

**The Bill Blackwood  
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**The Role of Police in Emergency Management**

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**An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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Leadership Command College**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Many parts of a local government emergency plan involve personnel and response from the law enforcement element. In many jurisdictions the emergency management function is embedded in either the fire or police department. The importance of law enforcement involvement in emergency planning is underscored by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies. Police departments emphasize command and control and do not include other emergency response agencies or pertinent responders in their planning. Police departments and fire departments focus on reacting to disasters instead of planning for them. Police respond to disasters by expanding on everyday emergency response. Police should know the difference between disasters and “everyday” emergencies and plan accordingly.

63% of patrol level police personnel reported that they had not been formally trained on their agencies emergency plan.

The planning phase of emergency management is a natural place to employ community policing techniques. The research not only ties emergency planning to community policing but also to Problem Oriented Government. Enlisting the community affected and protected by the plan in the development of the plan will make the acceptance of the plan more likely. Research demonstrated that proper emergency planning included coordinating with all response agencies involved in disaster response, not just the traditional emergency responders.

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## INTRODUCTION

This project will examine the Role of the Police in the area of Emergency Management. As a part of this project this author will explore the idea of reinventing government to meet the needs and expectations of the communities represented and serviced. Recent events in our nation have brought to the forefront the need to plan for response to both man made and natural disasters.

The trend in the State of Texas appears to be that the emergency management function takes place outside the field or control of Law Enforcement. In many places the Emergency Management Coordinator is placed under the auspices of the Fire Department. Still in other cases the Emergency Management Coordinator is an independent branch of a local governments organization chart. In an alarming amount of agencies the emergency response personnel are not aware that plans exist or have not been properly trained on those plans. Many parts of a local government emergency plan involve personnel and response from the law enforcement element.

This brings to the table the question: Should the Police take an active, leadership role in the development and exercising of their local plans? While answering this question it can be shown that there is a general lack of training by many departments in the area of development and implementation of an emergency plan. The research will also show a need for more drills and exercises on the emergency plan.

The methods used to inquire on this topic will be a review of relevant news articles, review of planning documents, interviews with emergency management personnel, and surveys of line and staff of emergency response organizations.

The anticipated findings will show that the leadership within Law Enforcement agencies does see the need to participate in regular review and update their local emergency plan and the need to educate others within their agency and government organization. It is also anticipated that the findings will show that Fire Department personnel have historically been better trained in the concepts of Emergency Management.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The implications of this research for Law Enforcement will be a shift in the thought processes of Law Enforcement administrators, Emergency Managers and the leaders within Local Government. Analysis of the research will also show that certain aspects of Emergency Management can easily be tied to Community Policing as well as the concept of Problem Oriented Government. There is a lack of standardization from one jurisdiction to another. In many agencies the emergency management function is embedded in either the fire or police department. In some jurisdictions it is found in the city manager or county judge's office. In other places there is an independent emergency management office with a full time or part-time director's position. (Tierney, Lindell, and Perry 2001)

According to Ernest G. Vendrell, in a *Protection News* article (April 2001) the awareness and process of emergency management planning has evolved significantly and taken on more importance in the last decade. This is a result of the increase in emergencies and disasters and their impact on government and businesses alike. Vendrell also adds that emergency management experts today advocate an all hazards approach to emergency preparedness. Each entity must conduct a risk assessment of potential hazards for their community and plan a response tailored to the findings of that

risk assessment. The risk assessment should take into account potential natural, technological, and man-made threats and the likelihood that each has of occurring in their community. Planning for these contingencies will potentially save lives, reduce property loss, and lessen the organizations potential liability.

Law Enforcement Officers are perfectly suited for conducting these risk assessments. They naturally look at situations from a worst case mindset and are naturally suspicious of most that they see. Officers use risk assessment skills on a daily basis without paying conscience thought to the process. When preparing to serve a warrant the officers look at the surrounding area for threats. When officers conduct traffic stops they survey the area for potential threats. These are basic risk assessments. When expanding on this thinking it is easy to see why law enforcement is so well suited for this task. Based on the many discussions held with law enforcement professionals the mindset is that police officers don't need to write plans or practice them because police officers operate in the response mode constantly and are constantly vigilant in looking for danger.

