



SR-530 Commission Prepared Remarks

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At 10:45 on March 22nd we learned that smaller events can be catastrophic, national level in response, derive international attention, and personally impactful.

Gratitude

I begin with deep and sincere gratitude to the hundreds of jurisdictions and agencies, to those that stayed endlessly engaged or supported from the periphery. The amount of effort and devotion to supporting this very tragic moment in time will never be able to be sufficiently repaid or conveyed from me, from my department, and certainly from those impacted by the events that unfolded.

Since its creation in 2006 Snohomish County has built a successful emergency management *system*... a system that has been tested through seven Presidential Disaster Declarations. SR-530 slide became the eighth and was the most complex incident I have faced in over 25 disaster declarations at the federal, state, or local level. Emergency management professionals from across the state and Pacific Northwest came to that system and helped it to successfully adapt to the requirements of this complex incident and by all accounts overcome some of the most significant challenges we will ever face.

The multiple Incident Management Teams (IMT), state and federal Task Forces, Search Dogs, and Incident Support Staff became instrumental to our tactical success. In short, we would have struggled mightily without that tactical support and expertise. Without the science that drove the searches, the number 43 (100% recovered victims) could never have been achieved... not even remotely.

Director Robert Ezelle and the staff of Washington State's Emergency Management Division exceeded my greatest expectations. With the director's leadership, EMD is in the process of successfully turning a mighty ship back into the wind for the betterment of all emergency management in Washington... and it was clearly demonstrated with support, compassion, resources, strategy, and perhaps most important a respect for 1) the nature of the tragedy and 2) the county and local entities that sought to manage it.

Adjutant General (TAG) Brett Dougherty deserves my personal, sincere gratitude for his leadership and support for any and all assets for our tasks. More important, however, he demonstrated leadership, essentially "cover", of me as an emergency management professional and of emergency management in

general when the media sought instant gratification in blame and the finger pointing. He not only defended me and our operations, but he personally moved out and drew fire in defense of our entire profession as it attempted to perform its primary mission... the protection and preservation of life, property, the environment, and the economy.

Our dedicated federal partners at FEMA and their support agencies not only brought to bear the support we needed as a state and local region, but they respectfully acknowledged their role and responsibilities in support of us and made a significant difference. We are blessed in Washington State and in particular in Snohomish County to have FEMA Region 10 as neighbors, partners, and colleagues. I was privileged to have been Region X's Director during a very challenging tenure, as FEMA sought to find its proper place in the post-911 world and adjust to mergers with the Department of Homeland Security. As national elements of the media sought to ask the inevitable question/blame game of "Where's FEMA?"... It was with distinct pride that I conveyed our strong ties with FEMA and that if the media chose to beat up them... then they would essentially beat up us as well. We are all (here in Washington State), to a large extent, FEMA and are eternally grateful for the mission, the devotion, and the service they provide.

My Snohomish County DEM staff is 14 strong and visionary beyond my wildest imagination... they continue to demonstrate above all else those things that matter most in time of crisis... *not* the foundation of emergency management, *not* the principles, *not* even the execution of our most relevant plans and procedures... they have exhibited leadership when leadership was required and adaptation was a necessity. They did not carry the single flag of emergency management; they parceled into visible fragments and planted it in places not often reserved for traditional emergency management. They demonstrated a battle tested readiness in leadership that defines the future of emergency management... and I am proud to be their director.

What Emergency Management Faced (and Why it is Important to Never Forget)

As a department full of experienced EM professionals, seven previous Stafford Act disasters in only seven years, I readily admit that our internal staff has struggled to accept their successes... because they are focused on their weaknesses during the event.

As their leader, it became incumbent upon me to get staff to "step back and grasp", if even for a brief moment, what we had all just endured. The magnitude of the event and the challenges that our nominal 14 member staff overcame. I believe that placing into context the disaster you have collectively faced has a way of breaking down any post-disaster silos that may exist (mitigation or recovery or reimbursement) and help individuals and teams to re-focus on organizational healing...and that was what we really needed the most.

