

Activation of the National Ambulance Contract Communications Exercise After Action Report

Executive Summary

The purpose of the communication/notification exercise was to provide the NASEMSO Executive Committee and identified EMS Directors, with the opportunity to test their procedure for when there is a potential that the National Ambulance Contract would be activated. The exercise was to be interactive and provide information to state EMS Directors of the potential for EMS resources to be deployed to a state whose EMS resources were overwhelmed.

In order to prepare participant members for the exercise, a review of the notification procedure was discussed during the monthly executive committee meeting. The “NASEMSO EMS Director after Hours Emergency Contact List” was disseminated to members for updates and a review of the objectives and purpose of the exercise was conducted for NASEMSO Executive committee and FEMA representative prior to the exercise. The exercise and planning team was comprised of the Domestic Preparedness (DP) Committee, Chair of the Domestic Preparedness committee and the program advisor. The DP Committee had identified the communications exercise as one of NASEMSO Strategic Goals to be accomplished for 2011.

Scenario:

The following was the scenario for the drill:

On July 18, 2011 at 10:00 am EST effecting New Jersey coastal area, it is a hot summer day. The wind is blowing at 40 mph from the Northeast with wind gusts up to 60 mph. The temperature is 98 degrees F and cloudy. The forecast calls for severe wind gusts and severe rain storms. There is a report that within the next 10 hours, starting in the Southern Atlantic Ocean, there will be violent winds, incredible waves, torrential rains and floods. The news is reporting that a hurricane will be hitting the Atlantic City area and Coast Line area as violent as Hurricane Hazel (1954) by 11 pm.

By 10 pm the wind gusts are reporting to be over 100 mph causing power outages, down electric wires and major building destruction. According to the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale, it is predicted that this hurricane will be classified as a Category 4.

On July 19 at 11:00 a.m., the major storm has dissipated leaving buildings, facilities including numerous casinos and roads in ruins. An EMAC response has been requested by New Jersey EMA. EMS resources to include ambulances, EMT's and paramedics have been working all night in the affected areas responding to 100's of EMS calls for assistance. There are reports of 1000's of missing people in the demolished casinos. Two Level 2 trauma centers have been hit hard with building infrastructure unstable and loss of power. Both CEO's have determined that their hospitals will need to be evacuated and EMS resources are needed. One hospital is in Monmouth County and the other one is in Atlantic City. New Jersey has identified their airport as the staging area for EMS.

Exercise Details:

Summary of Events:

At approximately 9:30 EST, FEMA notified NASEMSO's Executive Director that EMS resources had been requested and that the National Ambulance Contract was going to be activated in response to a hurricane that hit the Atlantic City, N.J. and coast line area. FEMA stated that the public health service is working closely with New Jersey to understand resource needs but there was, at this point, no specific identification of the numbers and types of EMS resources needed. A task order was anticipated to be completed by New Jersey requesting EMS resources. Following the notification by FEMA, NASEMSO's Executive Director sent out, via email and cell phone text, notification of a conference call, including time and number to call, of the potential of activation of the National Ambulance Contract. A confirmation was requested that members had received this notification.

At 1300 hours EDT a conference call was conducted with the following members present on the call:

FEMA representative Mark Snyder
NASEMSO Executive Director
President of NASEMSO
President-elect
D.P. Chair
D.P. Program Advisor
Staff from N.J's EMS office.

During the conference call FEMA informed the participants of what had occurred and that there was a strong potential that EMS resources were

going to be deployed to the disaster state via the national ambulance contract. There was a discussion on how the staging area for EMS resources was chosen but FEMA assured members that in a real event, a staging site would be a decision made in collaboration with the ESF 8 liaison on site. Subsequent to the conclusion of the conference call the NASESMO sent out a summary of the call to all Regional Representatives and asked that they notify their states on the “situation”. Each Regional Representative was then to report their notification results to NASEMSO Executive Director. By 1600 EST the exercise was concluded with all Regional Representative reporting making contact with all State EMS offices nationally..

Strengths of the exercise:

The following are the positive findings that were identified from the exercise:

- The procedure “Activation of the National Ambulance Contract” that was developed was a successful way to communicate information of a major incident where EMS resources may be deployed
- All identified members on the procedure participated in this exercise.
- All state EMS Offices were notified of an impending ambulance deployment and actively participated in the exercise
- FEMA shared critical information to the NASEMSO members of the exercise incident
- The communication exercise validated the need for this Activation of the National Ambulance Contract procedure

Lessons Learned/Areas of Improvement

- For any exercise, participants must remember to start and end each communication with “this is an exercise”
- NASESMO State EMS Directors notification contact list must be updated and all state directors should be encouraged to provide emergency contact information.
- Regional Representatives should just provide a summary of the number of states in their region that were notified vs. individual states status.
- Each Regional Representative should be added to the initial conference call with FEMA.
- AMR should not be included in the initial notification conference call
- Additional discussion needs to occur with FEMA and/or AMR and encourage them to provide a list of ambulance services that will be deployed in each state.

Next Steps:

- Notification Procedure should be revised based on findings.
- NASEMSO Director contact list should be sent out again to the EMS Directors and strongly encourage members to update their contact information
- Discussion of notifying state EMS offices of which providers in their state are being deployed by the National Ambulance contract should occur during the DP Committee meeting at NASEMSO Annual Meeting.