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Criswell Leads FEMA IMAT East

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Criswell Leads FEMA IMAT East

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Please understand if Deanne Criswell keeps a suitcase packed nearby.

Since the end of December 2013, the Center for Homeland Defense and Security [master's degree](#) and [Executive Leaders Program](#) alumnae has held the job of Team Leader with the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Incident Management Assistance Team (IMAT) East.

It is a job that will at times require quick deployment to the next big disaster as she and her IMAT team must be ready to deploy on short notice.

"When we are on call, we have a two-hour response time to be in the office," Criswell said during a recent interview. "In those two hours I am working with headquarters to understand the scope of the situation. We hold an initial team meeting to give leader's intent, where we are going and the initial priorities. We have 12 hours to be at the impacted areas or to meet up with state officials."

IMAT's were established under the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006. Each FEMA region has a regional team leader in addition to two national IMAT teams, East and West. The teams are intended to quickly establish unified command, coordinate federal resources in support of the impacted state, as well as provide situational awareness to state and federal decision-makers.

The national IMAT teams have 32 dedicated members, compared with a member of the Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) cadre who are assigned to regions and assemble a team from those employees that are available, which form a team once they arrive at the affected area. During their downtime, the team analyzes and reviews past disasters and discusses policy on how to continually improve the various response capabilities FEMA brings to an incident.

"I get to lead a team and develop a group of individuals who have a passion for public service," Criswell said. "They are there truly for the mission of FEMA."

Criswell has an uncommon understanding of disaster planning and response, having worked at the local and federal levels. She began her career in Aurora, Colo., and has served as a FEMA Federal Coordinating Officer as well as, most recently, heading up the agency's FEMA Corps Program.

"It's actually been quite an evolution," she said. "I was a local emergency manager and understand the impacts of federal policy. As an FCO I was able to deploy to several types of disasters which helped build my awareness on how we can effectively help states recover."

Her recent stint overseeing FEMA Corps, a program that trains 18- to 24-year-olds in emergency response practice, enabled her to gain insight into operations at FEMA headquarters.

In addition, Criswell has taken advantage of education. She had already earned a Master's of Public Administration from the University of Colorado-Denver prior to enrolling in the CHDS ELP. And, after experiencing the ELP she



Criswell. Photo Courtesy of FEMA

enrolled in the CHDS master's Degree Program, where she wrote her thesis titled "Homeland Security: Developing State Level Doctrine to Guide Strategy Development."

The ELP course was beneficial in addressing the leadership aspect of her position.

"The ELP wasn't just leadership education, it was about bringing leaders together to move the field of homeland security forward," she noted. "That's the concept I am trying to do with my team."

The master's degree complemented the ELP by reinforcing critical and strategic thinking in homeland security planning.

As her team analyzes and crunches numbers, Criswell said her CHDS education helps her look for the relevance of information and statistics generated by her staff.

"I have elaborated on the Chris (Bellavita) piece of 'why do I care?'" she said. "I have lectured (my team) that I want the 'so what and the now what.' I got that directly from Chris."

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