Although there was not a lot of research found specific to police departments and emergency planning, Tierney, Lindell, and Perry (2001) did have some comment on the topic. In their book, *Facing the Unexpected*, they cited research that police departments and fire departments focus almost exclusively on reacting to actual disaster response situations instead of pre-disaster planning. They also concluded that police departments, more so than fire departments, devote fewer resources to pre-disaster planning even though they are assigned many responsibilities in community wide disaster plans. Their research showed, however, that larger departments were more likely to plan than smaller

departments. The drawback is that most of their planning is internal and they do not use an inter-organizational approach to disaster planning. The police generally feel that they can expand everyday emergency procedures to respond to disasters. (Tierney, Lindell, and Perry, 2001)

A *New York Times* article published July 27, 2002 and written by William Rashbaum illustrates that mindset. In his article about a consultants report on the 9-11-01 World Trade Center response Rashbaum quotes a senior police official as saying “every day police officers are faced with unimaginable situations, and every day they adapt and survive and do their jobs”. Another *New York Times* article published on July 7, 2002 quotes the Police Commissioner, Raymond Kelley as saying “we are in the business of emergency response. That is our business, every day.” This is more evidence of the way police personnel think about emergency management.

At the State level, the Emergency Management function in Texas is assigned to what is primarily a law enforcement agency, the Texas Department of Public Safety, although ultimate authority for response lies with the Governor. The state Emergency Operations Center is located in the Department of Public Safety Headquarters in Austin, Texas. The Disaster District Chairperson for each region in the state is the Department of Public Safety Captain assigned to that region. Any request for state assistance made by a city or county political subdivision must be made to the Department of Public Safety Captain in the Region the political subdivision lies.

As a result of the chain of command structure in the State of Texas emergency plan all sworn personnel in the Department of Public Safety have been trained in basic emergency management and all Sergeants and above have been trained in the Incident

Command System. It appears that the state agencies of the State of Texas are ahead of most local Law Enforcement in the area of recognizing the importance of training their personnel in Emergency Management.

The importance of law enforcement involvement in emergency planning is underscored by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies. In their *Standards Manual of the Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Program*, Fourth Edition, there are numerous references to emergency management and preparedness for all types of events. In order for a law enforcement agency to become accredited the agency must develop policies and procedures on how all incidents will be resolved. These standards are very detailed and cover nearly every conceivable emergency.

Although tragic and very costly in terms of loss of life, the events of September 11, 2001 provide many opportunities for learning. There has been much published about lessons learned in the aftermath.

One of the lessons learned was the importance of communication and coordination between fire department and police department officials in New York City. In the August 3, 2002 *New York Times* Article written by Kevin Flynn and Jim Dwyer a consultants report on the World Trade Center response is discussed. The article sites the absence of coordination between fire and police departments meant the fire commanders did not receive information from the police helicopters about the structural integrity of the buildings. According to the article the report called for improvements in planning, and overhaul of the training program and the acquisition of new technology to improve the coordination with other agencies involved in emergency response. The same August 03, 2002 article stated that the department's senior chiefs had not received routine



training for up to 15 years. The lack of, or inadequacy of, training was a recurring theme in this, and many other reports.

On September 9, 2002 the *New York Times* printed an article written by Al Baker. In the article Baker speaks of the New York Emergency Management Office being thwarted by its past. The article states that only one joint drill had been done in the 18 months prior to the September 11, 2001 attacks. This drill was not a functional field exercise, only a tabletop exercise.

The *New York Times* article of July 7, 2002 states that in the West, some fire departments coordinate massive responses to brush fires but in New York mock disaster drills rarely draw more than 100 firefighters. The response to the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 by the fire department included more than 1000 fire personnel. The events of that day certainly highlight the need for drills and exercises.

Rashbaum, in a *New York Times* article dated May 24, 2002, states that for decades the New York Fire Department and New York Police Department have been known for their disputes with one another at the scenes of different emergencies. These disputes are so infamous that the phrase “Battle of the Badges” was coined to describe them. These historical battles may have added to the number of deaths suffered by the New York Fire Department. In a *New York Times* article dated July 7, 2002, no author listed, the lack of communication between fire and police commanders is mentioned as a possibly costing the lives of 121 firefighters in the north tower of the World Trade Center. This article spells out the many communication failures along with the failures of command and control. The same article goes on to say that throughout the incident the two largest emergency departments in the city barely spoke to one another. Even though

the police department had intelligence that the buildings were deteriorating and reported such on the radio, that information was not relayed to the fire department. To overcome these types of communication problems nearly every state and the federal government have begun using the incident command system. According to the *New York Times* article of July 7, 2002 New York City does not.

