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REP Executive Education focuses on Midwest plant off-site emergency preparedness

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The Center for Homeland Defense and Security burgeoning [Radiological Emergency Preparedness \(REP\) Executive Education Program](#) convened June 8-12 with a special focus on emergency preparedness policy and strategic issues for a nuclear power plant in the Midwest.

Since 2013 FEMA's Radiological Emergency Preparedness program has utilized the CHDS [Executive Leaders Program](#) (ELP) model with a focus on local, state and federal professionals who would work together during a crisis or attack involving nuclear power plants. The course is sponsored by the FEMA Technical Hazards Division.



“For this particular cohort we focused on one nuclear power plant and its emergency planning zone,” said Ellen Gordon, CHDS Associate Director of Executive Education Programs. “It is the first time this executive education program has focused on regional issues, hopefully when they go back to respective jurisdictions it will assist them in addressing some of the issues to provide for a stronger emergency preparedness program.”

The Quad Cities Plant, owned by Chicago-based Exelon, produces 1,824 megawatts of energy and sits along the Mississippi River in Cordova, Illinois. The composition of the 37-student cohort reflected the plant's location and governance with students from two FEMA regions, four counties, two states, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and company representatives.

“What I found most valuable was that everyone involved with a particular power plant were sitting at the table together and we were able to have frank open discussions,” said FEMA Region VII Administrator Beth Freeman.

The program employs curriculum and content based on the Center's Executive Leaders Program that utilizes guest speakers, interactive discussions and case studies to examine security issues. Topics include the basics of terrorism, crisis communications and emerging threats. As often happens, the week included speakers who have graduated CHDS programs.

Jaeson Jones, a graduate of the [Fusion Center Leaders](#) and ELP, discussed the threat and breadth of transnational criminal gangs. Similar to terrorism, what happens overseas or south of the border can affect varied facets of public safety at home.

“There are no local problems any longer,” said Jones, a captain with the Texas Department of Public Safety who works at the Texas Joint Crime Information Center. “The fight of the 21st century is combating transnational crime and dark networks. We either incorporate a holistic collaborative approach or we will fail.”

CHDS master's degree graduate Charley English, Deputy Director of the Georgia Emergency Management Agency, led a conversation on leadership and crisis communications. In communicating with the public during an emergency or catastrophe perception is sometimes as strong as or stronger than the facts on the ground. English referred to the 2014 winter storms in the Peach State. The first storm stranded motorists, ignited public outcry and catalyzed a wave of media furor, while a second storm that led to six deaths and put about 750,000 households out of power received far less press and citizen scrutiny.

“Perceptions are paramount.” English observed during an interview. “The words and the characterization of an event affect the perception. I think there are leadership and communication principles that cut across different events and different disciplines. “

The course’s expert subject matters and the opportunity to communicate with partners were beneficial pieces of the program, said Jacob Nicholson of the Iowa Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

“The program was expertly facilitated by the staff at NPS CHDS and they have compiled an outstanding collection of guest speakers and instructors,” Nicholson noted. “The materials presented during the program were both compelling and thought-provoking and set the framework for program attendees to think critically and work together to devise novel solutions to complex and continual challenges.”

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