CORE SERVICES IN ACTION: EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

"First responders need all the information they can get before they arrive at the scene. It would have been nice to have blueprints, personnel lists and data estimating blast effects and impacts to the buildings before rescue efforts began."

Jon Hansen
Former Assistant Chief
Oklahoma City Fire Department

Emergency Response Problem:

Emergency response to the Oklahoma City bombing required complex coordination by a variety of organizations from the state and the country. They simultaneously participated in activities, requiring substantial management of critical information. Although many aspects of the response operations were successful and efficient, many lessons were learned regarding the critical need to improve interagency information flows.

From the beginning, responders lacked important information needed to understand damage from the blast and where victims might be found. In addition, voice communications proved to be unreliable because of overload and chaos, particularly in the first few hours. Many supporting agencies received duplicate requests for resources while others could not be reached or were not contacted at all. The 9-1-1 center did not have a direct line to the Emergency Medical Services Agency (EMSA), so dispatchers could not transfer calls. This hindered EMSA's ability to understand the situation as it unfolded and its ability to manage available medical assets. In addition, hospitals were not incorporated into the command structure and were not kept informed about injuries because the command center did not have accurate contact information for appropriate hospital departments. According to the Police Department Final Report, this situation highlighted the need for electronic data links between emergency entities and the need to extend data access into the field through mobile data terminals. This would have allowed all command centers to communicate with relevant entities.[1]

Core Services Solution:

Core Services would have solved many of the communications problems experienced during the Oklahoma City incident. As common shared utilities, Core Services embrace the use of national data standards and encourage information exchange across jurisdictions and disciplines. By using the agency locator service, known as the Emergency Provider Access Directory (EPAD), users could have easily routed messages to the right agency destinations, without needing to know their contact information. Responders would have had the information they needed when they arrived at the scene, the 9-1-1 center could have communicated with EMSA, and the hospitals would have been kept informed about injuries, casualties and requests for resources.

Through the use of shared Core Services the goal of enabling every authorized emergency organization to be able to send a data message to the operating technology application or system of every other relevant organization can be achieved. Core Services do not replace competitive systems and applications; they support and enhance them. Emergency agencies and authorized private entities register in EPAD how and where they want data sent to them. They indicate their incident information preferences with corresponding geographic areas to facilitate the distribution of information. The identity management service ensures that only authorized entities may access the system and send information. By authenticating and authorizing entities and users, information can be disseminated quickly, efficiently, and in a trusted manner.

[1] Manzi, Catherine; Powers, Michael J.; Zetterlund, Kristina. "Information Flows in the Alfred P. Murrah Building Bombing: A Case Study." www.mipt.org/pdf/murrahcasestudy.pdf.

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