Lisa Browne, in an article published in the January/February 2003 issue of *Emergency Fire and Police* magazine states that studies indicate that up to 73,000 police, fire and other emergency response agencies do not communicate with each other in major emergencies. Bowne states that first responders need to know critical information before it is required and waiting until a crisis makes that information too late. Browne says it is critical for agencies responding together to know how to communicate with one another. It is critical to know how the agencies work in relation to each other. The incident command structure of managing crisis is the best way to ensure this communication and understanding.

In police departments there is a tendency to base plans on myths instead of actual knowledge. Police departments emphasize command and control and do not include other emergency response agencies or pertinent responders in their planning. Police commanders are often overconfident based on past successful responses to routine emergencies. These past successes lead to a low priority being placed on the planning process. Important parts of the process, such as conducting frequent hazard assessments, developing response networks, and conducting emergency drills get overlooked. To quote the authors, “they do not consider the qualitative (as opposed to the quantitative)

difference between disasters and “everyday” emergencies”. (Tierney, Lindell, and Perry, 2001)

## **METHODOLOGY**

The objective of this research project is to answer the question: Should the Police take an active, leadership role in the development and exercising of their local plans? The purpose of answering this question can be shown by the general lack of training by many departments in the development and implementation of an emergency plan. Based on the review of literature used in this project I propose that the answer is an unequivocal and resounding “yes”. The literature also highlighted the current lack of communication and coordination between all emergency responders, a severe lack of participation in training on emergency plans, a severe lack of exercising emergency plans and a mindset that police officers don’t need to practice because they work daily in a response mode.

In addition to using recent news articles reviewing the events in New York City on September 11, 2001 and the aftermath, a survey of command level personnel participating in the Leadership and Command College and a survey patrol officers in the Round Rock Texas Police Department was conducted. The survey was done to show how much the different levels of the chain of command know about their agencies emergency planning efforts. The surveys were given to two Round Rock Police Patrol Shifts consisting of a total of 16 officers and 28 participants in the Leadership Command College. There was a one hundred percent return of surveys.

The results of the survey were compiled and analyzed to determine the amount of knowledge each group had on the topic as well as the perception as to how much training and exercising had been done.

## FINDINGS

The review of literature conducted for this research paper adequately answered the query, “Should the Police take an active, leadership role in the development and exercising of their local plans”.

Police departments and fire departments focus on reacting to disasters instead of planning for them. Of the two response agencies the police devote fewer resources to pre-disaster planning than do the fire departments even though are assigned many responsibilities in the communities’ disaster plans.

Larger departments, though, are more likely than small departments to participate in pre-disaster planning. To the greatest extent the mindset of police departments in general is that they can simply expand everyday emergency procedures to respond to disasters.

In general, police departments do not coordinate with other response agencies and create lines of communications with other potential responders during their pre-disaster planning. Valuable resources from within and outside their own local government are ignored.

During this pre-disaster planning police departments miss many opportunities to use community policing techniques. While conducting the risk assessments for the community police departments could be making contact with community leaders, such as neighborhood association presidents, to enlist their cooperation in conducting those assessments. Who know the community better than those who live and work there?

When the assessments are complete police departments again miss opportunities to build community partnerships by not sharing the findings of the assessments (where

practical) with the community. After sharing these assessments with the community is the perfect time to train the community on steps to mitigate the impact on the community or to even include them in planning for the emergency response to disasters. Community policing is all about partnerships with the community in crime prevention and this could be the perfect extension of that line of thinking.

