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Integrated Systems Approach to Special Events Planning

Coordination between agencies, organizations, and other stakeholders during a critical incident is paramount for the successful outcome of the incident. Nowhere is the scope of inter-agency, multi-stakeholder cooperation more evident than during the planning of a large-scale special event such as a political convention, global economic summit, or a sporting event such as a Super Bowl, or the Olympics. These large-scale special events typically take at least a year of planning, and encompass a broad array of participants from many fields and disciplines. The problems associated with integrating so many stakeholders in such a complex planning environment are self-evident, but what is often ignored are the learning opportunities that these large-scale special events provide. Large-scale special event planning provides an ideal setting for participants to share ideas and learn from each other. These large-scale events act as *focusing events* where inter-disciplinary knowledge is shared, ideas are exchanged, and innovations are hatched.

As stated earlier, the Incident Command System provides a modular organizational structure that is ideal for planning large-scale special events. Equally important is the use of a universal language that allows for the effective communication and exchange of ideas between disciplines and various agencies and organizations. ICS terminology is universally known, and avoids industry-specific jargon, or geographical colloquialisms that hinder communications between elements in crucial incidents and in pre-planned special events. ICS provides both the structure, and the process that are ideal for planning and managing complex incidents and events. However, the ICS alone is not sufficient for understanding and managing such complex systems. To fully grasp the complexity of large-scale special event planning, it is important that we conceive it as a three dimensional model, in which ICS is only one of the three dimensions.

Figure 5.3 illustrates the components of the three dimensional model for planning special events. The first, and most important, is the ICS structure, and the processes associated with it. While many critical incidents result in the activation of only some of the modular components of ICS, the planning of a large-scale special event will require the full scope of an ICS organizational structure.

The second component of the model can be simply stated as *before, during,* and *after*. FEMA uses a four-phase emergency management model that includes preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation (Lindsay, 2012). Nuñez (2009) argues that mitigation is a process which occurs before, during, and after a critical incident, and should not be considered a phase in itself. According to the Nuñez model (Figure 5.4), mitigation is an overarching process that encompasses the preparedness, response, and recovery phases. This is important because the planning of a large-scale special event is actually the planning of three different things: the *before*, the *during*, and the *after*.

The third component of the three dimensional model consists of three concentric circles denoting the *strategic*, *operational*, and *tactical* spheres of command (Figure 5.5). The middle ring of the circle pertains to the operational planning for the main event. Within this ring contains the command structure (ICS) for the localized event itself (i.e., the Super Bowl, the G-8 Summit, etc.). The bulk of the planning typically focuses on this sphere. Typically, command and control for the operational sphere during the event is located at a predetermined Incident Command Post (ICP).

The inner ring of the circle pertains to the tactical sphere. The tactical sphere comes into play when an unanticipated localized critical incident occurs during the special event. Such localized critical incidents include, but are not limited to situations such as active shooters, chemical spills, bombings, and localized weather disasters. Tactical response is basically a contingency within the broader operational plan. Command and control of the localized incident is typically located at an ad hoc Tactical Operations Command (TOC).

The strategic sphere pertains to the broader stakeholder environment surrounding the event area of operations. The strategic sphere is also a part of the overall plan and serves as a contingency in the event that an unanticipated incident cannot be locally contained, and in which the assistance of elements not assigned to the main operational sphere are needed. For example, a mass casualty incident during a Super Bowl would likely result in the activation of a multi-jurisdictional mass casualty plan involving the hospitals and resources of surrounding counties, states, and the federal government. The strategic command sphere is typically located at a pre-determined Emergency Operations Center (EOC), at a distance from the main area of operations. During large-scale special events, the EOC typically deploys at a Level 2 activation, and is ready to mobilize to a Level 1 activation if necessary (Miami-Dade, 2012).

Summary

As the three dimensional model illustrates, the planning for a large-scale special event is really several plans in one. It involves a full-fledged ICS structure. It involves planning for the before, during, and after. And it involves strategic, operational, and tactical planning. The complexity of the planning process can be better managed by understanding the three major dimensions of this model.

References

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Add Attached Figures to Article

Figure 5.3

Figure 5.4

Figure 5.5