

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Emergency Preparedness of Texas
Law Enforcement Agencies**

**An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

**By
Mike Scott**

**Richardson Police Department
Richardson, Texas
February 2011**

ABSTRACT

Emergency preparedness of local law enforcement agencies in Texas is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because it identifies the deficiencies of local law enforcement when responding to disasters. There are numerous areas of preparation needed when responding to disasters. This paper focuses on the basic steps needed: policy and procedure development, training of first responders, and coordination with other agencies, including the federal government. The scope of this paper did not go into other areas of disaster response, such as availability of equipment or response to specific types of disasters, like chemical or biological.

The purpose of this research is to identify the need for better policy planning and preparation of local law enforcement agencies in Texas in order to respond appropriately to a mass disaster. The research also intends to demonstrate the need for better training and coordination with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The research should serve notice that a large percentage of law enforcement agencies in Texas, although they have made some progress, are still not prepared for the challenges of responding to a disaster.

The method of inquiry used by the researcher included a survey distributed to 23 law enforcement administrators representing 22 law enforcement agencies in Texas. This group of law enforcement administrators were participants of the Bill Blackwood Leadership Command College. The survey consisted of seven questions inquiring into timeliness of policies, training of officers, coordination of training with other agencies, and inclusion of some of the components of disaster response as required by FEMA.

Inquiry into this topic will also include the use of periodicals, journals, and internet sites, as well as publications from the federal government of the United States.

The researcher discovered that there is a need for agencies to develop policies and procedures in responding to mass disasters. However, it was discovered that this number is not as large as expected. The research indicated that 86% of the law enforcement agencies surveyed had policies covering disaster response. Although this number is high, the data also revealed that only 40% of the law enforcement agencies surveyed were meeting the basic goals of preparedness.

The research also concluded that law enforcement agencies were not utilizing the main components of the *National Response Framework* as directed by FEMA. These main components are National Incident Management System (NIMS) and incident command. Overall, the research indicated that local law enforcement agencies still lack in training and preparation for disaster response.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Abstract

Introduction. 1

Review of Literature 3

Methodology 7

Findings 8

Discussions/Conclusions 10

References 15

Appendix

INTRODUCTION

The issue to be examined considers whether or not law enforcement agencies in Texas are prepared to handle disasters, natural or manmade, in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Pampel (2007) defined a disaster as an “unusual and dramatic event that, in a relatively short time span, causes enough death and destruction as to disrupt normal patterns of living in a community, region, or society” (p. 4). To further assist local law enforcement agencies, the National Response Plan (NRP) was developed in November of 2004 (Pampel, 2007). Pampel (2007) wrote that the NRP “presented an all hazards approach for responding to disasters” (p. 44). In January 2008, the Department of Homeland Security revised the NRP and developed the National Response Framework (Department of Homeland Security, 2008b). According to the Department of Homeland Security (2008), the National Response Framework identified that the “basic premise of the Framework [National Response Framework] is that incidents are generally handled at the lowest jurisdictional level possible” (p. 10).

The relevance of emergency preparedness to law enforcement agencies in Texas is of significant importance. Government responses to disasters, as discussed in this paper, have received significant coverage by the media and have been scrutinized by citizens. Local law enforcement agencies and the administrators who manage those agencies must be prepared to respond when a disaster happens. Texas’ law enforcement administrators, in preparing for disasters have assistance from FEMA through the National Response Framework at their disposal. One component of the National Response Framework is the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

According to Walsh, Christen, Miller, Callsen, Cilluffo, and Maniscalco (2005), "NIMS represents a core set of doctrine, concepts, principles, terminology, and organizational processes to enable effective, efficient, and collaborative incident management at all levels" (p.xvii).

The purpose of this research is to identify the deficiencies in preparation and planning in local law enforcement as it pertains to responding to a disaster. In addition to identifying the deficiencies, this research will also serve the purpose of alerting local level law enforcement officials of the needs and challenges to overcome when responding to disasters. Pampel (2007) observed that written response plans can be easily written; however, when it comes time to implementing them, it can cause difficulties. Pampel (2007) named this the "Paper Plan Syndrome," which is defined as "a tendency to create a response document that sits on a shelf without undergoing adequate testing and practice" (p. 28). These plans contain unsupported facts, incomplete or missing information, and do not take in to account the publics interest. The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not local law enforcement agencies are up to the challenge of these types of events. Local law enforcement does not have adequate policies that are current and in line with FEMA guidelines. In addition, local law enforcement first responders are not prepared and do not have the ability to respond to a disaster.