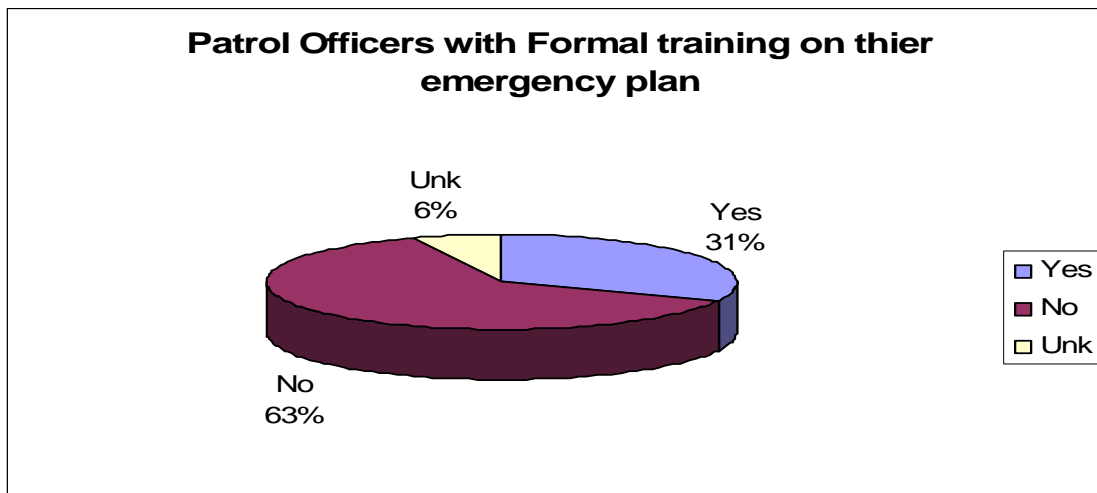
The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) has placed into their accreditation standard manual a section pertaining to disaster planning. Their standards require formal, written agreements and memorandums of understanding between agencies involved in mutual emergency response as well as written contingency plans for all conceivable emergencies. CALEA obviously recognizes the importance of planning. Part of the accreditation process is assessments of departments applying for accreditation. These assessments include a panel from CALEA visiting the department and speaking with members of the department. It is not enough for an agency to merely have a plan in place but that all line and staff personnel know of the plans existence and be trained on the implementation of the plan and policies.

The research conducted for this paper indicated that training for fire and police departments is very inadequate. The fix is to improve the quantity and quality of the training fire and police personnel receive. The phrase “the battle of the badges” that was referred to in a *New York Times* article must become a thing of the past. Police, fire and all other entities involved in response to disasters must plan and practice how they are going to communicate with each other. Employing the Incident Command structure of managing crisis is one way to make that happen. Frequent joint exercises are another.

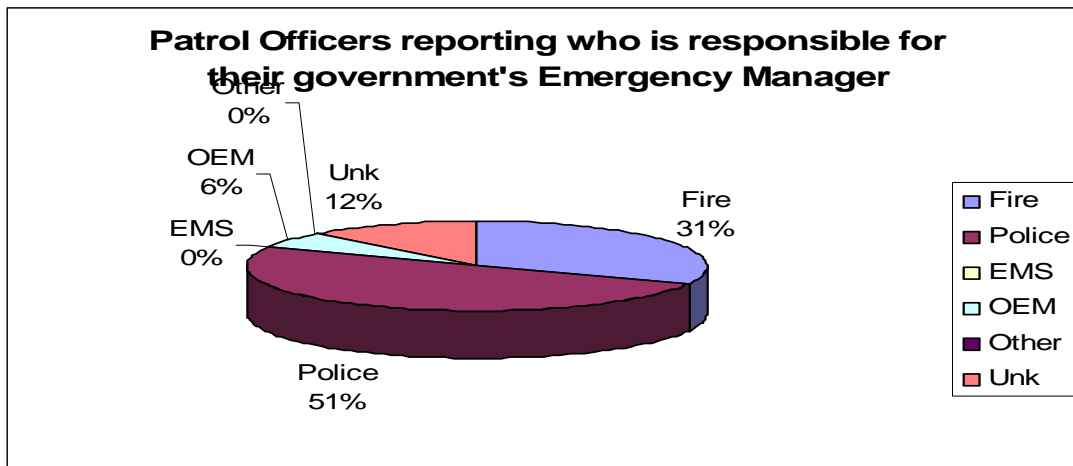
Police departments should emphasize less on command and control and include other pertinent response agencies in their planning. Police should know the difference between disasters and “everyday” emergencies and plan accordingly.

The following conclusions are based upon surveys conducted of patrol level officers of the Round Rock Police Department and management level officers participating in the Leadership Command College.

