

## Multi-Agency Incident Response – Incident Safe Scenes



by Robert Laford

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*“Am I a target of violence?”*

*Emergency workers are no longer always “the good guys” out to help the public.*

The question, “Is the scene safe?” brings to mind different connotations depending on which branch of the emergency services you are involved with as a responder.

If, by training, you are a firefighter then those words may bring to mind thoughts like building collapse, hazardous materials response, flash-over or back draft potential and electrical hazards to name a few.

If you are an emergency medical technician those words may make you think of infectious disease, universal precautions and proper “sharps” disposal. In a law enforcement agency, safe scene thinking may involve adequate backup, domestic violence, traffic safety and the like.

Today’s world of incidents, however, has emergency responders converging on scenes such as school shootings in Jonesboro, Arkansas; Conyers, Georgia; Columbine High School, Littleton, Colorado or the financial district shootings in Atlanta.

The primary response thinking may no longer begin with how are responders going to mitigate the incident and care for the injured with available resources. Rather, those primary thoughts may need to change to include thinking such as, “Am I a target of violence?” And, “How are all branches of the emergency services going to work together to provide a safer scene for victims and responders?”

It need not be an explosion that kills hundreds of people that makes an emergency responder a target. Road rage,

domestic violence and violence in the workplace can precipitate a response from any emergency service. Emergency workers are no longer always “the good guys” out to help the public. Emergency workers can, and do, become injured when they intervene in a scene that is not safe because of the nature of the call and the people involved.

In many instances the three major emergency response agencies: police, fire and EMS, see themselves as a specialty answering a given need from the community. Every response agency, however, needs to begin building concrete alliances with the other emergency service organizations within their response district.

Each emergency responder needs to be trained to go beyond their own niche. Responders must have cross-vocational knowledge of the skill and ability that are necessary for the fire departments, police departments and EMS agencies to be successful in their mission.

Future training also has to bring the realization that the most successful operations are those where the multiple agencies within a given community or area realize they are a piece of a team – and function under a team philosophy. In order to create an “Incident Safe Scene,” emergency response administrators must form cooperative coalitions with each other to best handle response, size-up, action planning and tactical operations as a team member.

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## COMMUNITY-WIDE/ MULTI-AGENCY EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANNING

Although you cannot prepare for every incident that may occur in your community it is possible to begin planning for the response needed to help during most situations. If you have a plan, that plan can also help you respond to those unpredictable situations such as those that involve significant violence and a greater potential for responder injury.

Without any advanced planning for potential problems, needed resources and possible solutions, your emergency responders are going to respond in an ill-prepared manner. And the commu-

nity and the citizens you serve are going to be left without the service they need and expect.

Any planning process should be thought of in the context of a team event.

Agency response planning or community emergency preparedness planning is not an issue that should be left to one individual. There are many people throughout each community and each response agency that have vested interest in how well the community and the emergency response agencies are prepared to handle potential problems.

### ACTION PLANNING PROCESS

The Action Planning Process (APP)

has the following effect on multi-agency response situations.

- APP makes the best use of resources
- Reduces duplication of effort
- Increases effectiveness of the resources and scene management
- Enhances understanding between resources

### APP – BEST USE OF RESOURCES

If the community emergency service managers and administrators understand that there is a need for a certain number of resources ahead of time, then this planning will help spell out how these resources are going to be secured, staged and developed. By discussing these issues before the event, then the specifics and any jurisdictional problems should be worked out prior to the event and prior to any incident that requires deployment of the plan.

