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2013-08

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Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California

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CHDS Announces 2013-14 Distinguished Fellows

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An emergency management professional from Washington state and a retired New York City police detective are the 2013-14 Center for Homeland Defense and Security Distinguished Alumni Fellows.

Jody Woodcock, Deputy Director of Pierce County (Wash.) Emergency Management, and Edwin Welch, a retired New York City law enforcement officer, will spend a year in Washington, D.C., working at the Federal Emergency Management Agency National Preparedness Directorate. This year marks the seventh year of the CHDS Distinguished Fellows program.



The announcement was made by CHDS Director Glen Woodbury. The goal of the fellowships is to enable participants to share their local government expertise while gaining insights into the inner-workings of the upper echelon of FEMA management.

Welch and Woodcock are heading to the nation's Capitol after decades in their respective professions. For Woodcock, part of the appeal was stepping away from her comfort zone after 23 years working for county government.

"Just as the CHDS master's program forced me out of my operational comfort zone to look at issues from a policy perspective, my goal with the fellowship is to step outside my local government comfort zone and view policy from a federal level," she said. "I hope I can offer insight in the local perspective to those in the federal environment. What I don't want to do is let that comfort divert me from innovation. Taking time to get perspective and learn new things will benefit my agency back home."

Welch, who began the fellowship July 1, said the fellowship program is structured in way that will allow him to concentrate on his issues of professional interest.

"It has given me the opportunity to do 'deep dives' on important issues to inform my understanding of the role the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), Protection and National Preparedness (PNP), National Preparedness Directorate (NPD) and Office of Counterterrorism and Security Preparedness (OCSP) play in protecting the homeland and how these programs integrate with state and local preparedness programs," Welch said.

In addition to learning the broad workings of FEMA, the pair will further be able to explore issues stemming from their professions. Welch worked an array of jobs during a more than 30-year career with the NYPD, including an appointment as Chief of Environmental Police just after the 9/11 attacks. One of his goals is to maintain the momentum in homeland security that was gained in the immediate years after the attacks.

"Soon after 9/11 the good will faded and so did the financial resources, despite the fact there was no lessening in the propensity or the severity of the threats we were confronting," he said. "So we had to get much more knowledgeable, innovative, and flexible in a hurry. The bottom line is that we have to work smarter, not harder, to get things done."

With his assignment to OCSP he looks forward to applying his CHDS thesis, "Preventing School Shootings: A Public Health Approach to Gun Violence," a topic he knows first-hand from experience.

"I've thought about it a lot, but gun violence has always been an area of interest, and to couple that interest and

experience with the research I did at NPS was a really great opportunity for me to think more deeply about a wicked problem in the homeland security enterprise," he noted.

Likewise, Woodcock is eager to continue work on issues related to her CHDS thesis topic, "Leveraging Social Media to Engage the Public in Homeland Security."

"I'm interested in how we can better engage the public for situational awareness and to leverage their expertise and ability to solve problems," said Woodcock, who begins the fellowship October 1. "Often the answer to a community problem isn't a government one."

Additionally, Woodcock looks forward to exploring multiple issues such as continuing the advances made with funding from the Urban Area Security Initiative's Catastrophic Planning program as its moneys decrease. Also, as governments at all levels are facing demands for proficiency in preparedness and response, Woodcock would like to study how effectiveness of current training and exercise efforts.

Another area of her interest is the long-discussed prospect of establishing credentials and standards in the emergency management profession. Over the years grant guidance has referenced target and core capabilities, Woodcock noted, but there is little, if any, linkage to the well established Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP).

Both say their educations at the Center have prepared them for an inside-the-beltway role.

"The fellowship is just the next step to sharpen my skills and improve how we do business locally," Woodcock said. "Without CHDS I doubt I would have considered an opportunity like this – would have been too much of culture shock."

Added Welch: "CHDS changed my life in so many positive ways. It changed the way I think about problems and it changed the way I confront them. I'm grateful for the opportunities the fellowship has provided me to learn about FEMA and the federal system from some of the great people who work here."

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