



## **Shawnee County Community Organizations Active in Disasters Meeting Minutes 7/14/11**

### **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The meeting was held at the American Red Cross building, 1221 SW 17<sup>th</sup> Street in Topeka, Kansas. The meeting was called to order by Steve Christenberry, the Chair of the SNCO-COAD at 1:00. He thanked everyone for coming, and had them introduce themselves to the group.

### **ATTENDANCE**

Those community partners attending were: Steve Christenberry – Family Service and Guidance Center and the SNCO-COAD Chair; Tom Baumgartner – United Way of the Greater Topeka and the SNCO-COAD Vice-Chair; Carolyn Buono - Animal Assisted Crisis Response and the SNCO-COAD Secretary; G. R. Laughlin – Community Resource Council; Greg Simms – American Red Cross; Terry Harbert – American Red Cross; Renee Aldrich – American Red Cross; Mike Foster – The Topeka Rescue Mission, Jeff Kaias – Topeka Rescue Mission; Jerry Parrish – Harvesters; John Treolo – Adventist Community Services; Denise Fasse – Let’s Help; Christine Wills – Valeo Behavioral Health Center; Rachel Vega-Retana – City of Topeka – HND; Jennifer Zellers – Shawnee County Health Agency and Tim Hall – The Salvation Army. Guests attending included: Mike Dorcey – Lyon County COAD and Rick Frevert – Lyon County Emergency Manager.

### **PROGRAM:**

#### **Background of the Lyon County COAD’s formation and participation in the Reading Tornado Response and Recovery –**

Rick Frevert, the Lyon Country Emergency Manager opened the presentation by sharing that he had appointed a steering committee to design a COAD for their size of community, one that would work best for them.

Mike Dorcey, the Chair of the Lyon County COAD, said because of his background which included a journalism degree and experience in the National Guard that he stepped up to rewrite documents their committee borrowed from the KC Metro COAD after a presentation by a representative of that more experienced group. They originally were part of a local group – Health Community Alliance (HCA) but broke off from them and formed their own core group. They started out as the Emporia COAD but changed over to the Lyon County COAD.

Prior to the Reading tornado they were loosely run but had written their Bylaws and were following them, and they had also drafted a Mobilization Plan and a plan for operating a Volunteer Reception Center (VRC). They also had arranged as part of the planning they had an agreement to use the Extension Office in Emporia as the location of their VRC. They had done a walk through, a table top exercise of a flood, for this plan and found some holes in it such as the need for a calling tree. They had plans to participate in an actual exercise but the Reading tornado happened first.

**Lessons Learned by Lyon County's Emergency Manager, the Lyon County COAD and the Kansas Capital Area Chapter of the American Red Cross in the Response to the Reading Tornado –**

Rick and Mike shared that they knew in disasters that unsolicited donations and spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers (SUVs) become a big problem and have to be managed. People want to help. They locked down Reading and tried to divert the volunteers to Emporia. Some got through so they set up a secondary staging area in a cemetery in Reading. They were not able to keep people from coming in through the back roads. But they needed to eliminate as much traffic as possible as Reading is small and their streets narrow. Their plan then was to bus volunteers from the VRC in Emporia into Reading, and that worked for the most part.

Some of lessons learned involved some inadequacies in their Mobilization Plan, especially in regard to access to the disaster site, due to lack of experience. Most of the problems and therefore things to take away from the experience had to do with lack of good communication.

The plan was to only let homeowners in the area early on, as well as their relatives and friends that they had given permission to. They soon learned that they needed a location for the permission process to take place. They also failed to tell those providing security to let the utility crews in so that power could be restored. They had established a curfew for those remaining in their homes, and violators were to be arrested after dark. They did have two arrests which will be going to court. The following day they let homeowners in to check on their pets and gather valuables. Those with official IDs, vehicles with red lights, and crews to haul out debris were let in. Unfortunately the Red Cross personnel were let in but then sent to the cemetery VRC and their activities were delay for several hours according to Renee and Terry from the local Red Cross Chapter. One lesson according to Mike was to call The Salvation Army and the American Red Cross in to help early on. The plan was not to accept any donations in Reading itself but have trucks with these items stopped and diverted to Emporia. Some trucks did get through and they allowed them to unload a school in Reading that had not experience much damage to it.

The COAD leadership and the Emergency Manager were aware that managing the donations and volunteers would be an issue and had attempted to plan for it. They dealt with the influx of both and remained flexible. Both Rick and Steve thought this secondary disaster within the disaster would have been worse and very overwhelming for the 10-12 square mile community if Joplin had not happened so soon, and diverted the attention that direction.

In their planning they assumed that they could use the volunteers to help in public property but learned that help for the public locations came mainly from Mutual Aid agreements from outside county officials. The SUVs would instead be utilized on private property. Home owners were not coming to the VRC to say what help they needed. Mark Stump of the United Way of the Plains, who coordinates a lot of VRC activities for Kansas Department of Emergency Management arrived with the request/work release forms. He instructed some volunteers on how the forms should be filled and the forms were taken to the private property locations and filled out there by those desiring help. This worked very well.

