



Southern Tier/Finger Lakes VOAD
Meeting Notes
April 23, 2014

Those present:

- Kathy Burns, Steuben County Office for Aging/RSVP
- Joel Robinson, American Red Cross
- Karen Miner, Chemung County
- Chris Durkin, Blackhawk EMG
- Judy Coleman, American Red Cross
- Bill Kennedy, Schuyler County EMO
- Shelbi DuBord, United Way of Broome County
- Joann Kowalski, Elmira College
- Lynda Lowin, Catholic Charities of Steuben
- Tim Marshall, Steuben County Emergency Management
- Matthew Burns, NYS Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Services (by phone)
- Carol Wood, Institute for Human Services

Carol opened the meeting and participants introduced themselves.

Karen Miner, Bill Kennedy and Tim Marshall gave an overview of each county's communication/information management processes, covering press releases, use of social media, relationships with the press/media and related information.

Chemung County's information is relayed primarily through the county website under Karen Miner's direction, and individuals may subscribe to the updates as well, which are delivered via email. (Subscribe here: <https://www.chemungcounty.com/index.asp?pageid=105&CatId=2>) The County Twitter account (@ChemungCounty) is used only for disaster-related information and three people are responsible for content and able to post information. They take a cautious approach in order to reduce liability. Karen also spoke of the good relationship between the news media and the county.

Steuben County does not have a designated chief information officer, some press releases are handled by county manager's office via the clerk of the legislature, and each department handles its own media. During EOC activation, the clerk is the point person, supported as necessary by others from the administrator's office. The County IT department provides support in terms of website and media posts. Not using Twitter at this time, and also taking cautious approach. Facebook is used to post course schedules and events (@SteubenCountyOES). A seminar held recently at Arnot Health focused on social media and Tim Marshall will make arrangements to offer the same session again, possibly at the training facility on Route 54. Public Health and RSVP also have FB pages. The County guidelines for social media apply to all pages created, but we did not go into further detail. Steuben is utilizing CodeRed alert system, which will go live in the near future.

Bill Kennedy spoke of a new tool they have subscribed to (ping4alerts!, will launch mid-May) which does not require subscription but may be accessed by downloading the app onto a smartphone. It is available at no cost on the iPhone app store or Google play and provides a mechanism for alerting people within a certain geographic area about traffic accidents, severe weather, power outages, etc. Schuyler County also has a FB page and Twitter feed (both @SchuylerEMO). Two people have access to post, and the National Weather Service posts are automatically fed to Twitter & FB. During an incident, notice is posted often that the social media are not



monitored so if there is a situation that needs attention, should call 911. They also monitor both feeds for “eyes in the field” type information. They also use NY Alert but have found that it’s difficult to get people subscribed.

Each county also uses traditional media, sending press releases as necessary.

Matt Burns provided some background on the value of establishing communications protocols during preparedness, and developing an understanding of capacity for handling information. Social media are instrumental in helping responders (and over longer term) understand what is going on and to monitor situations.

Carol Wood provided some background on how 2-1-1 may be used during a disaster. 2-1-1 HELPLINE and IHS also maintain Facebook and Twitter pages (@211helpline), primarily set up for use during a disaster but seasonal posts as well (tax season, summer food service, e.g.). Governor activated 2-1-1 during Hurricane Sandy and each of New York’s 211 call centers provided overflow call handling service to Hudson Valley & Long Island regions. 211 was referred to by FEMA for assistance registration, and the call centers also fed information into a work order system organized at the state level to deploy pre-credentialed volunteer groups. Because 211HL had also deployed during Tropical Storm Lee, in support of Susquehanna Region, we were able to implement some information handling processes already in place. Rumor control and accessing reliable information were high priorities in both situations.

Joel Robinson indicated that the Red Cross has created a position specifically responsible for monitoring social media around the clock. Only those trained in public affairs are authorized to speak with the media, within the Red Cross organization.

A brief discussion followed on the importance of distinguishing between a state of emergency declared by the governor’s office (usually in order to access certain disaster-related resources) and a local state of emergency, which may lead to confusion about travel bans or other specific directives. There is concern too when the county EMO’s learn of the governor’s declaration via social media if they have not been notified directly.

The three county representatives agreed to hold further discussion about strengthening back-up support and media relations (referring in particular to the tornado which impacted downtown Elmira knocking out news stations and the potential vulnerability for getting information to the public with heavy reliance on Elmira-based media).

Shelbi DuBord and Chris Durkin provided additional information about the disaster volunteer project funded through the regional volunteer center network, which is designed to integrate volunteer management into emergency management plans across our region and to assess capacity. Each regional volunteer center across the state is working on this project. Within Steuben County, the Office for Aging and RSVP would hold responsibility for volunteer management beyond what takes place through specific agencies (ServSteuben, Red Cross, e.g.). The ST/FL VOAD will not take responsibility for volunteer management but is in place in order to establish agency-level responsibilities in advance of a disaster.

The next few meetings will focus on formalizing the coalition’s operating guidelines, membership process and related tasks. Matt Burns offered to provide information and sample documents (will send to Carol W.), in particular relative to the distinction between VOAD operations and establishing a long-term recovery group. On a related note, the Red Cross is now following ICS, and additional training will be offered in the future. (Note: also available at FEMA - <http://www.fema.gov/training>.) Meeting to be scheduled for mid-late May.

Please send corrections or missing information to Carol.

Specific follow up: social media training similar to what was offered at Arnot Health, 3-county discussion about back-up support, work sessions on VOAD operations, review of county-level plans, and regional assessment process.

The next regular ST/FL VOAD meeting will be held in early April 2014, agenda items and program ideas to Carol Wood.

ST/FL VOAD materials & resources available at www.ihonet.org (Services, ST-FL VOAD).