



Latest Spotlight on Smart Practices: Advanced Local Emergency Response Team (ALERT) Charlotte/Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

Summary: *Across the nation, state and local personnel are recognizing the need for collaboration and coordination in emergency preparedness and response operations. This week's Spotlight focuses on how one partnership integrates multiple disciplines and agencies into a metropolitan medical strike team that can deploy quickly and treat patients in an event involving mass casualties, including those caused by weapons of mass destruction.*

Charlotte, N.C., is one of the nation's largest financial centers, a national airline hub and home to two nuclear power plants. Even before 9/11, officials in the City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, where Charlotte is located, were concerned about their region's preparedness for a large-scale disaster, especially one involving chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. So in 1998, the city and county began developing a metropolitan medical strike team that could deploy rapidly and handle mass medical casualties. They called it the Advanced Local Emergency Response Team (ALERT).

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's ALERT program is a multidisciplinary, comprehensive approach that involves collaboration among emergency responders including law enforcement, public safety, the fire service, emergency medical, public health, and the local regional level-1 trauma center. Rather than each agency or local department doing its own planning and preparation separately from the others; they work together.

"It's a decision-making process that focuses on what we need to accomplish our objectives," said Chief of Police Darrel Stephens. "With the ALERT team, people make decisions that put the goal and objective, rather than their particular agency, first." Training and cross-training sessions and exercises are held regularly and the team practices dealing with law enforcement issues, hazardous materials and medical mass casualties. All team members are highly skilled in their own specialties and cross-trained to help other team members in their roles. There are 90 specialists on the ALERT team.

The Charlotte/Mecklenburg County Police Department's ALERT program is the basis for a local WMD response team model currently being verified by the Police Executive Research Forum. When finalized, the model will outline the equipment, training and personnel resources needed for both basic and full preparedness

Thinking Locally:

- How can you strengthen your partnerships with other agencies and jurisdictions?
- How can you improve your response operations with resources from other agencies and organizations?

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Smart Practices Spotlight highlights practices and ideas that members of the emergency management and responder community have found useful and effective; they are not necessarily advocated or endorsed by FEMA. For more information about this initiative, contact Capitan Glen Neimeyer, at (704) 432-0427, or at gneimeyer@cmpd.org. For a draft copy of the current model plan being verified by the Police Executive Research Forum, contact Clifford Karchmer at ckarchmer@policeforum.org.

levels for an area like Charlotte/Mecklenburg.