calls for individuals to be prepared for up to two weeks after a disaster. It is important for an individual to make sure they have enough supplies for themselves, their family, and pets for at least two weeks after an emergency occurs. This is due to the fact that sometimes relief takes some time to be dispatched. Having supplies equipped ahead of time will help one and one’s family be more prepared when the time comes to handle these emergency situations. In addition, having multiple emergency kits is recommended in the event one and their family are forced to evacuate the area on short notice. Items that should be included within an emergency supply kit: at least one gallon of water per person per day for at least two weeks, a two week supply of non-perishable food, communication system such as battery powered walkie-talkie or hand crank radio and extra batteries, cell phones with chargers and portable battery packs, contact numbers, school Facebook/Twitter accounts, current photos of all family members, flashlight with extra batteries, medical supplies/first aid kit, whistle/flare gun, ibuprofen/Tylenol, dust mask, duct tape, rope, plastic garbage bags, can opener for food, and any other special considerations such as medications, glasses etc.

2. Step Two – Create a Plan

Create a plan. It is vital that first responders find time to sit down with their families and create a family emergency plan. When forming this plan, it is important to designate a point of contact or family member not living within the same area in order to relay information back and forth to one’s family. Next, having a solid understanding of how one’s work, spouse’s work, and their children’s school emergency plans will fit into the

family's plan will be helpful if a disaster occurs while the family is separated. Lastly, as disasters are not always predictable, and one might not be with their family when they do strike, it is important to designate two meeting places where family members can reunite. The first meeting place should be somewhere clear and safe from the most potential hazards/danger within one's neighborhood. The second meeting place should be an easily accessible area outside of the neighborhood that is also as clear and safe from potential hazards as possible.

3. Step Three – Stay Informed

The final step is to stay up to date and informed. It is vital that all family members practice and rehearse the plans in place to prepare for when an emergency does occur. Additionally, go through and check all emergency kits twice a year to ensure items are still in working condition, undamaged, and that food has not perished. When it comes to staying informed, it is important to research and understand which types of natural disasters are the most likely to affect one's geographical area. Make sure oneself and their family are up to date on local emergency alert systems, plans, evacuation routes, social media pages, etc. Lastly, in the event that one's family has to evacuate, it is imperative to listen to local officials on when and how their family needs to proceed. If an evacuation does occur, one needs to remember to bring a travel emergency supply kit, plan out driving routes as well as having back up routes if needed, remember to lock all doors at one's house, make sure all pets are accounted for and properly housed in shelters or have room to evacuate them with the family.

Conclusion

All fire departments within Western Washington should look into creating their own first responder preparedness campaign, if necessary, or revamping their already existing ones. Moving forward, this preparedness campaign could save the lives of first responders, their families, and the citizens of Olympia if a disaster strikes. With this campaign, first responders will be able to achieve the peace of mind they need to do their job to the best of their ability knowing that their families are properly prepared and safe. This preparedness campaign encourages first responders to feel comfortable enough knowing their families will be safe so the first responders can go back towards the danger and help those in need. This might seem like a small and insignificant idea, but it will provide first responders the peace of mind they lack. However, this simple concept can have immeasurable benefits when it comes to saving the lives of others while in the line of duty.

The concept discussed throughout this paper is relevant to the curriculum that is taught within the Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM) program at Concordia University. Numerous times during the course, the required studies had much to do with Emergency Action Plans (EAP), Emergency Operation Plans (EOP), as well as overall preparedness and the importance it plays in disaster relief situations. However, unlike what was done in other courses during this program, this first responder preparedness campaign was much more comprehensive. With this paper, the instructors asked to be shown a comprehensive understanding of the HSEM program, which this paper has accomplished. This paper not only fulfills the requirements the instructors have

requested, but also enhances the OFD by proposing a first responder preparedness campaign that would give its first responders the peace of mind to do their jobs effectively.

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