Region 8 RRT Meeting April 4-5

Region 8’s Regional Response Team (RRT) met in Lakewood, CO., on April 4-5. Gina Cristiano, RRT Coordinator, welcomed the standing room only crowd to FEMA’s new National Preparedness Directorate. Participants were asked to send future agenda items to Gina for inclusion in the next RRT and to review the current list of members to correct contact information.

Opening remarks were given by RRT Chairs David Ostrander, R8 Director of Preparedness, Assessment and Response Program for the EPA, and Captain Ed Cubanski, US Coast Guard.

The reason we are here, Ostrander said, is to help support response and preparedness in the Region and to provide support to the response community. He outlined key foundations of the preparedness program including: relationship building (knowing the people you work with before the crisis); training and skill building; and practice and exercises.

Ostrander said adding value to a response is critical component to the program, whether that is in technical support, funds to do cleanups or oversight of large PRP responses. He emphasized communications was strategic to a successful program and that one of his goals is to increase communications across all state emergency response organizations.

Cubanski echoed Ostrander’s comments on communications, adding that emergency responders need to capture valuable lessons learned on paper so as to be able to apply those leanings when a crisis arises.

A roundtable discussion of current issues facing the RRT followed:

**Utah Division of Emergency Management**: Ty Bailey said the division has been preparing response plans for the State’s first nuclear power plant proposed for construction near the Green River. A new State planner will take the lead to update and coordinate hazmat project teams. The Great Utah ShakeOut, the largest earthquake drill in the State’s history, will take place April 17.

**Montana Department of Environmental Quality**: Bonnie Lovelace said they were preparing a “root cause analysis” examining the issues around the Silvertip oil spill response on the Yellowstone River in 2011 and flooding events near Billings.

**South Dakota Department of Environment & Natural Resources**: Kim McIntosh asked what role that the RRT would have in the Utah ShakeOut. The response was that the exercise would mainly involve the state of Utah, FEMA, and the Emergency Operations Center in Denver. Concern was expressed by South Dakota and other states about the impact that cuts in federal

funding might have on state hazmat programs. South Dakota has five full-fledged hazmat teams.

In response to the severe flooding in South Dakota in 2011, the State is preparing for potential flooding events on the Big Sioux and Missouri rivers. Some small communities have been moved as a result of last year’s flooding, and roads and utilities are still in the process of rebuilding. As a result of the gas and oil boom in North Dakota, South Dakota is experiencing an increase in truck traffic, including more trucking accidents and spills.

**Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry**: David Dorian said his agency was able to provide technical support during the Silvertip oil spill response and worked specific issues on exposures to benzene and naphthalene and relaying this information at public meetings.

**North Dakota Division of Emergency Services**: A total of 29,000 semi-trailers a day was recently counted on Highway 22 as a result of North Dakota’s oil boom. Ray DeBoer said in the past about 600 spills a year were reported and that number has now climbed to 1,400 due to the oil field activities. He also expressed concern about three deaths that occurred in the State due to fracking blowouts and the increase in criminal activity (murders, prostitution, etc.) as a result of the transient nature of the oil and gas workers.

Due to the historic flooding events of last year, rail tracks and roadways were raised and storm sewers moved. Although high water persists there are no reports of flooding this year, but wildfires have become a problem.

Chris Freyman, also of NDDES, said that North Dakota was anticipating an increased need for oil spill response and, as a result, a private company (Greiner) is coming to the State and giving response presentations.

**Utah Department of Public Safety**: Many changes have taken place, a lot of learning has occurred, and plans have been redone in gearing up for the Great Utah ShakeOut said Michael Riley. He said next month they are planning on conducting a commodities flow study that will entail stopping traffic in both directions from Nevada to central Utah for 24 hours. A recent Table Top Exercise in the Four Corners region of the Navajo Nation went extremely well, he said, along with other exercises involving the Ute Tribe. A public safety summit is planned May 8-9 at the Davis Conference Center in Salt Lake City.

**Department of Energy**: Dave Everett said his agency will be participating in the Air Force Academy graduation, Cheyenne Frontier Days and will be at the Minot Air Force Base in May.

**FEMA**: Mary Beth Vasco said her organization’s role is mainly during catastrophic responses and involves the delegation of mission assignments. This past year there were 72 such responses, a new record. FEMA will be heavily involved in the Great Utah ShaKeOut event.

**Department of Agriculture**: Bethany O’Brien said her department’s involvement in a catastrophic event mainly would entail ESF11 response issues. Primary technical issues would include decon and disposal—large animal disposal and small animal decontamination.

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**: John Wegryzn reported there are 38 active cases at present. He said that they had expected the Yellowstone River incident to be complete by this time, but that Fish and Wildlife had recently sequestered oil in debris piles, observed lesions in fish and noted other problems with turtles and migratory birds. He said they were hoping that no more spills would occur into critical habitat this spring, because nesting had already begun, weeks earlier than usual. He said his bureau had also become involved with the more recent Suncor spill in Denver.