The intended method of inquiry includes a variety of sources. These sources include a review of the literature, response reports on disasters, government publications, and internet sites. The research will also include a survey of local law enforcement officers from a variety of Texas law enforcement agencies. The intended

outcome or anticipated findings of the research will show that local level law enforcement agencies in Texas are not prepared to respond to disasters as prescribed by FEMA. It is also anticipated that the research will indicate a need for agencies to update and implement policies and procedures in order to properly respond to a disaster. The lack of policies and procedures will also identify a need for better training of first responders.

The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research or be influenced by the conclusions because the research will identify the deficiencies of local law enforcement in preparing and responding to disasters. The research is intended to influence top-level law enforcement officers at the local level, as well as top local municipal officials, of the needs to properly respond to such incidents. In meeting these needs, law enforcement agencies will provide a better service to the communities they serve during and after a disaster, should it occur.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Throughout history, disasters have been recorded, and mankind has had to deal with preventing, surviving, and recovering from such an event. In South Carolina, more than 300 years ago, Pampel (2007) discovered plans had been developed by the early settlers in that area to respond to storms. These early disaster plans included evacuation instructions, building codes designed to improve the durability of buildings during severe weather, and suggested lifestyle changes to better adapt the residents to the threat of weather related disasters. As the country developed, officials at all levels, local, state, and national, have been tasked with the same challenges as faced by these early settlers.

Local police agencies today are not only asked to deal with natural disasters, but also must deal with manmade threats. These threats include but are not limited to: bio-terrorism, weapons of mass destructions, mass shootings, bombings, and industrial accidents involving hazardous materials. These are just a sampling of the types of incidents local law enforcement officers could be confronted with. Local law enforcement will be challenged by the increasing number of disasters. Mayer (2008) reported, "by 2016 FEMA will be issuing almost 200 declarations in a single year" (p. 2). In order for local law enforcement officers to properly mitigate, prepare, respond, and recover, they must have the proper tools needed to respond to the disaster. In order to accomplish these tasks, local law enforcement first responders must have a well-formulated plan by the agencies they serve to guide them in their response.

To properly prepare for these disasters, local law enforcement agencies need funding. Proper funding at the local level is especially important. Royster (2005) reported that the Department of Homeland Security has granted well over 8.2 billion dollars in grants to local and state agencies. These grants, according to Royster (2005), have been used to "purchase special equipment, prevent and respond to possible terrorist attacks to provide training for emergency responders, and updating and implementing each state's Homeland Security strategies" (p. 12). Even with these amounts of fund distribution, Royster (2005) claimed, "many of the most prepared urban areas many (may) not have all the necessary resources needed for first responders" (p. 15). The federal government, in addition to providing funds, has also provided and implemented plans to handle disasters. In 1992, the Federal Response Plan was put into effect, outlining the federal response to disasters. This plan was in effect until

2004, when the newly created Department of Homeland Security put into place the National Response Plan. According to the Department of Homeland Security (2008b), this plan brought together “all levels of government in a common incident management framework” (p. 2). In January 2008, the Department of Homeland Security published the document titled *National Response Framework*. This document “describes specific authorities and best practices for managing incidents that range from the serious but purely local, to large-scale terrorist attacks or catastrophic natural disasters” (Department of Homeland Security, 2008, p. 1b).

The *National Response Framework* clearly identified that when a disaster incident occurs, it “must be managed at the lowest possible jurisdictional level” (p. 10). These incidents or disasters can either be of a natural occurrence or can be brought about through the acts of mankind. When a disaster occurs, it is the local authorities who are called to respond first. In an October 19, 2005 speech to the Heritage Foundation, Governor Rick Perry of Texas in a press release stated, “The first response to any natural or man-made disaster must come from state and local authorities who have the firefighters, police officers and EMT’s that go out into our various communities and respond to emergencies on a daily basis” (Perry, 2005a). On the same day, Governor Perry testified to the United States House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, stating, “leave first response to the first responders, leave decision making in the hands of local and state leaders” (Perry, 2005b). These local responders must be prepared to properly respond to the incident. They must be trained and capable of handling the situation and know the resources to call upon in order to properly respond.