And so, for our staff... that context occurred recently. As we reflected, we began to understand what challenges we faced... critical things I believe should be shared with all emergency management leaders and with this Commission:

- 1) Deadliest landslide (mudslide) in the history of the United States. Kelso, Washington had experienced the second largest in terms of impacted homes, but the SR 530 slide was deadly... a mass fatality incident that encapsulated every single Emergency Support Function (FULLY) from inception.

This incident was geographically small, geologically large, catastrophic by definition, and contained an intensity that we have never experienced before.

Our previous disasters, training, and experiences allow us to reflect and visually lay on top of the slide the fifteen federal Emergency Support Functions (ESFs) that we operate under at our local level and how dramatically they were each engaged:

- ESF-1 Transportation (SR 530)
- ESF-2 Communications (Frontier Communications... in the dark, Darrington without information)
- ESF-3 Public Works and Engineering (10 million cubic yards)
- ESF-4 Firefighting (IMT's and coordinated support of endless fire service individuals, teams, and departments)
- ESF-5 EM and Coordination (A robust and experienced EOC and system challenged to its limits)
- ESF-6 Mass Care and Housing (for survivors, for families arriving, for shelter, for counseling)
- ESF-7 Resources and Resource Support (What do you need, when do you need it?)
- ESF-8 Public Health and Medical (For those searching, those remaining, the environment impacted)... with three tribes impacted.
- ESF-9 Search and Rescue (The anchor of the incident)
- ESF-10 Hazardous Materials (ESA, salmon and its impact to our native culture)
- ESF-11 Agriculture and Natural Resources (Parks, farms, Tribes)
- ESF-12 Energy
- ESF-13 Law Enforcement (Including reunification of property, security of site)
- ESF-14 Long Term Recovery (Not just beginning to think about it, but launching it while still in response... transitioning to recovery when it is difficult to set aside the search)
- ESF-15 Public Information (Including the international angles, the social media, the priorities of your locals and weeklies, the construct of your JIS and JIC)
- ESF-20 Defense Support to Civilian Authorities (DCSA).

- 2) We were challenged by the physical relocation and unprecedented mission re-assignment of our core staff and its strategic leadership.
 - i. My directive to staff was very simple... if you see a vacuum in leadership, anywhere and within any realm, fill that vacuum until an attorney tells you to stop. And we did.
 - ii. We were challenged, however, with still maintaining continuity, a common operating picture, and operational stability for everyone in the EOC... with dramatically limited staff. We had to, in effect, lean heavily on the "system" we had built and hoped that it would continue with others not only filling the seats but in some cases leading the EOC.
 - iii. In the process, and as director, I was not present in my own EOC but rather deployed to an Incident Command Post in Arlington (IMT's, SCSO, and FEMA), staged for a week in Darrington (EOC and Recovery Focus), or attached in multiple forms to the Joint Information process that was rapidly developing. Each hour was indeed different, and I faced conflicting responsibilities and at times was simply unable to strategically lead the organization I had helped to build.
 - iv. My Deputy Director of 13 years (between FEMA Region 10 and Snohomish County DEM) officially retired one week in... and justifiably so.

