

Doing it the Northwest Way

By Eric Holdeman

What exactly is the “Northwest Way” you ask? Here in what we call the Central Puget Sound (Greater Seattle Metropolitan Area) it means not being bounded by the artificial jurisdictional boundaries called city or county limits, nor do we look only at our discipline specific needs (Fire, police, private sector), but rather we take a more holistic approach to establishing a regional coalition of people and agencies dedicated to making our regional community as disaster resistant as we can.

The “Northwest Way” recognizes that interoperability is more than radio frequencies and being able to talk on the radio between the levels of government and between disciplines. True interoperability comes from planning, training, exercising together as partners. It even means sometimes subordinating your individual organization’s wants and needs in order to achieve a more effective regional level of preparedness and response capabilities.

Some great examples of what we have been able to achieve with this type of thinking and acting together include the following:

- ***An Award-Winning Regional Disaster Response Plan:*** Implemented well before January 2005’s federal-level National Response Plan, and supported by 134 signatories, the Regional Disaster Response Plan (RDP) is an innovative effort serving to establish a shared concept for how cross-jurisdictional and cross-discipline King County public and private organizations, like Boeing, Microsoft banking, utilities and other organizations will work together in times of extreme natural, technological and human-caused disasters.
- ***A Strategic Plan:*** The Region 6 Homeland Security Strategic Plan is a stakeholder-driven, five-year roadmap that is designed to guide decisions of resource allocation toward solutions that deliver a homeland security benefit to the entire region. Strategies enumerated in the plan strive to improve the region's capabilities with regard to natural, accidental or man-made disasters.
- ***Developing a Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan:*** This regional planning effort is another example of King County public organizations working together to set a national standard. The plan is comprised of over 40 partners like cities, schools, utilities, and fire districts, all working in conjunction with King County government to ensure our area’s eligibility for pre- and post-disaster mitigation grants.
- ***Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI):*** The Seattle-King County Urban Area (UA) is comprised of King County, Pierce County, Snohomish County, and

the Cities of Seattle and Bellevue. These jurisdictions are committed to working together to develop and coordinate efforts for building an enhanced and sustainable capacity to deter, prevent, pre-empt, protect, respond to, and recover from threats or acts of terrorism and CBRNE events while supporting and enhancing an all-hazards capability.

- ***A Dedicated Regional Emergency Coordination Center:*** Constructed with only county funds this \$30M facility provides a central location for coordinating disaster response issues for the region. In building this facility emphasis was put on survivability, redundancy, communications, flexibility, and interoperability.
- ***Utilizing Local Mass Media for Disaster Preparedness:*** Working with local media companies in both television, radio, bus ads, internet and print advertising to motivate individuals and families to become better prepared for disasters. These ads have run on major television affiliates and have leveraged additional media coverage via partnerships so that for every dollar invested there are three dollars of value provided by the media partners.
- ***Coordinating Real-time Homeland Security Information:*** This region was one of four national pilots as part of Homeland Security Information Network–Critical Infrastructure (HSIN-CI). Known locally as North West Warning, Alert & Response Network (NWWARN), it is a grassroots cooperative effort between federal, state, and local government and private partners whose goal is to maximize real-time sharing of information and provide immediate distribution of intelligence to those in the field www.nwwarn.gov
- ***Protecting Critical Infrastructure in King County:*** As one of the first regions nationally to begin the critical infrastructure protection (CIP) planning process, the King County region is actively working to protect critical infrastructure and not just cataloging the existence and location of assets. Regional funds have been committed to enhanced the protection of our electrical grid system.
- ***Understanding and Protecting Infrastructure:*** The “Blue Cascades” series of exercises are a collaborative initiative focusing on critical infrastructure linkages that could make the Pacific Northwest vulnerable to cascading impacts. Facilitated by the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER). These exercises are particularly effective in illuminating what is known and unknown about regional critical infrastructure interdependencies and creating action plans to address them.

The Results/Success of the Regional Approach: This process of orchestrating a regional approach to homeland security and all-hazard disaster preparedness has withstood challenges. It has been successful in eliminating the potential to politicize any grant- or policy-related decision-making, as well as eradicating the

ability to circumvent the necessary regional process. Most importantly, this regional strategic approach has helped to build trust between levels of government and other public/private organizations, a necessary compatibility for successfully executing regional homeland security goals.

More importantly it has shown that people and organizations can put aside their differences to protect their region from dangers that will impact us all in the future.

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King County was recognized in 2005 by the National Association of Counties for its "Regional Approach to Homeland Security."