



Lucien Canton is a nationally recognized expert on strategic planning for crisis and disasters. A popular speaker and lecturer, he is the author of the best-selling *Emergency Management: Concepts and Strategies for Effective Programs* used as a textbook in many higher education courses.

Prior to starting his own company, Mr. Canton served as the Director of Emergency Services for San Francisco and as an Emergency Management Programs Specialist and Chief of the Hazard Mitigation Branch for FEMA Region IX.

Lucien G. Canton, CEM (LLC), is a management consulting firm specializing in helping managers lead better in crisis.

Lucien G. Canton, CEM (LLC)  
783 45<sup>th</sup> Ave  
San Francisco, CA 94121  
415.221.2562  
415.520.5218 FAX  
LCanton@LucienCanton.com  
www.LucienCanton.com

# Two Concepts to Improve Your Emergency Planning

## *Plans should fit a conceptual framework*

One of the most common problems I find with emergency plans is a confusion as to who the user is. This is apparent when you find some sections of a plan that provide broad conceptual information and policy while other areas of the same plan contain detailed procedures.

Part of the problem is that we have been conditioned to think that there should be only one all hazards plan, that we should use in emergency management. The simple fact is that an emergency management program consists of many plans and it is essential to have a framework that shows the interrelationship among those plans.

The development of a conceptual framework for emergency planning is not that difficult if one keeps in mind two basic concepts: the needs created by disasters and the various operational levels that come into play.

### **Disaster needs**

In numerous articles, Dr. Enrico Quarentelli has examined the needs created by a disaster and divided them into two categories:

1. Response generated needs are those requirements that remain essentially the same each disaster. For example, shelter operations will be relatively similar in every disaster. We may make adjustments based on the specific needs of the disaster but the responsibilities and processes will remain similar.
2. Agent generated needs are those requirements that will vary based on the type of disaster that has occurred. The issues involved in responding to a flood, for example, are significantly different from those in a major fire or earthquake.

This concept of response versus agent generated needs forms the basis of all hazards planning. Because response generated needs remain relatively constant, we can preplan the procedures that we will use to meet those needs. In the case of agent generated needs we can develop hazard specific plans that recognize these differences among disasters.

We can use this all hazards planning as the basis for developing the contingency plans and procedures necessary for tactical implementation.

## Operational levels

Another concept that comes into play in emergency planning is the concept of operational levels. In any emergency operation there are three levels:

1. The first level consists of those operations that provide services directly. This tactical level usually consists of first responder organizations and volunteers.
2. The next level is a coordination level that provides support to the tactical level and coordinates the activities of departments and agencies in providing support to the tactical level. This operational level is where we find the emergency operations center and department operation centers.
3. The third level consists of policymakers who are expected to look beyond the immediate needs of the disaster and consider the long-range impact of the disaster on the community. This level usually consists of high level policymakers.

## Building the framework

If we consider these two concepts carefully it is possible to construct a framework into which a variety of emergency plans and procedures can be fitted and all hazards planning begins to make sense.

All hazards planning revolves around the coordination of multiple agencies. It provides the policies and concepts that allow these

agencies to work with each other in a disaster. This suggests that our all hazards plans should be focused on the operational level and should specifically address response generated needs. This idea is bolstered by the fact that EOC operations tend to be similar from disaster to disaster.

First responders, on the other hand, bear the brunt of agent generated needs. This suggests that the focus of planning for this level should be on flexibility and contingency planning.

This is not to suggest that planning be limited in these areas but rather to understand how the pieces fit together. The hazard specific

appendices that form part of the all hazards plan may be considered a type of contingency plan, but they lack the level of detail required for tactical implementation.

For example, a hazard specific appendix for

floods might include floodplain information for the entire community and capture agreements with adjacent communities for mutual aid or the location of needed supplies. A contingency plan would have specific information about deployment to respond to a flood in a particular area such as a dam inundation zone.

The point of developing this conceptual framework is not to limit planning but to rather help in understanding at what level and for what purpose a particular plan or procedure is being written. This allows the plan to be more focused and more accessible to the user. 