- v. My newly appointed director, Jason Biermann, had been tasked with building a workable system for EM and the IMT in Darrington... virtually placing him out of the loop with the EOC and department for the entire first week... but for what became one of the most critical and effective decisions we made during the incident.
 - vi. Our newest employee, Heather Kelly, six weeks on the job (though well known to me and because of her strong leadership skills) was appointed EOC manager over and above some of our remaining staff... without the benefit of full organizational knowledge, without benefit of having had a chance to build the web of support and trust internally with our well oiled DEM machine and the relationships that drive the success of our department. And, in the following weeks, she found herself appointed to be the DEM liaison to our newly established Long Term Recovery Office (LTRO) and effectively disengage from the traditional EM world for a period of nine months... with outstanding results.
- 3) We faced establishing and maintaining ownership of our own incident... on the constant vigil for mission creep or unintentional federal ownership of the incident. We monitored it daily not only for the county, the community of Oso, the city of Arlington, and the Town of Darrington... but we also monitored it for the Tulalip Tribe, the Stillaguamish Tribe, and for the Sauk-Suiattle Tribe.
 - 4) We faced a relatively new leadership team at the county and in the aftermath of high profile political turmoil. John Lovick shined... he didn't want to be Rudy Giuliani... he wanted to find his appropriate footing and did just that.
 - 5) We faced a Mass Fatality Plan that existed but was nonetheless underutilized and not fully understood... the statutory roles and responsibilities needing real-time clarification (Family Assistance Centers versus Community Assistance Centers).
 - 6) We were challenged by logistics coordination with support from a host of individuals and agencies who each seemed to use a different resource ordering system.
 - 7) We faced the attention and scrutiny of the media and the onslaught of public information demands. CNN, Al Jazeera, POTUS, Social Media needs.
 - i. You can best understand the heightened media component of your incident when you feel your safest and most effective national interview is to Al Jazeera and not to traditional outlets including CNN and FOX News.
 - ii. We faced the dire need to control the tempo, tone and tenor of social media as much as was practicable.
 - 8) We faced the enormous challenge of the coordination of 2,000 first responders and support personnel. A significant percentage of who were strangers in our Snohomish County house. And although the proverbial business cards had already been exchanged and the valued relationships had clearly already been established, there were strangers (welcome strangers) nonetheless.
 - 9) I had tasked our internal Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Call Center (staffed by an experienced Medical Reserve Corps team) with reconciling the names and identities of the missing or unaccounted for... in essence transforming their traditional roles (Call center during floods or winter storms and on and on) into a very statutorily grey area for the purposes of getting a clearer picture and reconciling some of the pain that permeated the communities that were impacted.
 - 10) We faced the largest and most complex post-disaster mitigation effort in state history... not in terms of dollars state-wide, but in the nature and requirements of the mitigation... the purchasing of homes and or property that in many cases did not exist and had simple no means of practical resolution within that process. In simpler terms, not many remaining clear titles or understanding of exactly how to find that "willing seller" when (in many cases) they did not survive the incident.

Approximately \$13 million dollars of mitigation monies that required immediate and dedicated attention... beginning from the moment that words Stafford Act declaration were announced.

- 11) We faced some decisions that although perfectly logical and tactically sound, occurred parallel to the operational construct we (EM) had created... not with any malice or ill will, but rather by statutory collision and good will and intent. But decisions that had to be reconciled in operation and reimbursement.
- 12) We face(d) the most complex reimbursement process in the history of the state... with FEMA Public Assistance (PA) interpretation stretched to its limits... encompassing the literally hundreds of agencies, organizations, and individuals that simply stepped up when asked ... and even when not asked. We gladly and single handedly (as DEM) face the daily advocacy for reimbursement of hundreds of jurisdiction's generous support and resources. Our office has been going non-stop since March 22nd corralling the fiscal issues that included the expenditures into the millions of dollars each day.
- 13) We faced executing a Long Term Recovery Office (LTRO), conceptually designed over the previous two years in a Long Term Recovery Framework... but because of the nature of the incident (including the rapid risk of economic damage to the isolated Town of Darrington) having to execute it almost immediately and with the full force of our County economic team.

As a department, within that LTRO, we faced the displacement of a critical member of our DEM team... someone who we knew (by design) would be gone from our department and part of a policy-centric LTRO for upwards of one year. Then... letting go of that incident for the purposes of merely letting it succeed.

14) **Personal Emotional Impacts**

Not one person is immune to human emotion. Our staff and many of you were/are validating that fact.... I was personally impacted and remain so today. Those of you that I have known for going on two decades were impacted... and that human emotion takes its inevitable toll on those of us who offer the façade of the impenetrable and consummate professional. When staff did go home and closed the doors behind them to the world that was their family, those emotions rose to the surface, quickly and undeniably, and we faced a professional tragedy with deeply personal impacts.

