



### **D25 Managing Mass Fatality Incident Response: Concept of Operations and Field Operating Guides for an Integrated Regional Response to Mass Fatality Incidents**

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After this presentation, attendees will: (1) learn the essential components of a regionally integrated concept of operations for mass fatality incident response that reconciles variable asset availability associated with large and small jurisdictions; (2) gain a better understanding of the division of responsibilities at the incident site, morgue, and Family Assistance Center; (3) gain a better appreciation for Mass Fatality Incident (MFI) response strategies that may be applied to any type of disaster; and, (4) learn about the utility of field operating guides for providing real-time guidance to MFI responders.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing guidelines for a cross-jurisdictional, multidisciplinary, collaborative response to mass-fatality incident management.

The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) Region consists of the City of Houston and 13 surrounding counties. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) designated the H-GAC Region as one of seven high-risk urban areas in the United States for potential catastrophic incidents and subsequently awarded grant funding for regional catastrophic response planning. In late 2010, a mass fatality incident (MFI) planning team was assembled to develop response strategies for the H-GAC Region.

The MFI response planners developed and published a Mass Fatality Management Concept of Operation (CONOPS) for the 13 county H-GAC Region. The plan offers an integrated plan for unified response to catastrophic incidents producing mass fatalities that overwhelm local resources. This CONOPS complies with the Incident Command System and the National Incident Management System. It is designed to be flexible and scalable, and addresses four separate components of incident response: site management, morgue operations, victim identification, and Family Assistance Centers (FAC). It also recognizes that incident response starts and ends locally and external regional, state, and federal resources serve in support roles for the affected jurisdiction(s). The plan also leverages existing non-MFI related local and regional capabilities to fill MFI-related response gaps.

To develop this CONOPS, the team formed several advisory groups to assist in guiding the process. Eight specific groups were assembled: logistics, information technology, investigations, fatality management and identification, legal issues, family assistance, hazardous materials, and pan integration. Group participants (five to ten per group) represented a majority of the 13 counties within the region. Stakeholders were included from county and municipal government; federal, state, and jurisdictional agencies; private industry; non-profit organizations; and non-governmental agencies. The benefits achieved through use of advisory groups were: engaging stakeholders in the planning process, drawing from their expertise, and subsequently achieving stakeholder buy-in of the final product.

At the beginning of the project, a kickoff meeting was held for potential regional stakeholders and, after presenting a project overview, volunteers were solicited for membership to the various advisory groups. Then, specific subject matter expertise was sought out from other agencies, organizations, and jurisdictions to round out regional representation. Convening group meetings helped to identify specific concerns, develop integration strategies, and build working relationships across disciplines and the region. The advisory groups will be sustained to maintain MFI awareness in the region and to inform both future MFI responses and planning efforts.

Contents of the CONOPS included a hazard and vulnerabilities assessment, capabilities assessment, assumption statements, communications section, logistics section, various operational components, and appendices. Specific responsibilities are delineated in an appendix of Field Operating Guides (FOGs).

The FOGs are built from a comprehensive organization chart that reflects the various components necessary for an MFI response. The 52 individual FOGs are design-based from the NDMS DMORT response model. Each guide includes a mission statement; description of required knowledge, skills, and abilities; general responsibilities; and associated key tasks. The FOGs are divided into major divisions of each response element—site, morgue, victim identification, and FAC. Site management includes human remains recovery, personal effects, and human remains transport. Morgue operations are divided into admissions and processing, and forensics units. The Victim Identification Center contains sections for postmortem data collection and management, data analysis, and quality assurance. The Family Assistance Center consists of a forensic unit, family management unit, and health and human services unit.

The completed CONOPS is used to help guide the training and exercising of disaster response across the H-GAC Region. The planning initiative was funded by DHS and delivered end products are available for distribution upon request.

**Fatality Management, Concept of Operation, Field Operating Guides**