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Secure Commonwealth Panel Meeting Minutes for September 7, 2006 Virginia Emergency Operations Center

The meeting was opened at 10:00 a.m. by the Chairman, Bob Crouch, who welcomed everyone to the meeting and the facility.

Secretary Hanley, a returning SCP member, swore in the new SCP members as the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

Opening Remarks

Chairman Crouch, noted that the Panel has a rich history already. Governor Warner created the first Secure Virginia Panel by Executive Order and it was later re-titled the Secure Commonwealth Panel. Members are governor's appointees and several members are returning with institutional knowledge of past accomplishments.

It was noted that since this was the first meeting of the newly re-established Panel, that a thank you should be extended to Delegate Sherwood, Senator Wampler and the Attorney General's Office for helping to obtain codification for OCP and the Panel.

Chairman Crouch also noted that in preparing for the new millennium in 2000 and new challenges since then, history shows catastrophes have always been with us and will remain. The new century brings a higher standard for government to meet and it is the mission of this panel is to pursue preparedness.

The Commonwealth Preparedness Working Group (CPWG) members were introduced, after which, the Secure Commonwealth Panel members introduced themselves as well.

Chairman Crouch noted that the meetings are open to the public and guests and that they would be conducted across the state to address regional issues as well as state level issues. He stated that follow-up on the Evacuation and Sheltering Task Force is on-going and a thank you was extended to those who attended the conference on disabilities. He commented that the next step was to bring the Panel members up to date on initiatives that are already in place and that each meeting will cover a few topics in this realm.

Pandemic Flu Activity Overview

Dr. Lisa Kaplowitz, VDH Director of Emergency Management and Preparedness, gave an overview and summary of Virginia's influenza planning efforts (see PowerPoint) covering the spring pandemic influenza conference, co-hosted by the US Secretary of Health and Human Services and Governor Kaine, as well as reviewing a multitude of regional and local efforts being conducted throughout the Commonwealth. Bob Mauskapf, also of VDH, then gave a summary of the Health Department October exercise "Fowl Play."

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Several questions were answered regarding the dispensing of the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS), the adequacy of hospital surge capacity, the efficiency of HRSA funding for regional distribution and the lack of ability to vaccinate against avian flu.

Chairman Crouch thanked the presenters and stated that preparedness is all-hazards oriented. He reviewed a history of specific challenges, such as Tim McVeigh, Al Qaeda and the success of the previous Panel in communications interoperability in Virginia. He discussed the national focus received by Virginia as it was the first state to develop a statewide communications interoperability strategic plan. DHS uses as Virginia's process as a model across the nation.

Interoperability Overview

Chris Essid, the Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator, gave an overview of interoperability efforts in Virginia. Chris stated that the successes over the past three years of effort were due to the support of the stakeholders. He reviewed the role of the Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator's Office and the governance structure for the effort. He then discussed the interoperability strategic plan, with specific mention of the "Common Language" initiative and the key support it has received from Colonel Flaherty of VSP. Chris discussed the need for a system of systems such as STARS to achieve true interoperability. He reviewed the Executive Order from Governor Kaine which formally established the Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee, an action which, when combined with the larger effort, caught the attention of national observers at Safecom. Chris reviewed the major achievements of the effort, including the annual statewide conference, funding allocations through the grant process and positive interaction with the localities. He then spoke to the goals for the future of interoperability in Virginia.

A question regarding funding from the General Assembly for replacement systems was asked and it was noted that funding was being sought through various means, to include the General Assembly.

Emergency Operations Center Overview

Harry Colestock, VDEM Director of Operations, gave an overview of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and the role it played during Hurricane Ernesto. He reviewed the various component pieces of the EOC and its close alignment with the fusion center in the need for a common operating picture. He discussed the technical challenges brought about by emergency situations and how Virginia was working to overcome them.

Chairman Crouch then introduced Steve Mondul, Deputy Assistant to the Governor for Commonwealth Preparedness.

Hurricane Evacuation and Sheltering Overview

Steve Mondul gave an overview of the Evacuation and Sheltering Task Force and its recent activities. He reviewed the changes since Katrina and highlights of the Task Force recommendations (see PowerPoint). Specifically he mentioned the Governor's role, the numbers of potential evacuees that must be considered in the Hampton Roads region and

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technical solutions that are already being implemented to assist in a potential evacuation of the region. He also addressed the role of the localities in this process, sheltering and the need for acute medical care capabilities. He addressed the short-term recommendations that are almost completely implemented as well as the longer-term objectives that should be accomplished by the next hurricane season.

A question was raised concerning the populations estimates used in the model and it was stated that a worst case scenario number was used that had been approved by subject matter experts in the field.

General Discussion

The Chairman then opened the floor for general discussion of the direction of Panel for the coming year. He reviewed a draft sub-panel structure, consisting of several new sub-panels in lieu of several older ones (see PowerPoint). He addressed the concern that the Panel act to identify and address gaps in Virginia's preparedness. He also reviewed the need for multi-discipline support and stronger partnership with the private sector. He discussed the establishment of the Regional Advisory Groups and requested the Panel members input into the process.

Several Panel members expressed support for the new sub-panel structure. It was agreed that OCP would fill each sub-panel with suggestions on various old and new issues to address. Technicalities will be worked out with OCP and the committee members as they arise and a copy of the strategic plan will be disseminated to the members for consideration.

A short discussion ensued regarding the grants process, changes, the role of the Commonwealth Preparedness Working Group, the Grants sub-committee, the new Grants Coordinator position and where Virginia stands for the coming year.

Suggestions were made for future discussion regarding the Chairman's views on preparedness and the role of various state agencies, such as the Guard, in the process.

The Office of Commonwealth Preparedness (OCP) staff members were then introduced and it was suggested that the next meeting be held in November.

The Chairman extended a thank you to all those in attendance and to the Virginia Department of Emergency Management and its staff for the availability of the Emergency Operations Center and the facility tour

The meeting was adjourned at 1:50 p.m.

*These minutes will remain in draft form until approved
at the next Secure Commonwealth Panel meeting.*