After examining, then, only a handful of the challenges we faced... many of which we overcame... how do we address the future of emergency management and emergency management coordination in Washington State? How do we best ensure that we repeat the successes, tweak the shortcomings, and outright kill the failures?

Emergency Management Next Steps.

Six achievable and 2) matter most to the emergency management.

1) **Statewide System of Emergency Management**

Foremost, we must examine who we are and ask the fundamental question, "Can we build a system of emergency management for the 21st century"? I think the short answer is yes.... we have the leadership and will at the Emergency Management Division and the Office of the Governor to accomplish that goal. The system we have had is built on aging principles and at times archaic statutes... in need of revision and overhaul. In this area alone I see great leadership from WSEMA, from the State, and to an extent with a buy-in of sorts from the federal government.

We must clarify for ourselves and for those we serve (the expectations) the critical differences between Incident Stabilization and Disaster Stabilization. In reality, the slide itself... the tactical operations and rescues... would naturally be addressed and to an extent resolved. It was a matter of quick and as affective as possible Incident Stabilization. But we, emergency management, were faced with the first week task of Disaster Stabilization. A wholly different animal and almost impossible task... simply reach back to the fullness of the incident and the Emergency Support Functions previously referenced... the degree to which they were involved. Our jobs in Emergency Management was not Incident Stabilization... it was to somehow grasp what happened, corral it as best as possible, and stabilize the enormity of the disaster.

We must find a way to educate and inform the public, the media, the elected officials, and those survivors or relatives of survivors of the difference in order to 1) work unimpeded and 2) face lessened scrutiny as we perform those duties.

Finally, within that “system” we must include in each jurisdiction a recovery framework not dissimilar from that the National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) offers us... one that is executable at a moment’s notice. But most important, as Emergency Management leaders, we must train ourselves to be able to effectively let it go... like a child going on a bus for the first day of kindergarten. Letting go of a disaster that you personally own and have investment in is difficult and requires education, training, and exercise.... and although we theoretically preach Recovery moving away from traditional emergency management, we must prepare ourselves and implement a solid plan for the transition to recovery, and at all levels of government in order to minimize chaos and the personal and emotional attachments to the disaster for those of us that lead it during response.

2) Clarity in Statutory Responsibility

There must be clarity in statutory responsibility... not merely clarity for the local jurisdictions in their respective relationships to the state or tribes, but we must have undeniable clarity in the governing authorities of complex incidents... more than routine floods or winter events. More than during an earthquake. We must reconcile any existing conflicts between roles and responsibilities within our internal jurisdictions and mostly at the county level... not necessarily who is in charge, rather how and in what lane they are in charge and how does emergency management create an effective coordination umbrella for those aforementioned under RCW 38.52.

3) Regionalization

The concepts of Emergency Management Regionalization must in some way be developed and executed. Without a thorough examination of regionalization... especially given the recent experiences of SR 530... I believe we face tremendous odds in overcoming any statewide or regional catastrophic incident.

The basic precept of Span of Control within the National Incident Management System mandates that we must re-think how we administer EM within our statewide system... and if SR 530 was as intense as we have all come to understand it, then try to imagine how it will unfold within a Cascadia Subduction Zone event or even the rupture of a multi-county interior seismic fault line.

It is, I believe, in our best interest to build our capabilities regionally, in some form or fashion... to practice what we effectively preach... that disasters have no boundaries or borders.

The SR 530 events give us a window of opportunity to boldly state that part of the answer lies in regional teamwork that is more than theoretical or within the planning element. It should be at a point operational and built upon trust, designed and pushed from the state downward and across.

If SR 530 showed us that a localized and intense catastrophic incident can stretch almost every response resource and asset in the state, then how can we expect to succeed when we are at a point all impacted simultaneously? Regionalization becomes critical... building capabilities and then leaning on each other within regional structures similar to the Homeland Security Regional construct that already exists... but lacks focus and contains no operational framework within it.

