INTRODUCTION

Los Angeles County has the largest population and is the most complex county in the United States. Its area encompasses over 4,000 square miles, including mountains, deserts and coastline. Our county has 88 independent cities; 81 independent school districts; 13 community college districts; numerous special districts (such as water districts, mosquito abatement districts, sanitation districts, etc.); 137 named unincorporated areas; and ten million culturally diverse residents. During the 1990s, the County had the most federally-declared disasters of any jurisdiction in the United States.

Because of the many natural and manmade hazards we face, the County has had an aggressive emergency preparedness program for many years.

STANDARDIZED EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Los Angeles County and its cities use the California Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) to coordinate and respond to disasters. SEMS is based on the Incident Command System which was developed in California by Firescope in the early 1970s. SEMS provides common functional descriptions, common terminology, and a common organizational structure for the coordination of damage information and resource requests. Under SEMS, the County, also known as the Operational Area (OA) Coordinator, serves as the intermediate level of government that coordinates and communicates response needs between the cities within its geographic boundaries and the state. As the OA Coordinator, we also coordinate pre-event planning, training, exercises, and much more with our cities, community-based organizations, utilities, state agencies, and other OA partners.
SEMS is an effective system that has served us well for the past ten years. Last year, President George W. Bush directed the entire nation to adopt a new National Incident Management System (NIMS). Much of NIMS is based on California’s SEMS. NIMS implementation is an important part of our nation’s plan to coordinate disaster response operations. The County of Los Angeles has already developed a NIMS Implementation Plan and is moving swiftly to integrate NIMS and SEMS for an even more successful local, state, federal interface.

COUNTY OPERATIONAL AREA

Around 1989, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved the development and construction of a state-of-the-art County Emergency Operations Center (CEOC). We broke ground on the facility in 1992, and took occupancy in 1995. The CEOC is base-isolated to withstand an 8.3 earthquake. It has multiple redundant communications systems, fuel, water emergency generators, audio/video capabilities, and a host of other technical capabilities.

The CEOC is designed around the Incident Command System with planning rooms for Operations; Plans and Intel; Logistics; and Finance, Administration, and Recovery. The CEOC is equipped with an Emergency Management Information System that allows us to communicate directly with all 88 cities plus the Governor’s (state-level) Office of Emergency Services (OES); County departments; Red Cross chapters; school districts; and other agencies using internet web-based technology. We are able to get rapid reconnaissance reports from our cities, followed by more detailed damage information and resource requests. This ability to communicate with our cities allows us to quickly identify areas of damage and to receive resource requests so that County and mutual aid resources can be sent to the impacted areas.

PLANNING AND EXERCISES

On a day-to-day basis, we coordinate planning and exercises with our 88 cities by working with our Disaster Management Area Coordinators (DMACs). The County is divided into eight Disaster Management Areas and each DMAC works with a consortium of cities within their area to ensure that plans are coordinated with their cities and with the County OA. Our office also coordinates major countywide exercises every year. For the past several years we have concentrated on terrorist-driven scenarios. All 88 cities are invited to participate in each year exercise program and, over the years, we have engaged almost all our cities to one extent or another in EOC activations, tabletop exercises, and full-scale events. Our program
this year is based on an anthrax attack. It includes 36 tabletop exercises and will culminate in three CEOC functional exercises and a full-scale mass prophylaxis exercise.

COUNTY DEPARTMENTS

The County has 36 departments and 95,000 employees that provide a vast array of services to our county’s 10 million residents. Many of our departments provide countywide services such as health and public health, public social services, coroner, and mental health to all 10 million residents. In addition, the County Fire Department is responsible for providing fire protection to approximately 57 of our cities as well as the one million people in our unincorporated areas. The remaining cities have their own independent fire departments.