Local law enforcement agencies are continually asked to respond to a wide variety of traditional tasks. These traditional tasks include responding to crimes in progress, order maintenance issues, traffic management, and civil disputes. In today's environment, local law enforcement agencies have higher expectations from all levels, national, state, and local, in how the responsibilities are carried out. Local law enforcement must be prepared to meet these challenges.

The Department of Homeland Security is one entity that has set directives on how local law enforcement operates. The Department of Homeland Security, in a document titled *National Incident Management System* (December, 2008a), directed that any agency, when responding to and handling a disaster incident, is required to use the National Incident Management System or NIMS. This document identified that the goal of NIMS is to have one uniform process in place that can be used for any size operation and a structure common to any agency. This provides a unified and coordinated effort should more than one agency be involved in the response.

A main component within the NIMS system is the practice of incident command. Incident command is an incident management tool as identified by Haddow and Bullock (2003), that helps "establish a set of planning and management systems that would help the agencies responding to a disaster to work together in a coordinated and systematic approach" (p. 66). NIMS should be used to respond to all types of emergencies, no matter the size or scope of the incident. In order to implement NIMS, agencies should be training personnel on the components of NIMS and how to apply and utilize NIMS should a disaster occur. FEMA has recommended that agencies conduct practice

exercises and coordinate those exercises with other governmental agencies at all levels including FEMA (*National Response Framework*, 2008)

With these standards in place, the federal government has set specific guidelines to follow when responding to a disaster. However, it is the first responders at the local level who must first be prepared to respond to a disaster. As Nunn (2007) pointed out, “there is still a huge shortage when it comes to preparedness” (p. 3). The first responding officers need to be properly trained and equipped to handle the potential hazards, both natural and manmade.

METHODOLOGY

There is no doubt that the federal government, along with local governments, has plans in place to respond to disasters. The research question to be examined considers whether or not first responders of local law enforcement agencies in Texas have current policies and procedures in place in order to properly respond and manage a disaster. The researcher hypothesizes that local law enforcement administrators will report their agencies have policies in place. However, the researcher believes the agencies will be lacking in current policies and procedures and are not implementing some of the basic components of disaster response. It is also hypothesized that there will be a need for continuous training and coordination with other agencies, including FEMA.

The method of inquiry will be a survey to be distributed to law enforcement administrators of Texas law enforcement agencies. Inquiry into this topic will also include the use of periodicals, journals, and internet sites as well as publications from the federal government of the United States. The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher’s findings regarding the subject of emergency preparedness of

law enforcement agencies in Texas will include a survey. The size of the survey to law enforcement administrators will consist of seven questions, distributed to 23 survey participants from around the state of Texas. The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in responses from 23 participants who represent 22 Texas law enforcement agencies. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by this researcher.

FINDINGS

A survey was administered to 23 participants of the Bill Blackwood Leadership Command College Module I class. The class represented 22 different agencies spread throughout Texas and consisted of management level law enforcement administrators. All 23 surveys were returned. Of the 22 agencies represented, 86% had policies covering a response to a mass disaster. An intricate part of emergency preparedness is having a policy in place that is current. Of the agencies reporting having a mass disaster policy, 21% reported policies have not been updated in over a year.

The survey revealed that 77% of the agencies had policies or procedures in place to implement NIMS. However, 45% of the agencies reported they do not implement incident command as a routine practice. Only 41% of the agencies surveyed reported continuous training of their officers on the components and implementation of NIMS. In training their emergency responders, the participants of the survey reported several methods used. The participants were able to select all the methods that apply to their type of training. Some of the agencies reported multiple levels of training, thus increasing the exposure of their officers to the components of NIMS. Figure 1 shows that the majority of the training conducted is either internet based or in the classroom.

