

LTAP Can Be Player in Emergency Response

Emergency response to wild fires, tornadoes, floods and earthquakes that ravaged cities and counties from New Hampshire to Hawaii, highlight the important role that LTAP centers can play in preparing for and responding to disasters, panelists in yesterday's afternoon plenary session. Panel members, including municipal and county leaders, said one of the biggest roles LTAP can play is to offer training on how government workers can do their jobs during an emergency. "We need to consider what we can offer proactively at our meetings and conferences," noted John Habermann of the Indiana LTAP. "Some city always pulls ahead in terms of planning and preparation. We need to use their experience and leverage that with the contacts we have in our LTAP Programs."

Carl Quiram, director of public works for Goffstown, NH, said the list of contacts and the communications network maintained by the New Hampshire LTAP center proved critical in his city's response to devastating floods. Thanks to LTAP he was able to draw on significant resources through the state's mutual aid program.

Contacts also proved critical in pulling together a training session on fire fighting for equipment operators in the face of wide spread wild fires in Oklahoma. "It was a wildly successful class that saved millions and millions of dollars in property and probably saved some lives too," noted Mark Sharpton, County Commissioner from Logan County. Doug Wright from the Oklahoma LTAP said LTAP's long-standing relationships with trainers, facility managers and equipment managers allowed them to pull together the training in 10 days. More than 300 equipment operators attended. Part of the training included hands-on experience in preparing fire breaks on an 80-acre site using new equipment provided by vendors.

Jiro Sumada of the Department of Public Works for the county of Hawaii challenged LTAP to think beyond its typical course formats to better prepare municipal and county workers to deal with emergency situations. Based on his experiences following a 2006 earthquake, he suggested "peer exchange training for field workers by field workers." Sumada said that training should include information on how to be sensitive to the public's needs, training on how to communicate with the public, and background on the chain of command during emergency operations. Many of the panelists noted that managers need specialized training too. Sumada noted that many managers have an aversion to formal disaster training and have to be prompted to think beyond their day-to-day work. "Fire and police department personnel are typically the only local government staff trained to think about emergency operations as part of their every day jobs," he said.

