Planning Tool Helps Agencies Pool Disaster Resources

Planning Tool Helps Agencies Pool Disaster Resources

By understanding the hazards to their communities and the resources needed to respond, emergency managers can better prepare and plan for catastrophic events. An online planning tool is available that can help agencies improve preparedness and share resources across jurisdictions.

Developed through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate First Responders Group (FRG), the Mutual Aid Resource Planner (MARP) is an online collaboration emergency planning tool that helps emergency managers create shareable plans for hazard-based scenarios such as hurricanes, earthquakes and wildfires.

Ron Langhelm is the FRG program manager for MARP, which became available to agencies and communities in late 2016.

"Using MARP, agencies can identify a potential disaster or scenario to plan for, work through requirements, identify resources and resource shortfalls, and work with neighboring jurisdictions to fill those voids. If an agency does not have the resources, it can work to meet those requirements by collaborating with other jurisdictions," Langhelm says.

The National Information Sharing Consortium (https://www.nisconsortium.org) hosts the free MARP tool, which is an ArcGIS Online configurable template. ArcGIS is mapping and analytic software on a cloud-based platform. Users can create and share information such as maps and data.

Users can track the resources necessary to meet desired capability in the event of a disaster. As a geospatial-based online system, MARP can ease information sharing and collaboration. Participating communities can enter their resources into MARP.

Mutual Aid Resource Planner

While other mutual aid planning tools may use geospatial technology to develop a plan, the plan is frequently a paper document, Langhelm says. Not so with MARP.

"MARP uses geospatial technology and so is visual by nature. It is good for spurring additional discussion and collaboration because of the nature of the tool. It is more interactive and leads to better overall planning. At the end of the process you have better documentation, better discussions and a more solid plan," Langhelm says.

"You consider transportation corridors, and ingress and egress for an area," he adds. "For example, if there is an earthquake and resources are on the other side of a large river with four bridges, those resources may not be able to help out, so you look to identify resources in a different direction."

During the pilot phase of the project, emergency planners in Michigan and Ontario, Canada, used MARP to develop mutual aid resource sharing plans in a cross-border environment. In New Orleans, the program was tested as part of the DHS Flood Apex program.

To access MARP, see https://www.nisconsortium.org/. For more information, contact John Verrico of DHS Science and Technology Directorate Office of Media Relations at john.verrico@HQ.DHS.GOV.

Article photo: Background Image Shutterstock/Website Screenshot MARP

Main photo: FEMA/Jocelyn Augustino