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New EOC Course Shows Power of CHDS Networking

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The last time a FEMA-backed educational course for management of emergency operations centers (EOC) was completely re-written and updated, social media had yet to be invented and cell phones were a mere novelty.

Amid technological change advancing at a dizzying pace, John E. Pennington enlisted the assistance of Center for Homeland Defense and Security fellow students and staff to comprehensively update the program of study for the first time in decades. The result is a revamped, FEMA-approved curriculum that provides a blueprint for large and small communities to establish or enhance an emergency operations center.



"This is a completely new emergency operations management course that will be instituted nationwide," said Pennington, a student in the CHDS Executive Leaders Program (ELP). "The original need was identified through a host of first responders and emergency managers who realized that the techniques we used were really outdated. This really brings the course into the 21st century."

Pennington was aided by ELP classmates Lori Hodges and Adam Thiel, who shared their public safety insights as the document was crafted. Accompanying video was produced and edited at the Naval Postgraduate School Campus by the CHDS Educational Technology Department.

"CHDS was instrumental in getting this important course revision over the goal line," said Thiel, chief of the Alexandria (Va.) Fire Department.

Included in the revision, for example, are clearer definitions of two terms essential to an emergency manager's lexicon: situational awareness and common operating picture. Previous curricula failed to fully identify those terms and how emergency managers can use them to provide information to first responders on the scene as well as policy makers at the state and federal levels.

"I spoke of the emergency operations center environment and how locals work through the response phase into recovery," said Hodges, who is a regional field manager with the Colorado Division of Emergency Management. "It's not the role of an EOC to second guess Incident Command's decisions or try to make tactical decisions for the incident commander. Once objectives are set by Incident Command we figure out the consequence management piece. How will the incident or event affect the community and what will we need to do to support it?"

Another innovation addresses how emergency operations centers transition from response to recovery.

"Most people have assumed for years that EOCs cease operating after response," noted Pennington, director of the Snohomish County (Wash.) Department of Emergency Management. "They keep going, in some cases, for weeks. The transition from response to recovery is where the wheels come off the bus in a lot of communities."

Also, the curriculum addresses strategies for warning of disasters and disseminating other public information utilizing both traditional and social media.

"Social media was non-existent and therefore not relevant to EOCs 10 years ago," Pennington said. "That has

clearly changed, so we are introducing this curriculum and beginning the process of instruction for it nationally."

Pennington hopes that as technological developments such as social media advance, the EOC curriculum will be updated to keep pace.

"The last course lasted 20 years," he said. "It's our hope that this course will not last 20 years. We hope it is revised as technology and practices evolve."

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