Luke Chavez, EPA PAR exercise coordinator, said that the EPA had participated in 45 exercises this year including activities from the national level to local and tribal drills. State, local or tribal agencies are encouraged to contact Chavez for support.

Bradley Miller, EPA Preparedness Unit, said the issue brought up at the last RRT meeting in Salt Lake concerning hazmat safety on railroad sidings was moving slowly and that a report out should be expected by the next RRT meeting.

Martin McComb, EPA OSC, gave a presentation on **Using Data to Support Planning and Response Actions** including: readiness (using the right tools and training); publication (pushing the data out); acquisition (keeping various inputs consistent) and management (managing the information). The presentation highlighted recent developments and discussed how Region 8 will be managing data to support planning and response actions in the future.

A little more than a decade ago there was no standardization. Since Katrina in 2005 and Deepwater Horizon in 2010 there has been a major shift towards standardization and requests for public dissemination of data. The Data Team was formed in 2009 and, since their inception, the team has played a role in all major emergency responses.

Max Kiefer, Director **Western States Office of NIOSH**, spoke to the ERT on NIOSH’s role in Emergency Response and the dangers of Erionite, the most toxic naturally occurring mineral known. Kiefer said NIOSH provides a lot of support to the states concerning exposures in the oil and gas industry through health hazard evaluations and fatality investigations. Workers are the common denomination in any emergency, he said, and added that NIOSH’s goal is to keep people from getting hurt at work.

Kiefer talked about the dangers of **Erionite**, which until recently was not considered a hazard in the United States. The material is fibrous and respirable and forms brittle wool-like masses similar to asbestos. Erionite in this country was compared to that found in three villages in central Turkey where the material has been used for years to construct homes and roads. It was reported that up to 50% of deaths in those villages have been attributed to mesothelioma due to erionite exposure.

In the U.S., deposits are present in many Western states. EPA found erionite in gravel pits in Dunn County North Dakota, which was used recently to build more than 300 miles of road to support the oil and gas boom going on in that state. Although the exposure levels are much higher in Turkey, where many live surrounded by the material 24-hours a day, a study by the U.S. Geological Survey found that erionite fibers from Turkey and North Dakota were chemically and morphologically similar.

There are no regulatory or consensus standards or occupational exposure limits for airborne erionite fibers, Keifer said. Little is known about exposures currently experienced by US workers, however erionite fibers only pose a hazard if they are disturbed and become airborne.

Kerry Guy, R8 OSC, led a discussion on changing the scope of sub area contingency plans from discreet planning areas (the Green River Plan, the Colorado River Plan) to **geographic planning areas** based on watershed boundaries. Guy also plans to use some of the data management mapping tools described earlier by Martin McComb of the Data Team in developing sub area contingency planning. A consensus was reached to form an RRT work group to draft a geographic response plan, which will chaired by Kerry Guy and Joyel Dhieux. Robert Stewart, DOI, volunteered to serve in the group and said several DOI agencies should also be represented.

In support of the Guy’s efforts, Capt Cubanksi showed a mapping tool (ERMA) used by the US Coast Guard during the Deepwater Horizon spill. The Thursday morning example showed a map of Key West that was populated with needed data streams and layers for the Coast Guard to use while responding to the spill and was one segment of a larger project used to develop USCG strategies from Key West to Corpus Christi.

An **RCP Bioremediation Annex** update was given by Gina Cristiano. Recent events prompted the US Forest Service to ask the RRT to re-evaluate the annex. The document is cumbersome (50+ pages) and a proposal was made to eliminate the annex and combine it with chemical countermeasures, streamlining the process. Ms. Cristiano will chair a work group to re-evaluate/streamline the annex; Kurt Muenchow, US Forest Service, volunteered to serve along with Robert Stewart, DOI.

**The Anatomy of a Spill Call** was given by Ray Figueroa, R8 Preparedness Program and SEE employ, outlining how spill notifications come in to the National Response Center and then passed to Emergency Response. Ray DeBoer, North Dakota Division of Emergency Services, described North Dakota’s reporting requirements, who gets the notifications, how notifications are processed and what other state entities receive the reports.

Hot site presentations were given on the Eaton Sugar Beet Factory by Shun-Ping Chau, the Sand Creek Oil Seep by Curtis Kimbel and the Milwaukee Roundhouse Site by Joyce Ackerman and Craig Myers.

John Marshall, long-time member of EPA’s preparedness group and RRT member, was honored for his many years of service. Mr. Marshall worked for the Denver Fire Department before coming to EPA. During his time with EPA, he led the Front Range Regional HazMat Group and represented the agency at numerous other functions.

Marshall retires this June.