

U.S. Department of  
Homeland Security



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# Smart Practices Spotlight

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## A Regional Approach to Terrorism and All-Hazards Preparedness Pennsylvania Region 13 Working Group

**Summary:** *In 1998, 12 Pennsylvania counties and the City of Pittsburgh together became the first group in the state to try a regional approach to terrorism preparedness. Today, their mutual aid and regional coordination system has been recognized by the FBI and the National Association of Counties as a model approach for inter-government cooperation in terrorism and all-hazards preparedness.*

While attending a Pennsylvania emergency management conference in 1998, a number of county emergency managers began to discuss threats of terrorism and the resources needed to respond effectively should a weapons of mass destruction incident occur in their region. In searching for a way to pool their resources, they created the *Pennsylvania Region 13 Working Group*.

Since formalizing the mutual aid and inter-government agreements, the Region 13 Working Group has established an incident command system for response operations, created a Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS), and developed plans and procedures for surveillance and notifications, and mass immunization and fatality management. They have organized major training exercises such as "Mall Strike 2001," a simulated nerve agent and radiological incident; a simulated gas attack exercise in the Pittsburgh subway system; and a full-scale exercise testing the ability of 27 hospitals in three of the 13 counties to decontaminate victims of a chemical attack.

When United Airlines Flight 93 crashed in rural Somerset County on Sept. 11, 2001, the chair of the working group was immediately in touch with other members of the group and emergency teams were deployed swiftly to the site. The group's four years of working together and preparing for terrorist events allowed them to develop and train teams that could work efficiently together during an event of this magnitude.

Meanwhile, work is going forward on the 800 MHz project, an interoperable communications system for emergency response agencies in Region 13 and the rest of Western Pennsylvania. Allegheny County has approved the floating of a bond issue for \$25 million to build the system infrastructure, while other counties in Region 13 are already using 800 MHz with great success. Other projects include a specialized equipment resource pool specific to WMD responses and specialized WMD training for emergency services personnel and support agencies.

Members of the group include 13 county emergency managers (the 13<sup>th</sup> county joined the group in 1999), the City of Pittsburgh, the Pittsburgh office of the FBI and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA). The Allegheny County emergency manager serves as chair of the working group, which meets every month at the Allegheny County Emergency Operations Center. Committees focus on communications, training, law enforcement, fire and hazardous materials and medical issues. On a regular basis various emergency services personnel participate in the meetings, including police, fire, EMS, bomb units, public works, and health and hazardous materials units.

### Thinking Locally:

How could you establish a regional emergency management structure?  
Are your current mutual aid agreements truly inclusive of all appropriate agencies and institutions?

To submit a 'Smart Practice' for consideration or subscribe to Smart Practices Spotlight send an e-mail to [SmartPractices@fema.gov](mailto:SmartPractices@fema.gov)

*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 Chief Robert Full, chairman, Pennsylvania Region 13 Working Group, at (412) 473-2550, or [rfull@county.allegheny.pa.us](mailto:rfull@county.allegheny.pa.us).*