

CRISIS CONVERSATIONS

 HSAC 2018

 HOMELAND SECURITY ADVISORY COUNCIL

OUR VISION

“To be the indispensable bridge for public safety collaboration”

THE HOMELAND SECURITY ADVISORY COUNCIL

(HSAC) develops an active regional and national network of thought leaders in the private, public, and civic sectors that make the Los Angeles region better prepared, more secure, and more resilient in the face of all threats.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to engage, partner with, enhance capabilities of and support through innovative technologies, an active regional and national network of key stakeholders in the private, public, and civic sectors.

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SUMMARY

Over the past two years, HSAC has hosted a series of speaking engagements with leaders from the emergency and crisis management field. These industry ground-breakers are informing the national dialogue and the conversations have been dynamic and informative, producing valuable insights to the public safety and emergency management community of greater Los Angeles.

From operations managers to executives, HSAC continues to engage trailblazers across the private, public, and nonprofit sectors, and these “Crisis Conversations” are a unique opportunity to include varying perspectives in the national debate.





CRISIS CONVERSATIONS:

Q & A with Craig Fugate, Former FEMA Administrator

Mr. Craig Fugate, Former Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator and former Director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management, discusses the successes, challenges, and the future of crisis/emergency management in our nation. This is a continuation of an interview that HSAC President & CEO Jim Featherstone conducted in front of a live audience on November 3, 2017 at the University of Southern California.



JF: Can you review your famous “Seven Deadly Sins of Emergency Management?” And how did they come to be?

CF: The first time I put this list down on paper, I was preparing for a talk in Japan. They needed the materials in advance so that they could translate for the audience. This list is a combination of elements I have seen throughout my career, particularly when trying to address why we keep making the same mistakes. Why does it become lessons observed, and not lessons learned, after every disaster in the United States?

1. We plan for what we are capable of responding to.
2. We plan for our communities by placing the too-hard-to-do in an annex (elderly, disabled, children, and pets).
3. We exercise to success.
4. We think our emergency response system can scale up from emergency response to disaster response.
5. We build our emergency management team around government, leaving out volunteer organizations, the private sector, and the public.
6. We treat the public as a liability.
7. We price risk too low to change behavior; as a result, we continue to grow risk.

JF: How do you define resilience? What are the key factors to making our communities more resilient?

CF: Resiliency is the most malleable word in the world. It means whatever somebody needs to mean for their given situation. If I am talking about local government then I am asking: Is your tax base resilient? Without taxes you can't provide the essential services that government is required to provide. Moody has put this in context recently. They put out a press release for the Gulf Coast and Atlantic Coast communities that if they are not factoring in climate change into their resilience strategies it will affect their bond rating. And there is nothing that gets a local government's attention faster than talking about their bond rating.

Small businesses get decimated during disasters. But FEMA is not mandated to provide assistance to small businesses. About the best I could do was say, “hire local and buy local” to get local businesses back to work. It is not uncommon to have 50-70% of small businesses not survive a disaster.

On a national government level, how do you determine if a nation is resilient? After some conversations about this at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), we decided a nation's resilience is its ability to: (1) defend itself, (2) ensure enduring constitutional government, (3) ensure and protect its currency and (4) maintain the confidence of its people during a crisis.

JF: Is the current process for developing financial thresholds – in which it is based on damage in an impacted area — the best way to evaluate the need for a Presidential Declaration and/or federal assistance?

CF: As designed and implemented it works fairly well. People may not like the results but the process is predictable. The problem is when folks don't hit the thresholds. However, many of those at the General Accounting Office (GAO) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Inspector General (IG) think that the thresholds are too low and need to be adjusted higher to reflect the current financial realities.