Rick and Mike both felt that the biggest area of lessons learned revolved around communication. They felt that that needed a strong public relations person who understood what the purpose and capabilities of each of the COAD agencies were, not just those represented by board members. They need prewritten press releases in regards to donations and volunteers, so that donations that they did need could be averted and money sent instead; food that could not be used because of health concerns, over preparation and storage, not deliver; and volunteers directed to the correct location. There needed to be an understanding with the media of the extreme importance of these announcements, the fact that they needed to be made often and the reality that they should take precedence over the nice little stories that they preferred to run. Greg Simms, the CEO of the local Red Cross Chapter added that the Red Cross has key messages in place to get out to the community as press releases. He was frustrated that he thought he had arranged for the media to make the needed announcements but they choose to spend their air time on interviews with victims. A good relationship with them seems to be of key importance. Unfortunately in Reading the media were bussed around but were unhappy that they couldn't get all the photo shots they wanted, due to concerns over safety and traffic control.

Rick said he learned that he needed to have briefings more often, two to three times a day, and that all the partner agencies of the COAD that were on the ground needed to be included in them. Those in the Incident Command structure were talking to each other but not to the agencies. Therefore there were gaps and overlaps in the coverage being provided in regards to feeding and the like. This is where the value of the COAD is, in addition to handling donations and managing volunteers. An example of a problem was in regards to water the Red Cross was having delivered from Wal-Mart - that according to Terry, they could not locate. Mike added that the COAD didn't know why the water was being delivered and didn't know what to do with it. Rick also shared that they had National Guard and K-DEM presence. But he found out that needed for overlap when the reinforcements arrived in the way of the State Emergency Response Teams and officials from neighboring counties. The locals retreated to get some rest too soon. There was a breakdown in communication at this point in regards to what was going on with the response effort and time was wasted.

Rick says we have a long ways to go to have a handle on the communication systems that are available. E-mails could not be used, and there was limited cell phone capabilities as well, even when extra tower were brought in. There were problems with trying to get the needed FCC authorizations too.

Mike said that they are now in the recovery phase, and he is heading the Long Term Recovery Committee. He pointed out that the COAD needs to be prepared for more than the response phase. Mike added that help is needed now, but everyone has left and their nickels have been spent. Perhaps if the needs had been realized and communicated in advance then the assistance could have been more organized and spread out to meet the demands that are currently facing the residents of Reading. He stressed that there is need for a strong logistics presence on the COAD to coordinate with the community during the recovery phase. The LTC is now dealing with a different type of VRC – the Victim Recovery Center.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

### **Planning and Training Committees:**

There was not sufficient time for the committee chairs to give a report at this time, but Tom did share that for the next few months, the two committees will meet together on the off month from the general meetings. The two committees had been doing a considerable amount over lap at this point, so it seemed more efficient to have them meet together.

It should be noted that the program presentation at this meeting was a direct result of the last Training Committee meeting.

The next meeting will be on the second Thursday of August, the 11<sup>th</sup>, at 1 pm at Harvesters, 215 SE Quincy.

### **Website Update:**

G. R. report the COAD link is now up and running on the Community Resource Council's website. It can be accessed at [crcnet.org](http://crcnet.org), under clients. So far it had the minutes from the last 3 meetings, the Bylaws, our current Resource Directory and links to some training possibilities.

### **Volunteers in Emergency and Disaster Response Handbook:**

Tom shared that he is working on the handbook which is adapted from other locations and brought some copies of the draft as it stands today to the meeting for those interested in reviewing it.

## **REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES**

A copy of the minutes from the 5/12/11 meeting had been e-mailed to those who had been in attendance and others who had been identified as interested parties a week prior to the meeting along with the meeting reminder. Copies were also made available to those in attendance at the current meeting. Steve asked if there were any other corrections or additions. There being no corrections, Tom moved that the minutes be approved. G. R. seconded the motion and it passed by acclamation.

**LOGO CHANGE:**

Carolyn reported that she got some information at the National VOAD Conference in May in regards to COADs not being able to use the VOAD symbol (a funnel) in their logos. It is possible with some extra wording to use the state logo and say a member of the Kansas VOAD. After discussing it via e-mail with Steve, it seems that our best option is to change the logo by replacing the funnel with something else. After a short discussion it seems that using an umbrella or a tornado funnel cloud would be best. Steve will explore this further with the graphics person at his agency, and see what our practical options would be.

**UPCOMING MEETING LOCATION AND DATE**

The next meeting will be in 2 months, is scheduled for September 8th and will be 2 hours in length. It will be held again at the Kansas Capital Area Chapter of the American Red Cross building, 1221 SW 17<sup>th</sup> St., Topeka, Kansas. Carolyn will send out a reminder, and the exact topic of the meeting with a draft of the minutes a week prior to the meeting. The exact topic for that meeting is yet to be determined but will be announced in advance, several times.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Steve then declared the meeting adjourned at 3:00 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carolyn Buono  
SNCO-COAD Secretary