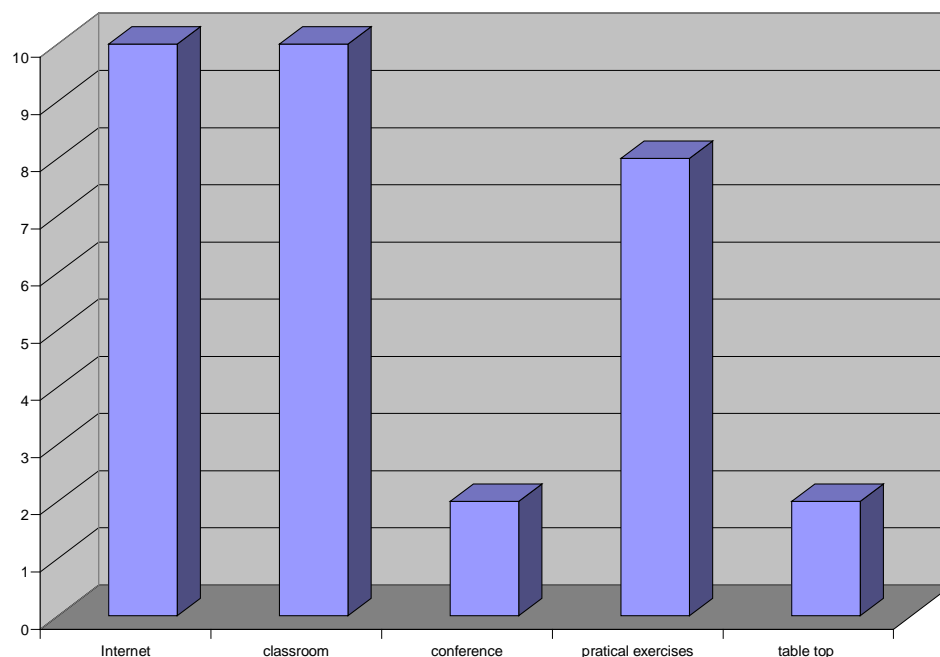


Figure 1. Type of training provided to law enforcement personnel on NIMS

In addition to this training, 64% of the agencies surveyed reported they have conducted a mass disaster exercise. Of the agencies who have conducted a mass disaster exercise, 57% of these conducted an exercise within the past year from the survey date of June 2008. The agencies that reported conducting exercises also provided information on other agencies, local, state, and federal, that assisted with their exercise. Figure 2 shows the other governmental agencies used and the frequency. As the graph illustrates, FEMA was involved in five exercises or only 36% of the time when a disaster exercise was conducted. Thus, in a large scale disaster, the main agency that would be called for assistance had very little involvement in the training and preparation for a disaster response.