In my opinion, we set the threshold so low that there is no real incentive for states to change their behavior. States and local governments are making decisions that grow risk but they are not assuming the final bill for that risk; that is the federal taxpayer. That is why the GAO and DHS IG want to double or triple the threshold. I suggested going to a deductible and crediting the states that are trying to mitigate risk. Take California — Governor Brown, without federal money, created his own Wildfire Mitigation Assessment Program and California gets no credit for it. Texas has wildfires and Texas doesn't have a mitigation program but they get the same assistance California does. Why don't we recognize states that are doing things to lower their long-term risk and lower their deductible?



JF: What trends are you seeing in relation to the public and its expectation of support from local, state and the federal government following a disaster?

CF: Most of the time, what I see is that the process is overwhelming and somewhat befuddling as to why someone gets help and why someone doesn't. The people who are insured for the risk and have taken the necessary steps are going to receive little federal assistance and that is the way the program is designed. None of FEMA's policies are designed to make you whole. The maximum amount provided to a household is about \$34,000 and the average payout is much lower. The award is based upon need and uninsured losses and this level of funding is not going to make you whole; it is just starting the process.

JF: How have the experiences from recent hurricanes, especially Hurricane Maria, indicated the need to address post-event access to clean drinking water beyond bottled water distributions?

"Amateur radio is 'back to the future.' A lot of emergency managers think amateur radio is a bunch of old guys talking geek stuff ...but when all else fails amateur radio will be one of the only things running."

CF: Bottled water is a luxury. As a solution, it is not the most cost effective, is not sustainable, and creates a big disposal problem. Maria showed us it is not practical to ship that much water. Bottled water is key in the initial response to a disaster but it makes more sense to produce clean water locally and have a distribution system to get it to the people in containers that can be refilled. The goal is never bottled water — the goal is safe drinking water in a sustainable manner. We have taken a short-term solution and made it into a long-term solution. Bottled water will buy you time but it should not be your long-term solution.

JF: What's the importance of ham radio emergency communication in recent disasters?

CF: Well, I am biased. My call sign is KK4INZ and I have spoken at the American Relay League's conference. Amateur radio is "back to the future." A lot of emergency managers think amateur radio is a bunch of old guys talking geek stuff and it is not modern or sexy and it didn't cost a lot of money...but when all else fails amateur radio will be one of the only things running. We need to diversify and multiply the number of people using radios to better represent the communities that will need the help.



In the Caribbean, after Irma and Maria, the only real communication that existed was radio. Power was out and cellphones couldn't do anything except receive and send calls. Had cell service gone down there would have been nothing except radio.

JF: What are your feelings about technology such as drones? Do you see them playing an instrumental role with emergency planning and response?

CF: I see a role for them but I think it is also a lot of hype. We have used civil air patrol for years; in California they have been spotters for fires. And now with the unmanned version it is great for hazmat where people can stay away from bad stuff and drones can fly in and get info and get out. I don't have to put any person at risk.

The hardest thing will be developing protocols and best practices and how do you really interpret the information you are getting. You may get the imagery from the drone, but you have to know what you are looking at. Just looking at damage is not always easy. Floods are hard to see from the air, and unless you can get an angle on how deep the water is you really don't know what you are dealing with. We will learn as we use them, what works and what doesn't, but right now a lot of what is being marketed has not yet been tested.

JF: What do you think we are least prepared for, and what are some ways we can address those gaps?

CF: We are least prepared for whatever is going to happen next. We make being prepared so complex and hard to do that people just go "if it happens, it happens." A seasonal threat like hurricanes is a bit better. But earthquakes don't have a season. They get out attention for a day or two and then we move on. We make it all or nothing, rather than just building preparedness into our daily routines and trying to be a bit better than we were the day before. One of the easiest things to do in order to prepare is to make a back-up communications plan for friends and family members. We know that getting a cell phone call is very hard after a disaster. Are all of your social media contacts in one place so that with a few key strokes you can get out a fast message saying you are ok? Or think about what you do really need? Flashlights, a first aid kit and a fire extinguisher in the kitchen. Most people have enough food in the pantry to exist for a few days. The most important thing is really to sit down with your family and talk through the realities of what will happen if you can't get back home. If you do that, you will be better prepared than most people out there.