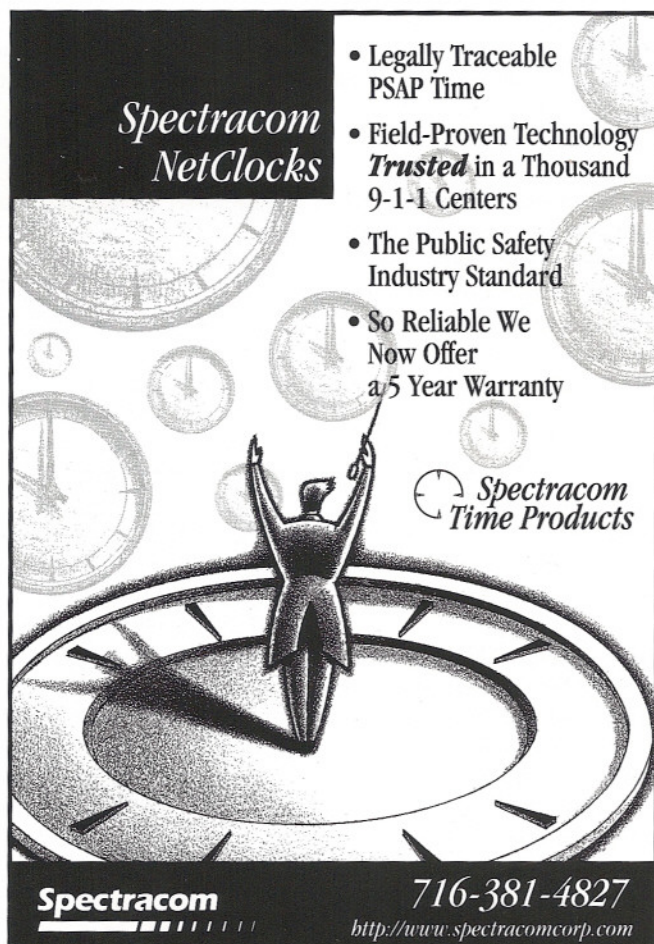
Collective knowledge of the given agencies within a community is very far reaching. Emergency managers should not underestimate the potential wealth of knowledge available in their local setting. They should work to utilize existing knowledge in the preparation of all the community's emergency responders.

### APP – REDUCES DUPLICATION OF EFFORT

Through planning there may arise a situation or situations where several jurisdictions could plan on mitigating a particular circumstance. Through the pre-planning effort it is spelled out how these jurisdictional duplications will be handled. Again, offering the best use of resources and the most efficient action plan.

### APP – INCREASES EFFECTIVENESS FOR THE RESOURCES AND SCENE MANAGEMENT

Through the pre-planning efforts the incident command structure is established for the event. Roles and responsibilities can then be known prior to the event.



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READER RESPONSE #105

In today's world mass casualty incidents often involve all aspects and levels of emergency response. Emergency response administrators cannot afford to go it alone – response agency by response agency.

To be effective, to provide the safest possible situation for their responders, and to provide the best possible service to the community, emergency administrators must work together in a partnership to create *Incident Safe Scenes*.

Working together necessitates use of community-wide emergency planning, interagency preparation, training, and a "team" approach to incident management that provides for an overall coordination of on scene activities.

This will offer a smoother operations aimed at mitigating the situation rather than quarreling over command and control boundaries.

#### APP – IMPROVES COMMUNICATIONS

In reality, every response agency enroute to an incident at a stadium, movie theater, convention center, or similar assembly area will probably be involved in communication directly with their own service. The pre-planning process and the incident command system recognizes this and provides for more comprehensive communications between agencies. However, the planning process needs to look at inter-agency communications needs and determine how the different agencies are going to communicate and work together.

The APP needs to develop policies and procedures for inter-agency communications. It may address this issue through the use of liaisons between the agencies, or it may address this through a unified command approach to the management of the incident. The planning process is where these issues should be addressed prior to any actual event.

#### APP – ENHANCES UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN RESOURCES

Many times there may appear to be struggles and conflicting objectives at emergency scenes because the players from varying agencies don't understand the others' needs and responsibilities. Through the planning process it is important to discuss the goals, objectives and needs of each organization that may arise during an event.

Each agency has specific objectives that need to be met and if each organization understands "Where the other is coming from," then there should be a more cooperative attitude. These types of issues also need to be worked out prior to any event. The Action Plan clarifies the inter-agency understandings and details are already spelled out.

#### ONGOING APP

The Action Planning Process is not a one-time, isolated event. This type of community and agency planning must be an ongoing process. Any planning document should be reviewed periodically and evaluated as conditions and events change.

Not only will an incident of a disaster cause the plan to be implemented, but the APP must include fine tuning after the plan is used in drills and actual events.

It is the combination of all the above in the planning processes that creates better managed response in multi-agency settings. It requires this type of planning and response to make the greatest use of an entire community's emergency response potential. In concert, all this results in the most *Incident Safe Scenes*.

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*The previous article is part of a comprehensive treatise on the subject by author Robert Laford. The complete document also covers "Multi Agency Training & Coordination" as well as "Unified Command Approach to Complex Incidents."*

*The entire document can be accessed on the [Responder](http://www.respondermagazine.com) website:  
[www.respondermagazine.com](http://www.respondermagazine.com)*