Our Sheriffs Department provides law enforcement protection to approximately 48 cities plus our unincorporated areas. The remaining cities have their own independent police departments. The County Sheriff and Fire Chief are also responsible for mutual aid for their respective disciplines. This means that, in addition to their day-to-day responsibilities, they provide regional mutual aid coordination and management for a number of other counties that are in proximity to Los Angeles County.

The County operates hospitals, health clinics, libraries, and numerous other public services, all of which must be ready to provide essential services following emergencies and disasters.

All County departments are required to have department emergency plans that describe how they will continue their non-deferrable services and emergency missions during disasters. All departments must also have building emergency plans to address the life/safety of occupants and visitors to County buildings.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Public education is an essential component of any emergency preparedness program. The County’s award-winning "Emergency Survival Program" was developed in 1989 and provides valuable preparedness information for a wide variety of hazards, including terrorism. It is available on our OA web site at www.lacoa.org and our ESP website at www.espfocus.org. Jurisdictions, disciplines, private and non-profit agencies are all encouraged to put their own logos on our materials. Our goal is to reach as many people as possible with preparedness information. We are best able to do that by making our materials accessible to everyone.
COORDINATION IS CRITICAL (to successful response)

If I were to pick one aspect of emergency preparedness that was the most critical it would be the coordination of plans before disasters and the coordination of response and recovery activities after disasters. The County works very closely with the City of Los Angeles (our largest city) on a regular basis, and we exchange staff in our respective EOCs during activations. We also exchange staff with our State OES partners. In addition, we bring the American Red Cross National Guard, utility companies, the Office of Education, and many other external agencies into our CEOC during emergencies to ensure that our response activities are well-coordinated. I firmly believe that by planning, training, and exercising together before disasters occur, we are far more capable of an effective, coordinated response during disasters.

The success of any venture whether it is in business or emergency management rests on successful relationships that have been forged in advance.

BUREAUCRACY HAS NO PLACE IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

It is essential that government respond quickly and logically during a disaster. I firmly believe that most governments' normal bureaucratic processes are unable to accommodate rapid effective response. That is not to say that government safeguards should be ignored. Rather government should, in advance, build into its response plans the ability to dispense with cumbersome and time-consuming processes in favor of expedited processes. Local governments should be able to rapidly integrate external resources (mutual aid) into their response plans. Local governments should empower their incident management teams to make decisions at the street level" during the early stages of emergency response. Local governments should know, "well in advance the types of resources that other levels of government may be able to provide how quickly they can provide the resources, and how best to make use of those mutual aid resources in response to the local need. Local governments should know how and when to suspend normal purchasing and contracting processes in favor of expedited processes. The safety and well-being of the public should not be dependent upon bureaucratic "red tape Politics also has no role in disaster response. During a disaster, no one benefits from territorial behavior. It is far better for all levels of government to communicate effectively and share common goals that will benefit "the greater good". There will be plenty of credit for all to share after a successful response to an emergency or disaster. Unfortunately, if politics are allowed to get in the way of a successful response, there will be plenty of post-disaster blame for all to share.
IN CONCLUSION

Although we have a strong emergency management program in our county, there is still work to be done. That is why the County has adopted the credo, “Los Angeles County, Prepared Today. . . Even More Prepared Tomorrow”.

The County advocates for strong cities, a strong County OA, a strong State emergency management organization, and a strong federal emergency management organization. I once saw a quote that I liked so much it is now hanging in my office. It says “None of us is as competent creative, or resourceful as all of us “.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to present information about the County of Los Angeles' emergency preparedness programs.
Los Angeles County Operational Area
Emergency Management
Coordination is the Key

- Size - 4,083 square miles
- Population - 10+ million
- Terrain & climate:
  - 9 feet below sea level to 10,080 feet.
  - Coastal plain, valleys, mountains, desert.
  - Flat land - 1,741 square miles.
  - Annual mean temperature - 65.3°F.
  - Annual average precipitation - 14.85 inches.
MANY LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL DISASTERS IN LA COUNTY

