National Mutual Aid Technology Exercise 2019
Summary of Findings

Exercise Logistics

Dates: August 21-22, 2019
Location: State of Kentucky Emergency Operations Center, Frankfort, KY

Exercise Goal

Demonstrate and exercise policy and technology interoperability among crisis management and mutual aid systems, through seamless exchange of priority resource management information.

Key Findings

❌ Current resource management policy and technology initiatives across the nation are not well coordinated and aligned, resulting in disparate policies and technologies that are not interoperable, and operational challenges.

❓ How do we unify and streamline resource management policies and technologies to achieve better coordination and smoother operations during incidents requiring mutual aid?

💡 Need a nation-wide strategy and course of action to unify resource management and mutual aid policy, technology, and operations.

Key Actions

1. Conduct an operational needs assessment to determine common policy and technology requirements for resource management interoperability, across all levels of government and the full spectrum of mutual aid.

2. Update policies, technologies, and support integration efforts that build a national mutual aid network – an integrated and unified nationwide network of mutual aid systems for enhancing the Nation's overall preparedness and resilience.

3. Establish a NIMS-related Work Group that serves as the leading forum for fostering collaboration and providing thought leadership in the development of updated and new resource management policy, technology, and integration efforts.

National Requirements for Enabling Success

- Cooperation: Mutual aid only works if we all work together.
- Shared Vision: Interoperability for more effective mutual aid operations.
- Education/Training: Common knowledge and skills in managing resources.

Designed & Facilitated:

NAPSG Foundation

Supported & Co-Hosted:

Homeland Security

FEMA

Top Challenges and Gaps in Policy, Operations, and Technology

Policy

1. The nation needs a cohesive resource management information exchange framework and guidance to support appropriate information sharing in support of mutual aid operations.
2. Policies need to be reviewed and updated to ensure they are keeping pace with operational needs and technology capabilities that support business and operational requirements.
3. Increased outreach, education, and implementation of standardized NIMS resource typing, inventorying, mission ready packaging, and the NQS at the local level.

Operations

1. Mutual aid operations in medium and large-scale incidents continue to face challenges in the double and triple counting of resources, often leading to confusion and extended time in determining resource availability.
2. Local agencies need a better justification for using and maintaining their resource inventories.
3. Mutual aid processes need to be driven foremost by operational needs. Mutual aid processes are often driven from the top down, by people who often do not own the resources and do not understand ground-level operations.
4. State-level resource inventorying and operational tracking needs to be improved before it is deployed.

Technology

1. There are gaps in technology policy to support interoperability and information exchange among technologies.
2. There are gaps in existing standards needed to support consistent and interoperable resource management information sharing.
3. There are gaps in defining how cyber security and data safeguarding protocol apply to mutual aid and crisis management systems.

Key Areas for Improvement

Information Sharing

- Resource tracking must begin when the resource is initially inventories and deployed, regardless of the type of operations (day-to-day, regional mutual aid, etc.). This ensures that tracking is established and can continue to build when and if the event reaches a critical stage.
- The current lack of information sharing forces individuals to work around and outside the system(s) – creating inconsistencies that inhibit real-time resource tracking and can result in double or triple resource counting, errors, and delays in resource deployment.
- Standardized resource identification number system for assigning unique identifiers to each resource, for alleviating some of the issues with the double or triple counting of resources.
- Operators need to identify thresholds that trigger information collection and/or information sharing.

Policy and Governance

- Form a NIMS-related Working Group focused on resource management policy, technology, and interoperability.
- Define and establish policies to enable appropriate interoperability and information sharing.
- Develop guidance as part of the NIMS program to allow for modified resource requests and typing.

Developing a Cohesive and Unified Strategy

When creating a nation-wide strategy and course of action for building the *most* effective national mutual aid system, the following parameters should be considered:

1. Effective mutual aid operations need to be driven by operational needs and requirements that improve the outcomes of the incident.
2. National mutual aid operational needs should drive the policy, which then drives technology requirements and appropriate information sharing. This sequence is critical to success.