

NEWS

CRCOG initiates mutual aid program

Towns join in pilot project to share equipment, machine operators and technological expertise

By Sujata Srinivasan

Quick to learn from 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, Connecticut's town officials seem determined to avoid getting stuck in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) bureaucratic quagmire in the event of a disaster.

The towns of Newington, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield have initiated a pilot project that will encourage mutual aid agreements among municipalities with Public Works Departments (PWDs).

"We've considered several situations, including fire, flood, earthquakes and a tsunami up the Connecticut River," says James Sollmi, director of engineering in the Town of Rocky Hill.

Mike Mancini, town engineer of Newington, says with PWDs being elevated to the status of first responders during state and national emergencies, forming legal and structured agreements to share equipment and personnel will enable towns to obtain reimbursements sooner from FEMA. "It'll save us tedious paper work," he explains.

model where more towns can participate in the future," says Jennifer M. Carrier, principal transportation engineer at CRCOG.

CRCOG attorneys are currently considering issues such as insurance premiums. For instance, should the lender or the borrower foot medical costs of the machine operator in the event of an injury? For their part, the towns are in the process of taking stock of their inventories.

Hedy Ayers, principal municipal services coordinator at CRCOG, says several of its 29 members — consisting of the City of Hartford and the surrounding rural and urban communi-

ties — have expressed an interest in joining the mutual aid program once the pilot project is in place.

Some of CRCOG's past projects include computer training for municipal officials, provided in conjunction with the Capitol Region Education Council. Its technology workshop series focuses on the use of Geographic Information Systems to manage services and analyze issues of concern to local governments. ■



James Sollmi, director of engineering and highways, Town of Rocky Hill, expects to rein in equipment and manpower costs due to aid agreements between Rocky Hill, Newington and Wethersfield. He also expects the Federal Emergency Management Agency to issue reimbursements more quickly in the event of an emergency if there is a legal agreement in place between the participating towns.

Sollmi adds that the sharing agreement is expected to provide huge benefits in non-emergency situations as well. The trio will lend and borrow equipment, operators and technological know-how from each other, thus reducing their costs associated with rental fees and the purchase of expensive pieces of equipment, when one will do for all three towns.

"In Newington, for example, we have two street sweepers. But Rocky Hill and Wethersfield have to hire sweepers since they have none. They can eliminate this cost by borrowing from us. They just have to pay labor charges [for the operator] and minimum equipment maintenance charges," Mancini explains. "We, in turn, could borrow a bulldozer from Wethersfield and a high-tech Global Positioning System from Rocky Hill."

He points out that the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG), of which the towns are members, wants to initially limit the scope of the project, so that it is better able to observe how well the mutual agreement works.

"The project is in the initial stages and we are looking at it as a possible



Hedy Ayers and Jennifer M. Carrier of the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) are overseeing a pilot project that will encourage mutual aid agreements among municipal public works departments. Currently, three towns are in the process of drafting a legal agreement to share equipment, machine operators and technological expertise.