Finally, I would say the public is a resource, not a liability. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster people are going to act; they are going to help each other. Once you and your family are safe, check on your neighbors. That will save more people than anything the government can do.



CRISIS CONVERSATIONS:

Q&A with Mark Sloan



Mark Sloan is the Homeland Security & Emergency Management Coordinator for Harris County, Texas, serving 4.7 million residents covering more than 1,700 square miles. Mr. Sloan shared with us his

lessons learned from the Hurricane Harvey response.

This is a continuation of an interview with HSAC President & CEO Jim Featherstone conducted in front of a select group of Southern California Emergency Managers on January 24, 2018

JF: How much of your pre-Harvey training, exercising, and planning proved to be a benefit during the Hurricane Harvey response and recovery?

MS: During training and exercises, we get to know our partners and get better understanding of their capabilities. This is critical and reaps huge rewards when we are dealing with catastrophic events or emergencies in general.

Typically exercises go up until the point of recovery and then stop. A lot of people don't follow through on what happens during that last deliverable mile of a disaster. So during our training and exercising, we don't always get to do what might be considered the harder stuff, which is recovery. The easy stuff is when we get to play with Big Red and Big Blue and turn it over to them to get us back to normal.

It was through the exercises we did in recovery that we realized we needed a full-

time recovery specialist on staff. Someone who focuses on coordination with our non-profits and community service groups that are engaged in the community on a regular basis. Despite having a disaster every nine months, it took years to get the concept approved. The problem was obtaining funding for the position.

JF: At what point during Harvey did you initiate a formal recovery component?

MS: We are talking recovery as soon as we are impacted. For our infrastructure, we do a SWEAT report — security, water, electricity accessibility, and telecommunications — and we figure out what is our current condition and how quickly we can get things back up and operational. So we are beginning the recovery immediately.

Recovery is not the same as rebuilding. Some emergency management professionals refer to it as the R+ Plan. Meaning, impact is zero hour then you

begin R+, response, restoration, re-entry and long-term recovery. The phases overlap and you have to plan for the next one. You have to be strategic and plan for tomorrow. Do not get stuck in today. Strategic planning helps set priorities for the post-disaster community that you are in charge of.

JF: How valuable were your “off the island” relationships in assisting with effective crisis management in Harris County?

MS: Our island is pretty big. That is, if people come to our island they are here for a purpose. Most of our partners, because of the large number of emergency declarations, understand what they bring to the table. Our private sector partnerships with Lowe’s, Target, Walmart, and Home Depot are critical. So are our relationships with school districts and non-profit partners and intergovernmental agencies. These play out to be very critical during catastrophic events. We do not want to meet each other for the first time during an event because there can be power struggles, political issues, etc. And you don’t have time for that. We need to come together and work together to accomplish the mission of getting back to a new state of normal as quickly as possible. We can’t be like two dogs who meet each other for the first time and sniff each other out to see who is in charge.

JF: What do you mean when you say “don’t fight the scenario?”

MS: How many exercises and trainings do we go to when we sit around the table and the facilitator says here is the scenario and you hear Fire or Law Enforcement

or Emergency Management say that is never going to happen. They go through the motion of getting through the exercise without taking it seriously. Never assume the crazy scenario in the exercise won’t happen, because it might. Non-realistic scenarios can lead to realizations about consequence management and that is where you learn about your own capabilities. A “Night of the Living Dead” zombie scenario can still lead to insights about your own capabilities if you take it seriously and are honest with yourself. So we like to say “don’t fight the scenario.” Embrace the scenario, test yourself and learn where you have gaps.

JF: You routinely send mid-career Emergency Managers to an “Emerging Leaders” program. What is the return on that investment ?