- Riots - April-May 1992
- Hail Storm (500 year storm) 2003
- LAX Air Crash – 1991
- Train Derailments – 2003, 2005

CHALLENGES OF OPERATIONAL AREA LEADERSHIP

- Most complex county in the nation
  - 88 cities
  - 137 named unincorporated areas
  - 10+ million population
  - Disaster capital of the nation in 1990s
- County Board of Supervisors authorized funding for a new EOC in 1989
STANDARDIZED EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (SEMS)

Mandated by state law to accomplish:
- Coordinate response at local, regional, state level
  - Facilitate information flow
  - Ensure rapid identification of needs
  - Employs California Master Mutual Aid Agreement
- 5 levels of emergency management activity
  - Field Response
  - Local
  - Operational Area (County)
  - Regional Coordination Center for State
  - State Coordination Center

ROLE OF THE COUNTY OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Established by County ordinance
- Coordinate emergency management planning, training, and response activities with local and state government
- Direct development & approval of emergency plans for all County departments
- Promote community awareness & self sufficiency
- Foster, conduct, & participate in emergency training programs
- Interact cooperatively with the private sector and non-profit organizations
- Maintain a functional County Emergency Operations Center
GOOD TECHNOLOGY IS ESSENTIAL

- State-of-the-art County Emergency Operations Center
- Multiple forms of communication
- Resource requests, tracking, and monitoring capability
- Geographic Information System overlays
EOC HISTORY

- Design started in June 1990.
- Construction started in April 1992.
- Computer system (Emergency Management Information System - EMIS) contract in the Fall of 1992 & system accepted in December 1996.

EOC BASIC DATA

- 33,036 square feet
- Daily staffing – 60
- Activation staffing for up to 99
- EOC includes:
  - Situation Room & SEMS staff planning rooms
  - Media/Visitors area
  - Conference rooms
  - 7 days supplies
EOC BASIC DATA

- EOC includes:
  - Multiple agencies plus utilities and the American Red Cross
  - Designed around the Incident Command System

- Base Isolated for an 8.3 quake

- State of the Art computer, communications & visual aids

THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

- Internet based system
- Relational database (Oracle)
- Messaging and reports
- Integrated GIS (ArcInfo/ArcView & Thomas Bros)
- Other office uses
- Local Area Network with 88 stations
- Wide Area Network with 29 stations on T1 circuits
- Cities access system through the Internet
**EMIS WAN AND INTERNET CONNECTIVITY**

- Red Cross
- CAO
- LASD (2)
- Fire
- DPW
- County EOC
- STATE
- ISD
- DHS
- DPSS
- Coroner
- 17 LASD Stations
- 87 Cities by Internet

**PLAN AND EXERCISE AS A MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNMENT TEAM**

- Plan in advance with partner agencies and other levels of government
- Develop exercises that include other levels of government plus private and community-based non-profit partners
- Don’t wait until the disaster strikes to meet your counterparts in other agencies
HELP THE PUBLIC BY GETTING THEM PREPARED

- Take an all-hazards approach to public education
- Make preparedness materials easy to understand and easy to access
- Enlist large employers, schools, corporations, and the media to help educate the public and employees
- A prepared public saves lives and minimizes economic loss

BUREACRACY HAS NO PLACE IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

- Government should respond quickly, with a high degree of flexibility
- Plan in advance on ways to expedite purchasing and contracting processes
- Empower people to make decisions at the lowest possible level
- Plan in advance how outside resources will be integrated into your response plans
POLITICS HAS NO ROLE IN DISASTER RESPONSE

- Decide in advance to collaborate and partner
- Put the talents and resources of others to good use – don’t wait
- Share the credit for successful operations
- *If you partner with others, there will be plenty of praise to go around*
- *If you don’t partner, there will be plenty of blame*

IT’S PEOPLE WHO DO THE WORK!
The Los Angeles County Operational Area

“Prepared today... even more prepared tomorrow”