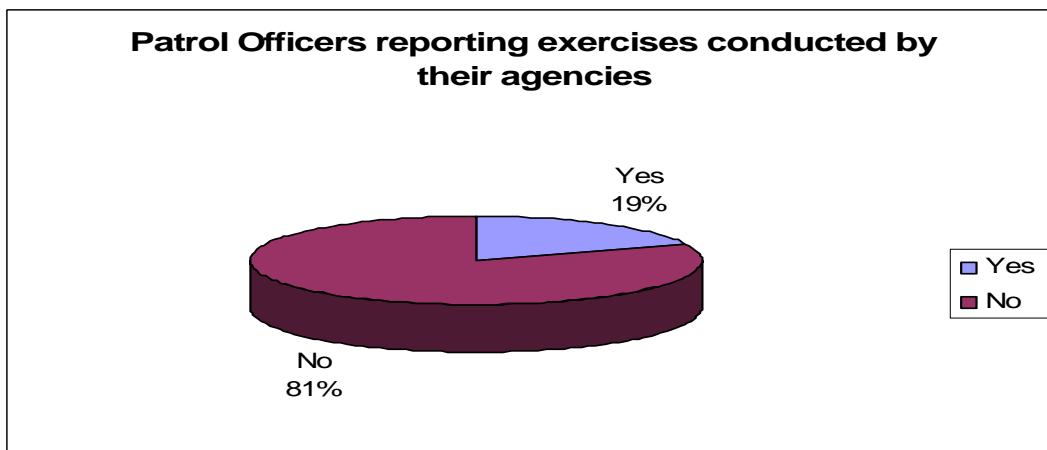
Overwhelmingly the patrol officers surveyed correctly believed that their agency has an emergency plan in place.



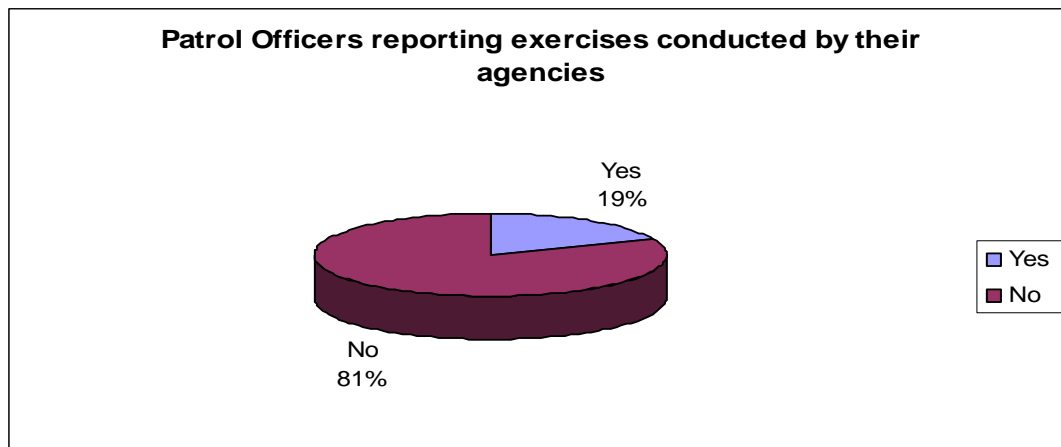
The patrol level officers indicated that they had little knowledge of the department’s emergency planning efforts or even who is responsible for the emergency management function. The survey showed that the patrol level officers incorrectly identified the police department as the responsible agency when in fact the fire department in the city of Round Rock is the responsible agency for the office of the Emergency Manager.



