Mass Fatality Planning for Cities and Counties: Working Together to Prepare for the Worst

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Partners in Preparedness Conference

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Objectives

- Outline the planning process for preparing a county-wide mass fatality plan

- Understand the duties of cities, counties and the state in Mass Fatality planning response
Abbreviations and Terms

- **KCMEO** – King County Medical Examiners Office
- **MFI** – Mass Fatality Incident
- **MFM** – Mass Fatality Management
- **FAC** – Family Assistance Center
- **DMORT** – Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team
County Systems

- **Prosecuting Attorney / Coroner**
  - Adams, Asotin, Clallam, Columbia, Douglas, Ferry, Garfield, Jefferson, Kittitas*, Klickitat, Lincoln, Okanogan, Pacific, Pend Oreille, San Juan, Skamania, Wahkiakum,

- **Coroner**
  - Benton, Chelan, Cowlitz, Franklin, Grant, Grays Harbor, Island, Kitsap, Lewis, Mason, Skagit, Stevens, Thurston, Walla Walla, Whitman, Yakima

- **Medical Examiner**
  - Clark, King, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, Whatcom

*Switching to Coroner this year*
County Planning and Responsibilities
Planning Process in King County

- Convene a planning team
  - Forensic Anthropologist (Kathy Taylor), Healthcare Coalition Planners (Onora Lien, Rebecca Lis), Preparedness Planner (Ashley Kolberg)

- Consult reference information from other organizations
  - Santa Clara County toolkit, New York City plan, DMORT plan

- Create an initial outline and complete sections as procedures are worked out

- Consult other experts as needed
### Defining a Mass Fatality Incident in King County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>&lt;20 fatalities with intact remains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>20-100 fatalities with intact remains OR fewer fatalities that are fragmented and/or highly dispersed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>101-500 fatalities with intact remains OR fewer fatalities that are highly fragmented and/or highly dispersed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catastrophic</td>
<td>&gt;500 fatalities</td>
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Components of the King County MFM Plan (see handout)

- Concept of operations
- Over 70 attachments to make the plan operational
Plan Activation in King County

- Chief Medical Examiner, Director of PHSKC, Area Commander and other relevant parties will discuss need for the plan.

- If the plan is activated, some version of the FAC and a contact center will be needed.
Plan Activation in King County

- Considerations:
  - Magnitude
  - Type
  - Population (open vs. closed)
  - Condition of Remains
  - Rate of Recovery
  - Infrastructure Status
  - Contamination
  - Location of Incident
Death Investigation in King County

- **Initial Response**
  - Depending on the size of the incident, KCMEO staff will deploy to the scene to gain situational awareness and determine scale of incident and KCMEO needs.

- **Human Remains Recovery**
  - Death Investigators and other staff will deploy to the scene to begin gathering evidence, property, and documenting and transporting the human remains.

- **Potential Public Health Tasks:**
  - Locate staff available to serve on death investigation teams
  - Procure additional supplies for remains recovery (cameras, PPE, body bags)
Morgue and Disposition Operations in King County

- Morgue Operations
  - Autopsy
  - Identification

- Mass Fatality Information Systems

- Death Certificates and Disposition Permits
Morgue and Disposition Operations in King County

Potential Public Health Tasks:

- Locate space for off-site morgue
- Locate staff available to serve in each of the morgue roles
- Procure additional supplies (PPE, body bags, laundry service)
- Contact outside organizations (via county emergency management) for assistance with larger events
- Provide staff support for issuing large numbers of death certificates
- Work with the state to secure waivers for issuing incomplete death certificates
Contact center
- Taking calls from family members of suspected decedents or missing persons; providing information on FAC

JIC daily update
- Daily update of information press will want, such as number decedents to be identified.