MS: The ROI goes back to partnerships. The Emerging Leaders program puts like-minded individuals together from different jurisdictions in the same place to exchange thoughts and ideas and business cards. They learn from each other and about each other. Denver is different from Miami, and San Diego is different from Seattle, but they can still learn from each other. The sharing of ideas and cooperation amongst the major metropolitan areas makes the United States better prepared as a whole.

JF: Do you use Geographic Information System (GIS) technology for crisis/event planning and management?

MS: Yes, I utilize GIS. I have two GIS people on staff. But do we use ESRI products to their full potential? Not yet. The problem across the country is that GIS is perceived

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Reggie Harrison, Director, Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Communications, City of Long Beach (Left), Jeff L. Reeb, Director, Office of Emergency Management, County of Los Angeles, Mark Sloan, Coordinator, Homeland Security & Emergency Management, Harris County, Aram Sahakian, General Manager, Emergency Management Department, City of Los Angeles

to be a map or a mapping system. GIS has evolved into a real time situational awareness tool that when understood in emergency management can benefit from much more than a single mapping system. We can do surveys and real time information sharing. There are tools and capabilities that are not being used to their full potential because we think of GIS in the wrong way. We have a long way to go to catch up with the capabilities that exist today. This is at the top of my priority list. It will be a county-wide initiative to bring all partners together — many hands make light work. Let's get the players around the table and start the education process.

JF: What trend, or trends, are you seeing in relationship to the public and its expectation of support from local, state and the federal government following a disaster?

MS: Speed — the speed of the recovery process. The public is expecting recovery to be faster than it is. It shouldn't take us as long as it does to get people back into housing and back on their feet. Insurance companies can move very quickly but federal response in some areas is slow. A lot of people in Texas can just pull up the boot straps and get it done. But for those

that can't, they need help. Efficiencies should be reviewed in some of the processes that take place. Not just FEMA but all the federal processes should be looked at. This has been discussed for decades and I think this will always be an issue. But can we become more efficient with technologies? Absolutely.

FEMA is now able to register people online and that is great. Other federal programs should look at how technology can be used to expedite the process. Look at the D-SNAP (Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) process. The fact that people have to go register in person, on site is insane. These are people that are already economically impacted, who may not have a vehicle and have to use public transportation to register for nutritional aid. We should be able to let people register online. That would reduce the lines and limit the stress put on those, many of whom have access and functional needs, who otherwise have to come and sit in the sun and wait for hours.

JF: What do you think we are least prepared for? What keeps you up at night?

MS: What keeps me up is a public health emergency — a national crisis in public health. I think that H1N1 was a warm up.

Ebola and the issues that arose highlighted the possibility of potential issues based on how our health community reacts to different types of viruses. I think that the reduction in funding to our public health departments across the country has reduced our ability to plan, respond and recover. But this is just me. Some people might say a Cat 5 hurricane, but I know what to do in that scenario. It would be a bad day, but I could do it. Flooding? I know what to do — been there, done that. I am just not sure that as a nation we are prepared as well as we should be for a pandemic-type issue.

JF: What is your biggest lesson learned or key take-away from Hurricane Harvey?

MS: The biggest take away for me was remembering the psychological impact to staff when dealing with a long, drawn out, life-threatening event. For example, watching someone drown on the screens in front of you or knowing that your family is in harm's way and is being rescued because you are at work doing your job. We had disaster psychologists on site to talk with staff and that was critical to our success. Our people were responding to 9-1-1 calls because 9-1-1 was overwhelmed. They were doing dispatching. Dispatchers get training, but our folks didn't have any training.

For me, remembering that people need support is crucial. We had crisis chaplains and then went to full-fledged psychologists on site. A lot of people don't talk about the disaster psychology portion of the job. We are supposed to be Type-A personalities and want to think we can handle it. Same as Big Red and Big Blue. "I'm good, I got it." Folks are unlikely to go back and talk to someone after an event because they don't want to rehash it. Having therapists on-site and easily accessible made a difference. They were utilized around the clock.



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