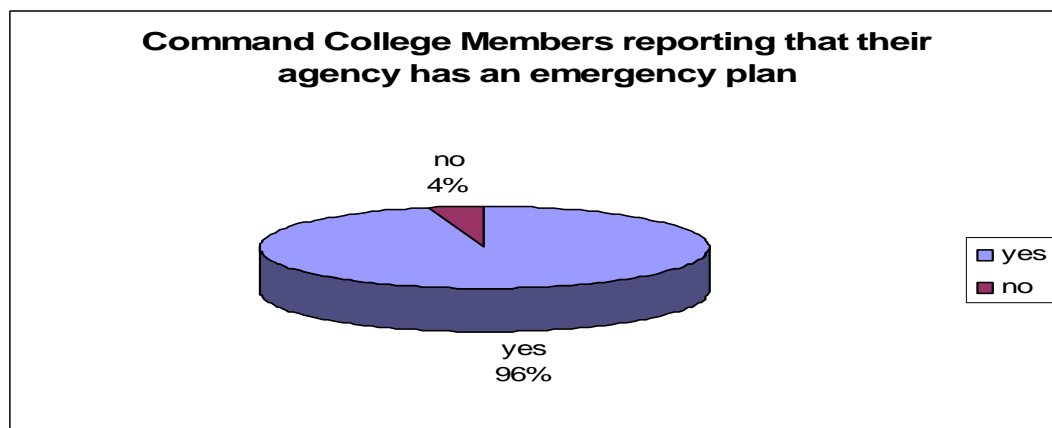
81% of the patrol officers surveyed perceived that their agency had not conducted exercises on their emergency plan even though several tabletop exercises had been conducted by command level personnel. This indicates a breakdown in internal communications and also a lack of training the patrol level officers on what was learned from those exercises.



The lack of formal training was re-emphasized by the patrol level survey. 63% reported that they had not been formally trained on their agencies emergency plan. This survey supports what was emphasized by the literature researched.

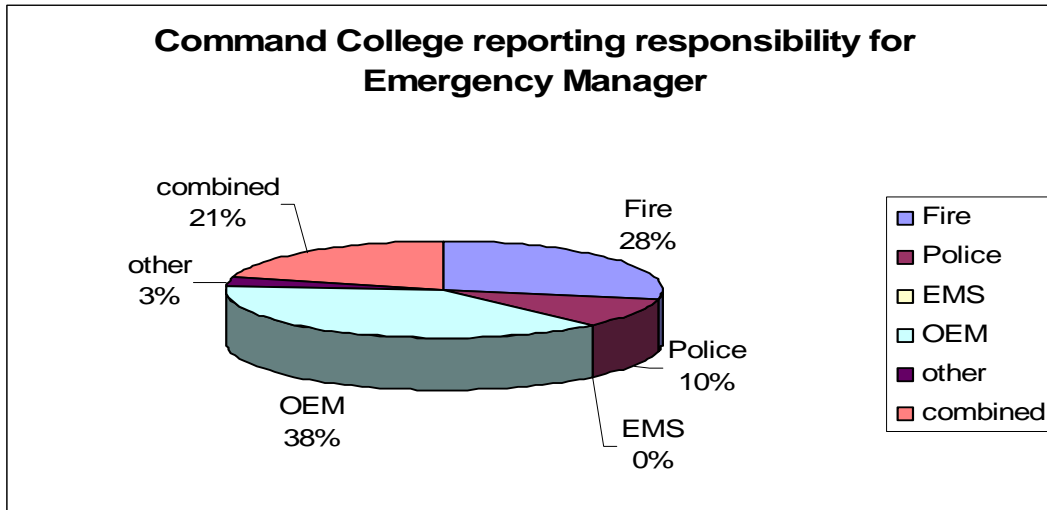


LCC participants were more committed when asked if their agency had an emergency plan. Only 4% stated that they did not.

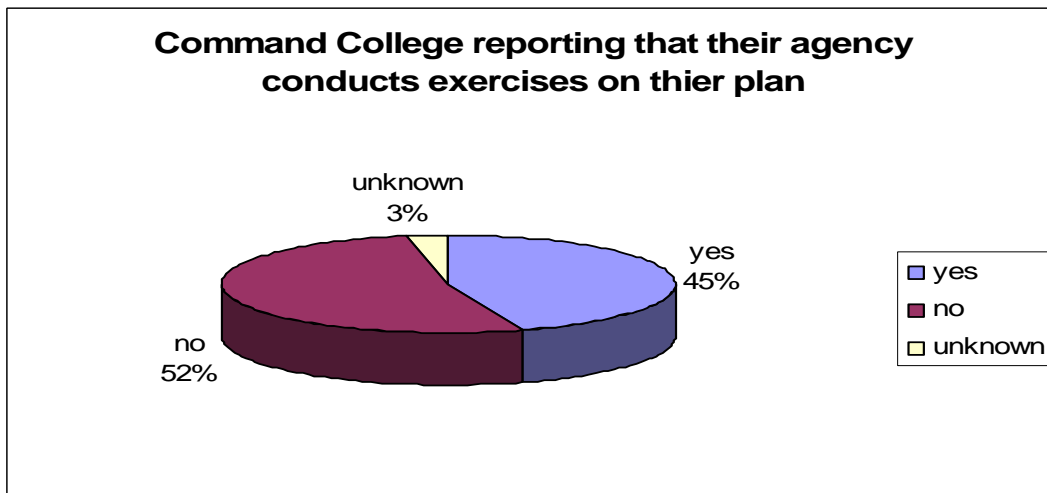


The LLC respondents provided the info below on who was responsible for the emergency management function for their respective cities.