Development and execution of strategically focused Emergency Management Assistance Teams (EMAT): I have a strengthening belief that similar to Incident Management Teams (IMT) that deploy in a more tactical manner to the field... we should develop full blown Emergency Management Assistance Teams (Strategic) that can deploy to other EOCs around the state as a team... trained and exercised in a statewide system and trusted by the receiving entity or jurisdiction. In short, helping any jurisdiction to have a readily available and mobile EM department at their disposal for a critical period of time.

Within that EMAT should exist one liaison whose sole purpose is the development of an internal EOC "Synthesis Function" ... not a Policy Group, which focuses more on decisions rising above the domain of an EOC... rather a strategically focused, single Think Tank inside an EOC. A small group of individuals dedicated to the critical thinking required to address the overarching strategic needs of a large scale response and recovery incident. Emergency management leaders and elected officials, as well intended as they may be, will in those early stages be focused on reactionary decisions, media intensity, and the immediate needs of the community. Finding time to critically and strategically think must be ingrained into the process in a different manner than it currently is... we must embrace that we will need critical thinkers to assist us in our mission and that it will make a difference as the proverbial dominoes begin to fall.

4) Re-examination of Funding and Funding Strategy

This is an age old issue for emergency management, but our approach must change to funding. We simply cannot ask with hand-out within the usual spheres and become reconciled to being pushed to the back of the public safety line in Olympia.

I contend that in as much as emergency management exists within the realm of public safety, so too is it a social science... perhaps even more so.

Emergency management is relevant to our diverse cultures and our societal fabric... and it often times can help prevent cultural collapse following disasters... our profession is becoming central to that discussion. So as we evolve in discipline, we must also evolve in our funding streams.

SR 530 was more to us more than just a coordinated approach to response and recovery... it showed to us the microcosm of cultures that exist in a 50 mile stretch of one highway and include 3 tribes, and salmon, and timber, and farming, and theatre and arts, and aviation, and history that no one ever imagined... but must be preserved and protected (before and after disaster strikes).

5) IMT-EOC interface

By all accounts, that interface is supposed to be simple... but the training is designed based on the assumptions that delegations of authorities are straightforward and from three county commissioners to an IMT of any size. Lost for the most part in that equation is how an incoming IMT will work or interface with an experienced or robust EOC... one with an established system for coordinating response and recovery.

More important, the integration of IMTs with our EOCs and emergency management (in general) is a fact that we must embrace for large scale events... if we are ill-prepared on either side (IMT or EOC), then we will face delayed response coordination and risk failure when the time calls.

6) Uniformity in Resource Ordering

In the end, SR 530 response (in the EOC) became about Planning and Logistics... it was about resources. And therein was one of our greatest challenges... the aforementioned utilization of so many different systems for ordering and tracking resources.

Although I readily embrace the home rule concept, I believe there are areas where the state should simply preempt local authorities for the betterment of disaster response coordination. I believe that we as a state would benefit from a single system of resource management that is in effect mandated and provided from the state. I am not too proud and neither is Snohomish County to follow the lead and direction of the state when it makes sense. This one makes sense.

Conclusion:

I hope that we never again have to face the type of incident we faced in March of 2014. I strongly desire for all emergency management professionals careers that are filled with forward thinking planning and routine responses to floods and small fires. I hope that not one jurisdiction ever has to stand up another long term recovery office. And I pray that people will never again die because of a landslide.

But we know that is likely not our reality... and we will face those disasters again. It may be similar to the 530 Slide... but the chances are that it will not.

SR 530, at least to me, gives us a glance into what localized catastrophe really looks like... but only that... a glance. It tempts us with our limited successes and yet somehow focuses us on what we believe we can do better.

With sincere reflection, I believe I have offered to you an achievable and reasonable list of 6 items that can help us to transform our state's emergency management system and improve our coordination of any event in the future.

Thank you for your time and your service.