

Recommendations

The five recommendations workshop participants put forward are presented below. The participants urged that, first and foremost, management principles for the coordination study should be jointly developed by a multi-sector group and that these principles, once established, should be used to guide the implementation of the additional recommendations. The second and third recommendations address the issue of knowledge gaps. Each participant had knowledge of their own organization, but recognized the lack of sufficient knowledge and opportunity to collectively identify processes and practices and to look for optimization and coordination opportunities across organizations. The fourth recommends an investment in process analysis of the current flow of information to determine performance criteria and areas for improvement. Finally, the participants recommended that DPS and others continue to seek support and funding for this exploration through state, regional and federal sources.

Recommendation # 1 Jointly establish guiding principles

Bring together the key actors from across the sectors to collaboratively establish guiding principles to steer continued work in this area. For example, the principle of “collect once – use many times,” if widely adopted, might result in more information sharing across organizations.

Recommendation # 2 Conduct current practice research

Current and best practice research regarding regional coordination of infrastructure incident response must be completed. The research should specifically focus on regional coordination of telecommunications incident response, as well as models for the governance and information sharing agreements of existing regional response efforts.

Recommendation # 3 Increase knowledge about current information resources, practices and capabilities

Regional coordination should not duplicate response capabilities in either the public or private sectors; this was very strongly communicated by stakeholders both before and during the workshop. However, it became evident throughout these discussions that the current knowledge of all parties did not provide a full picture of what currently exists. Without this knowledge it is impossible to assess if there are in fact duplicative efforts. Participants recommended that each of the primary stakeholders perform an assessment of their own organizations’ informational needs and resources, as well as their capability to share information across organizational boundaries, to determine what information they will be willing to share with the larger community.

Recommendation # 4 Invest in process improvements

A number of the participants stated before and during the workshop that any future efforts should provide value to all stakeholders in order for them to participate. One way to identify value was to look at the current flow of information to determine if there was in fact a better way for information to be shared. The concept of collect once – use multiple times became a common theme in these discussions. The information flow models need to be developed through collaborative group model building sessions to allow for shared understanding. Analysis of these models will inform decision making about process improvements, if needed. This effort will also provide the opportunity to increase the capability of telecommunications incident response by providing collaborators with additional knowledge that may not have been available before. Through this process it may be found that these improvements may or may not include regional coordination.

Recommendation # 5 Secure funding for continued exploration

A comprehensive study of the potential value of a regional coordination effort will require new resources. The cost of this effort will exist primarily in coordinating the serious and consistent involvement of the many stakeholders necessary to ensure representative and well-informed recommendations are produced. Funding sources, such as state and federal emergency and homeland security agencies, should be contacted for possible interest in funding this effort both as an investment in capability in the northeast region and as a model process for other regions throughout the States.

A number of conclusions emerged from the discussion regarding the current state of affairs and are put forward below as additional guidance in implementing the five recommendations.

Knowledge gaps exist - A key finding from the workshop is that, regardless of future investments in regional coordination, the gap in current knowledge about the roles and responsibilities of individual organizations in sub-national incidents needs to be addressed. In addition, the knowledge of who has what information at any point in time that could be brought to bear on incident response is unclear.

Roles and responsibilities are unclear – Participants were unclear about who is responsible at what point in

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time in the event of an incident. This lack of clarity about responsibility, or “who is in charge” at the regional level, echoes findings in the President’s National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee (NSTAC) Report to the President on the National Coordinating Center (May 10, 2006), which was used as background for this project.

Currently held information resources can be leveraged - Regional incident response requires leveraging currently held information resources in innovative and potentially more efficient ways, as well as the establishment of new business processes, communication flows, and a system of governance that satisfies the needs of all stakeholders.

Trust and collaboration are pivotal - Trust, collaboration, and timely cross-boundary information sharing play a pivotal role in this coordinated response. Trust is built when government partners and telecommunications providers are able to work collaboratively to restore service in a cost effective and efficient manner. This type of collaboration creates conditions that allow for continuity of government, which in turn builds citizen’s trust in government.

Quality and timely data - Receiving detailed information quickly becomes especially important in regional, multi-state, or multi-jurisdictional responses. Real-time data and cross-organizational information sharing are even more significant in the smaller, localized events where only one critical infrastructure is involved. A telecommunications incident response can be severely hindered if the response team lacks quality and timely data. Having knowledgeable workers as near to the “ground” as possible and having access to a “clearinghouse” for information were identified as being two important aspects of increasing response capability.

Contextual knowledge matters - Contextual knowledge of the region is imperative for decisions concerning resource distribution, response time estimates, and deployment of special equipment in response to an incident. Sharing information alone will not help refine the response; knowing what information was important within the context of where the incident occurred and what items are needed for restoration of service was viewed as being equally valuable as the sharing itself.

National Communications System (NCS) may provide a model - The NCS roles and responsibilities as documented through the NRP is one example of information sharing and disaster management model in the event of a national incident (further details about the NCS and other regional collaboration models are located in Appendix 3 Current Practice Review). The question remains, however, to what extent might a similar model be relevant when an incident was localized to either a specific geographic area or jurisdiction beneath the federal radar?
