

Do You Know What To Do In An Emergency?

In the recent tragic weather events across the Midwest, many lives were changed in an instant. Hundreds lost their lives in severe weather in May alone. *The Topeka Capitol Journal* recently reported that storm damage in April 2011 in Kansas was an all-time monthly record. That was according to Kansas Insurance Commissioner Sandy Praeger. The estimate for loss in April was \$502.5 million. That estimate came from approximately 66,000 insurance claims submitted throughout the state. Whether it's an ice storm or an E5 tornado, storms impact municipalities and RWDs too. Major storms impacted Reading, KS; the cities along the Mississippi River; Joplin, MO; Piedmont, OK; Tuscaloosa, AL – the list goes on and on.

Would you know what to do in the case of an emergency? Disasters cannot be predicted. Can a city or RWD ever be totally prepared for a disaster? I would say no. But, cities and RWDs can and should take steps to be more prepared.

In April I attended the Kansas Rural Water training session titled, "Incident Command - ICS 402 and Emergency Tabletop Exercise", in Iola. Funded in part by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, KRWA also facilitated this training in Dodge City,

Hays, Salina, Wichita and Lawrence. The Kansas Division of Emergency Management was also involved in all of the training sessions. The training helped open my eyes. I think that every system in Kansas should attend one of these training sessions.

Kansas Division of Emergency Management (KDEM) provided the presenters for the "ICS – 402: ICS Overview for Officials/Senior Officials". Kevin Jones, with the City of Chanute, was the lead instructor; he was assisted by Jackie Miller, KDEM SE Regional Coordinator at the Iola session.

Many people in the water and wastewater industry are not very familiar with the acronym ICS (for Incident Command System). Incident Command System is defined as a

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standardized, on-scene, all-hazards incident management concept. This allows the user to adopt an integrated organizational structure to match the complexities and demands of single or multiple incidents without being slowed down by jurisdictional boundaries. An incident is an occurrence, caused by either human or natural causes, that requires response actions to prevent or minimize loss of life, or damage to property and/or the environment. The purpose of the ICS is to use management best practices to help ensure the safety of responders and others, the achievement of the objectives, and the efficient use of resources.

While I listened to the presentations at the training session, I soon realized the benefits of using the ICS. The program could be used for any size and kind of incident from a main water line break to area-wide natural disasters. It will allow personnel from many



Bill Brubaker, Kansas Division of Emergency Management Northeast Regional Coordinator, presents information at the training session held at Lawrence in April 2011. The group was discussing how to request the state for assistance following a disaster. KRWA facilitated six "Incident Command – Tabletop Exercise" training sessions in April. These were attended by 149 people from seventy-seven cities and RWDs.

different systems or agencies to join rapidly in a common management structure. Its use will also provide support to operational staff and help avoid duplicating efforts. I realized it was important for the water and wastewater systems to be aware of the features of ICS.

The afternoon portion of the training involved a “Tabletop Exercise” conducted by Steve Paige. The exercise involved a situation play where a tornado hit the fictional community, “Zenith City.” Chaos ensued, just as it does in an actual storm. Additional challenges were added to the emergency, including:

- ❖ One of the city’s hospitals was hit
- ❖ Two water storage tanks collapsed
- ❖ The utility crew responding to a major water leak overturned their vehicle
- ❖ The roof on water plant collapsed
- ❖ Collapsed roof created a chlorine leak
- ❖ Numerous calls came in from customers
- ❖ The wastewater plant needed to by-pass
- ❖ A backup generator failed
- ❖ The supply of bottled water was low

The objectives of the exercise were to:

- ❖ Reinforce the need for water supply and wastewater officials to work together and with other agencies in emergency events
- ❖ Reinforce importance of emergency preparedness
- ❖ Emphasize dependence on mutual aid (KSMAP)

This exercise was a vivid illustration that disasters are often compounded in a domino fashion because of subsequent problems such as those presented in the exercise.

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If you are interested in hosting one of these tabletop exercises or would like more information about how to be better prepared for a disaster, I encourage you to contact the KRWA office by calling 785.336.3760 or email to either the office at krwa@krwa.net or to Training Coordinator Jim Jackson at jim@krwa.net.

Let’s be as prepared as we can when disaster strikes us or a neighboring community.

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