Remains Reporting

Instructions for caring for the dead at home
- Content exists; public documents need to be prepared
Future Work: Unique Situations

- Increased numbers of deaths for sustained incidents (e.g. pandemic influenza)
- Incidents in large bodies of water or on board ships
- Incidents with large numbers of missing and presumed dead, bodies unrecoverable
City Planning
Guidance for Cities: Preparing for an MFI

- Ensure the CEMP includes a section on MFIs.
- Have a process in place to manage resource requests from your ME/Coroner (or the entity through which they work).
- Identify potential liaisons.
- Identify locations for FACs and morgues.
- Consider working with neighboring cities to identify potential temporary morgue sites.
Guidance for Cities: Preparing for an MFI (continued)

- Identify community members who could help.
- Identify community assets and vulnerabilities.
- Identify and address issues unique to your city.
- Plan for use of body bags or other material.
- Plan for management of calls before call center is open.
Guidance for Cities: Responding to an MFI

- Notify your ME/Coroner if an incident has taken place in your city.
- Activate city CEMP.
- If requested, send a liaison to department operations centers.
- Participate in interagency meetings and conference calls.
- Refer all media requests regarding fatalities to a single agreed-upon entity.
- Refer inquiries about missing or deceased persons to call center.
Guidance for Cities: Responding to an MFI (continued)

- Assist in providing scene security
- Assist in providing escorts for transport of remains from scene to morgue
- Procure additional supplies for remains recovery
- Ensure workers have access to services to manage stress and trauma associated with an MFI.
- Implement local mass fatality plan *if* directed to by ME/Coroner.
Guidance for Cities: Preparing for a Catastrophic MFI

- Cities may be asked to temporarily manage local fatalities in a catastrophic MFI.

- ME/Coroner must be notified of all fatalities and is likely to take jurisdiction.
Guidance for Cities: Preparing for a Catastrophic MFI in King County

- Potential delays in medical examiner or coroner retrieving fatalities:
  - Infrastructure down – physically unable to respond.
  - Large number of fatalities over a large geographic area – staff and surge staff not sufficient to manage MFI death investigations immediately.
  - Another area is experiencing an MFI – staff and surge staff not sufficient to manage non-MFI death investigations immediately.
What to do if ME/Coroner is not able to immediately send death investigators to your city:

- If feasible keep remains in place
- If remains must be moved, document as much as possible
Guidance for Cities: Responding to a Catastrophic MFI

- If remains must be moved, document as much as possible:
  - Identity (if known) and how verified
  - Location where decedent was found
  - Any belongings with decedents.
- Take pictures of remains before moving them.
- Forms, templates and plan guidelines are being finalized and will be shared for all to use.
State Planning
Local jurisdictions rely on the state to assist when resources are (or are expected to soon be) exhausted.

Examples of needs:
- Specialized staff
- Resources
- Space

Important note: Tell the state what you are missing and they will look to fill the need. They may not fill it with the specific group expected.
### Possible State Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Washington State Search and Rescue</th>
<th>Teams to search for victims and collect evidence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washington State Patrol</td>
<td>Missing and Unidentified Persons Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Guard</td>
<td>Fatality Search and Rescue Team Region X National Guard Fatality Search and Rescue Team CBRNE Enhanced Ready Force</td>
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Federal Planning
State relies on the federal government to assist when resources are (or are expected to soon be) exhausted.

Examples of needs:
- Specialized staff
- Resources
- Space

Important note: Cost can be an issue if the disaster is not declared.
# Possible Federal Resources

| Department of Homeland Security (DHS) | Emergency Response Teams  
Catastrophic Incident Coordination  
Stafford Act Funding |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Department of Health and Human Services | DMAT – Disaster Medical Assistance Team  
DMORT – Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team  
FMS – Federal Medical Stations  
US Public Service Corps |
| Department of Defense | Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (Dover, DE)  
US Army Central Identification Laboratory  
Mortuary Affairs Assistance |
| FBI / DOJ | Evidence Response Team Unit  
Disaster Squad  
Critical Incident Response Group  
Laboratory Services  
Hazardous Materials Response Unit  
Office for Victim Assistance |
## Possible Federal Resources (continued)

| **NTSB Office of Transportation Disaster Assistance** | Technical assistance for victim identification  
Family assistance coordination during legislated transportation incidents |
| **Department of Veterans Affairs** | Bury eligible veterans  
Provide advice on interment methods  
Medical record archives |
| **U.S. Coast Guard** | Expertise related to water incidents |
Revisiting Our Objectives

- Outline the planning process for preparing a county-wide mass fatality plan
- Understand the duties of cities, counties and the state in Mass Fatality planning response
Contact Information

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Questions ?