

NIMS and the transit manager

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by Dan Nelson
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An unfortunate fact of life in the Heartland is the threat of natural disasters. In just the past year, Kansas communities have endured paralyzing ice and winter storms, catastrophic tornadoes, and widespread flooding throughout portions of the state. While these types of events can't be avoided, their effects can be mitigated through proper preparation and preparedness. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), in conjunction with Department of Homeland Security, has developed programs and protocol to ensure that disaster recovery efforts are as efficient and effective as possible.

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) was developed by the Department of Homeland Security to more effectively coordinate disaster response. According to the NIMS Web site, (<http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/index.shtml>) the system's benefits include, "a unified approach to incident management; standard com-

mand and management structures; and emphasis on preparedness, mutual aid and resource management."

To be NIMS-compliant, all local agencies must complete a series of training sessions aimed at educating first-responders and other supporting personnel that might assist in disaster recovery efforts. While NIMS training should be considered vital to any agency's disaster preparedness plans in and of itself, completing the training seminars also fulfills the requirements needed to receive federal funding in the event a disaster occurs. This not only applies to communities that are directly impacted by a disaster, but also to agencies that assist other communities' recovery efforts.

Connie Shellhammer, director and manager of the Harper County Commission on Aging, said that NIMS training proved useful during her agency's role in recovery efforts following this summer's flooding in Southeast Kansas. In particular, Shellhammer said that NIMS training was effective in instructing her who to report to and what procedures to follow as soon as her assis-

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tance was requested. Her agency provided assistance to Harper, a town in northern Harper County, by transporting bedding and cots to Red Cross shelters using transit vehicles. Even though the scope of work performed for the Red Cross was limited to material transport, the experience provided a valuable opportunity to put NIMS training to work while helping out a neighboring community.

The NIMS training curriculum include a series of courses geared toward entry level first responders and disaster workers, including those who work for support agencies such as public transit providers. The two required courses for individuals in these roles are **ICS-100:**

Introduction to Incident Command System (ICS) and FEMA IS-700: NIMS: An Introduction. The objective of ICS-100 is to orient the responder to purpose of the ICS, describe the basic features of the ICS, and to delineate the roles of each member of the ICS. FEMA IS-700 explains NIMS components, concepts, and principles.

Both courses required for transit managers can be taken free of charge online as interactive Web-based classes. An individual can either complete the course requirements online, or alternatively, they may download the materials and complete them in a group or classroom setting.

To access these resources, go to <http://training.fema.gov/IS/NIMS.asp>. Once at this Web site, select the desired course from the menu in the middle of the page. From there you will be taken to the Web site for the selected course. On the right side of the page are two options for taking a Web-based class. Both courses take approximately three hours and con-

NIMS Training Audience	Required Training
<p><i>Entry-level first responders and disaster workers to include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EMS Personnel ● Firefighters ● Hospital staff ● Law Enforcement Personnel ● Public Works/Utility Personnel ● Skilled Support Personnel ● Other emergency management response, support, volunteer personnel at all levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ICS-100: Introduction to ICS ● FEMA IS-700: NIMS, An Introduction
<p><i>First-line supervisors to include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Single resource leaders ● Field supervisors ● Other emergency response/management personnel that require a higher level of ICS/NIMS training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ICS-100: Introduction to ICS ● ICS-200: Basic ICS ● FEMA IS-700: NIMS, An Introduction
<p><i>Mid-level, required:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mid-level management including strike team leaders ● Task force leaders ● Unit leaders ● Division/group supervisors ● Branch Directors <p><i>Mid-level, recommended:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emergency operations center staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ICS-100: Introduction to ICS ● ICS-200: Basic ICS ● ICS-300: Intermediate ICS ● FEMA IS-700: NIMS, An Introduction ● FEMA IS-800.A: National Response Plan (NRP), An Introduction
<p><i>Top-level, required:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Command and general staff ● Select department heads with multi-agency coordination system responsibilities ● Area commanders ● Emergency commanders <p><i>Recommended:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emergency operations center managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ICS-100: Introduction to ICS ● ICS-200: Basic ICS ● ICS-300: Intermediate ICS ● ICS-400: Advanced ICS ● FEMA IS-700: NIMS, An Introduction ● FEMA IS-800.A: National Response Plan (NRP), An Introduction

tain a series of lessons that should be completed in order. When you complete all the lessons, return to the class Web site for the course you

have just taken and select the “Take Final Exam” link. The Web site will provide guidance as to how to com-

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plete the final exam. When complete, you will receive an email indicating pass/fail confirmation. If you pass, you will receive a course completion certificate via email.

Shellhammer took both ICS-100 and FEMA IS-700 through a group session administered by the Harper County Homeland Security/EMS director, and took the certification test online. While she is the only employee at her agency to have taken these courses to date, she indicated that her transportation coordinator will likely attend classes to become certified.

Shellhammer indicated that while she feels her current level of NIMS training helped her effectively participate in last summer's flood recovery efforts, additional NIMS courses and other disaster preparedness training

will also allow her agency to better prepare for the unexpected.

In fact, FEMA offers a number of other NIMS-related courses, as well as other disaster-response classes, through its Emergency Management Institute. While most transit managers are only required to take ICS-100 and FEMA IS-700, managers in higher-level supervisory roles may be required to take more advanced NIMS courses, as indicated in the

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table on page 11. Even office employees in non-managerial positions can benefit from NIMS or other FEMA-administered training, and are welcome to do so. It never hurts to have as many disaster-response-trained individuals as possible.

Being online, NIMS training can

be completed at any time. However, be sure to check with your local jurisdiction to see if group face-to-face training sessions are available. NIMS compliance guidelines are usually updated every fiscal year, so it is important to check with your local EMS or Homeland Security director or the FEMA-NIMS Web site to ensure that you and your employees are up-to-date on NIMS training.

Dealing with disaster recovery is one of the most difficult situations a public official or transit manager will ever face. However, NIMS provides the training necessary

to effectively contribute to the recovery effort. It is imperative that all transit managers become NIMS-certified, not only to qualify for federal disaster relief funds, but more importantly, to gain valuable knowledge and expertise that can be applied in emergency situations. ▲