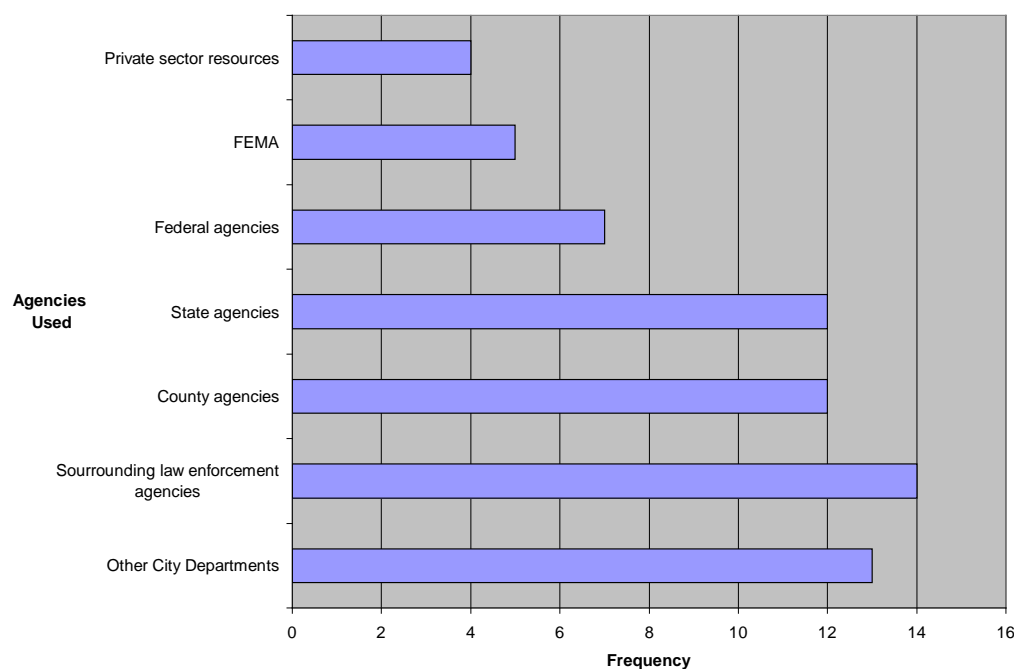


Figure 2. The frequency of different agencies used in mass disaster exercises.

DISCUSSIONS/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not local law enforcement agencies in Texas are prepared to respond to a disaster. This preparation includes having policies and procedures in place and utilizing the National Incident Management System along with the practice of utilizing incident command. The federal government, through the *National Response Framework*, requires that agencies, when responding to mass disasters, implement the National Incident Management System (NIMS). According to the National Response Framework, NIMS provides a common system designed to be used jointly between all emergency responders at all levels of government, making it possible for all responding agencies to communicate and coordinate their responses under a unified command structure.

Seventy-seven percent of the agencies surveyed in this research had policies to implement NIMS. A main component within the NIMS system is the practice of incident command. Incident command is an incident management tool, as identified by Haddow and Bullock (2003), that helps “establish a set of planning and management systems that would help the agencies responding to a disaster to work together in a coordinated and systematic approach” (p. 66). NIMS should be used to respond to all types of emergencies, no matter the size or scope of the incident. A significant number of agencies, 45%, do not implement NIMS. It has already been identified by Pampel (2007) that “it is easy to develop a written response plan but difficult to carry it out” (p. 28).

One further issue examined was the inclusion of the Federal Emergency Management Agency in these preparations. The purpose of this research was to identify the need for better policy planning and preparation in order to respond appropriately to a mass disaster. The research also intended to demonstrate the need for better coordination with FEMA and to serve notice that law enforcement agencies in Texas still have work to do in order to comply with the objectives provided by FEMA. The survey confirmed that FEMA was only involved in 36% of the planned exercises, which excludes a main partner in responding to a disaster.

The research question that was examined focused on whether or not local law enforcement agencies in Texas can ultimately respond to a mass disaster. For this research, the definition used for a mass disaster was defined by Pampel (2007) as an “unusual and dramatic event that, in a relatively short time span, causes enough death and destruction as to disrupt normal patterns of living in a community, region, or society”

(p. 4). Based on this definition, local law enforcement agencies in Texas must have the proper procedures and policies in place to meet the needs of the citizens they serve when a disaster occurs. The researcher hypothesized that local law enforcement agencies are not prepared to respond to a mass disaster. In addition, the researcher hypothesized that these agencies had outdated policies and, further, lacked the training needed of their first responders in order to coordinate a unified and successful response. In order to coordinate a unified and successful response, the researcher also hypothesized that most local law enforcement agencies in Texas were not implementing the National Incident Management System. The research confirmed only 41% of the surveyed agencies continuously train on NIMS.

The researcher concluded from the findings that there is a need for agencies to develop policies and procedures in responding to mass disasters. The research indicated that 86% of the agencies had policies. Although this number is high, the data also revealed local law enforcement agencies failed to utilize the main components of the *National Response Framework* as directed by FEMA. Additionally, research indicated that with the general interest and media coverage of recent mass disasters, local law enforcement agencies still lack in training and preparation in disaster response.

The findings of the research did support the hypothesis due to the diversified sample of agencies involved in the survey. The participating agencies in the survey were widely dispersed throughout the state, providing a varied sample of law enforcement within the state of Texas. Limitations that might have hindered this study resulted because of the rank of the members surveyed. The survey consisted of

supervisory and administrative levels of law enforcement. These supervisors and administrators are more involved in planning and policy development than the line level officer is. However, it should be noted that even with this limitation, there was still a need identified for further improvement in planning, training, and coordinating a response to disasters. Another limitation of this research was the narrow view. This research did not look at other areas of disaster response such as response, recovery, and mitigation. It did not take into account other areas of preparedness, such as availability of and training of first responders on equipment needed to respond to the large variety of disasters. Taking these factors into account would further exacerbate the issue of local law enforcement first responders not being prepared to respond appropriately to a disaster.