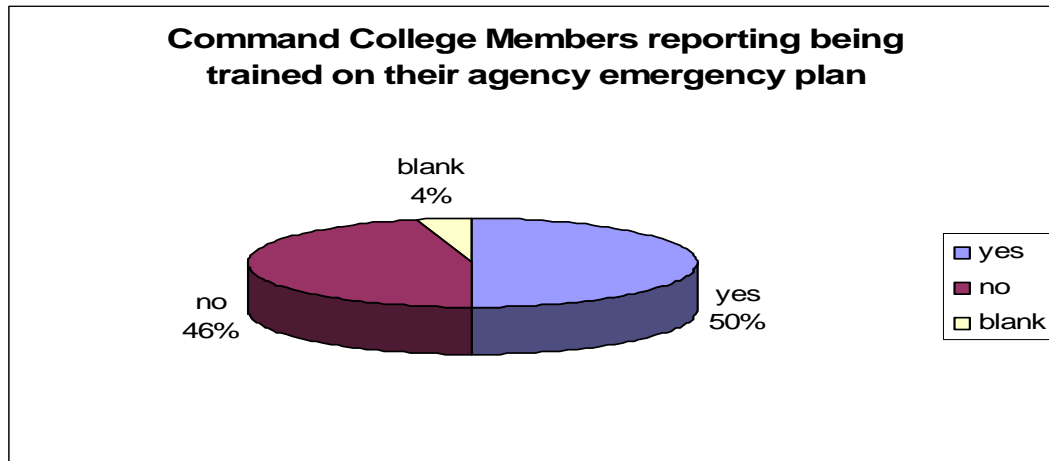




LCC participants perceive that their agencies conduct exercises on their plan at a higher percentage than patrol level officers.



LCC participants report a higher percentage of perceiving being trained on their emergency plan.



In general, the surveys confirmed what the research had already established. We, as police managers, are not doing an adequate job in the task of emergency management. Collectively, we fail to properly plan, to properly train, and to adequately communicate.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to answer the question of whether or not police departments should take an active, leadership role in the development and exercising of jurisdictions emergency plans.

The hypothesis was that police management should indeed take a leadership role in the functions of the emergency management coordinator. It was further hypothesized that law enforcement could use the emergency management function to re-invent the way business is conducted to better meet the needs and expectations of communities that they represent.

Based upon knowledge gained by researching this topic it is concluded that indeed the police should be in a leadership role in the emergency management function. This is based upon the functions within an emergency plan that are the responsibility of law enforcement.

The planning phase of emergency management is a natural place to employ community policing techniques. Communication of pertinent portions the emergency plan to the people that it is designed to protect is very important. Gaining cooperation from those affected by the plan will work more smoothly if the community were involved in the development of that plan.

The research not only ties emergency planning to community policing but also to Problem Oriented Government. The resounding theme was the importance of communication. Research demonstrated that proper emergency planning included

coordinating with all response agencies involved in disaster response, not just the traditional emergency responders.

After developing the plan, all affected by it, including other response organizations, the community effected, and the staff within the law enforcement agency should all be trained on the contents of the plan and all should exercise the plan to ensure that it was properly written. Waiting until a disaster has occurred to learn the plan allows an inadequate response and may endanger the lives of responders and the lives of the community. The results of research on this topic confirm this.

This research is relevant to the field of law enforcement as it demonstrates the need for law enforcement managers to change their mindset. Law Enforcement must move from a mindset of merely expanding everyday emergency procedures and focus on more formal planning. Managers in the field must also improve the methods used to train their staff and to their quality of communications within their agencies and with all other response agencies.

Just as law enforcement is looked upon by their communities as the leaders, the ones to call, when they have a problem law enforcement must take a leadership role in the emergency management function.

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