The study of emergency preparedness of local law enforcement agencies in Texas is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because it identifies the deficiencies of local law enforcement. These deficiencies were identified in the planning for a response and in the training of personnel at all levels of command. There has been progress, but more is needed. Top-level law enforcement officials within local law enforcement agencies and officials in the communities they serve stand to benefit from the results of this research in emergency preparedness of local law enforcement agencies in Texas. The information provided is beneficial as it identifies specific needs within the Texas law enforcement community. This research should identify that many communities' first responders may not be prepared to handle a disaster.

When applying the above factors to the survey results in determining if an agency was prepared to respond to a disaster, it was discovered that only 40% of the

agencies surveyed were meeting these basic goals in disaster preparedness.

According to the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education, (TCLEOSE) there are 2,163 law enforcement agencies in the state of Texas (TCLEOSE, 2007). Applying this data to the state as a whole reveals that there is a large need for further improvement in local law enforcement's disaster preparation.

REFERENCES

- Haddow, G., & Bullock, J., (2003). *Introduction to Emergency Management*. Oxford, UK: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Nunn, C. (2007). *Bio-terrorism and Municipality Preparedness*. Huntsville, TX: Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas.
- Pampel, F. (2007). *Disaster response*. New York, NY: Facts on File
- Perry, R. (2005, October 19a). [Press Release]. First response to disasters should be left to state and local authorities. Retrieved from <http://governor.state.tx.us/news/press-release/2599/>
- Perry, R. (2005, October 19b). Testimony presented to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security. Retrieved from <http://governor.state.tx.us/news/speech/9395/>
- Royster, A. (2005, April 28). *Emergency preparedness: Preparing the local community for terrorism*. The University of North Carolina at Pembroke: Author.
- Texas Commission Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education. (2007). *List of Law Enforcement Agencies*. Retrieved June 11, 2009, from http://www.tcleose.state.tx.us/publications/publications_gen/texas_law_enforcement_agencies_by_county.pdf
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2008a). *National incident management system*. Washington, DC: Author.
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2008b). *National response framework*. Washington, DC: Author.

Walsh, D., Christen, H., Miller, G., Callsen, C., Cilluffo, F., & Maniscalco, P. (2005).

National incident management system: Principles and practice. Sudbury, MA:

Jones and Bartlett.

Appendix

Emergency Preparedness Survey

The following survey is intended to gather information on the emergency preparedness of local law enforcement agencies in Texas. Your response to the survey is appreciated. Any information regarding your name and agency identifiers will be kept confidential.

Name and rank of person completing survey: _____

Agency: _____

City: _____ County: _____

1. Does your agency have a policy covering a mass disaster response?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, when was the last time the policy was updated?

Month _____ Year _____

2. Does your agency have policies and procedures to implement the National Incident Management System?

Yes _____ No _____

3. Does your agency implement incident command on a routine basis?

Yes _____ No _____

4. Does your agency provide continuous training on NIMS to all officers?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, how often does the training take place?

Quarterly _____ Semi-annual _____ Annual _____ Other _____

What type of training do they receive? (Please mark all that apply)

Internet _____ Classroom _____ Conference _____

Practical Exercises _____ Other _____

5. Has your agency conducted a mass disaster drill?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, when was the last training date? Month _____ Year _____

If your agency conducted a mass disaster drill, who was involved?
(Please check all that apply)

Other Departments in your city _____

Surrounding local/municipal law enforcement agencies _____

County agencies _____

State Agencies _____

Federal Agencies _____

Private resources _____

Did FEMA provide assistance _____

Other (please describe) _____

6. Do your first responders have the immediate capability to communicate via radio with surrounding agencies?

Yes _____ No _____

7. When was the last time you reviewed your city's response to a mass disaster?

Month _____ Year _____

Thank you for your participation in this survey. Please return this survey to:

Lt. Mike Scott
Richardson Police Department
140 N. Greenville Ave.
Richardson, Texas 75081
Phone: 972 744-4800 Fax: 972-744-5933