

## 2015 IEMA Conference WebEOC Exercise: Untangling WebEOC Through Exercises



The Idaho Emergency Management Association held their annual conference February 2-5, 2015 at the Riverside Red Lion Motel in Boise. One of the activities at the 2015 Idaho Emergency Management Association Conference was an exercise designed to provide an opportunity for the emergency management community to practice using WebEOC. WebEOC is a web based tool utilized by emergency managers in Idaho which is designed to facilitate event reporting, situational awareness, resource management and essential documentation during emergency events.

The scenario for the exercise began with the emergence of a novel strain of influenza threatening the State of Idaho. This was followed by a widespread severe winter storm causing heavy snow and blizzards, ice storms, and flooding throughout the state, depending upon location. The severe winter weather and associated problems turned an already difficult situation into one that caused all counties in Idaho to declare a state of emergency, as well as the Governor of Idaho doing so as well.

The objectives of the exercise for local emergency managers included posting information on WebEOC, submitting requests for assistance to the Idaho Emergency Operations Center (IDEOC), and familiarization with the shelter boards utilized by American Red Cross (ARC) during an emergency or disaster. The IDEOC Logistics Section also participated and processed



the requests for assistance in WebEOC. ARC staff and

volunteers updated simulated shelter information in WebEOC for each of the participating counties and tribes in Idaho. In addition, all Public Health Districts in Idaho participated in the exercise and utilized WebEOC to provide situational awareness throughout the state.



In all, 76 people took part in the exercise, including representation from 33 counties and 2 tribes, 7 public health districts, 3 state agencies, the National Weather Service, and the American Red Cross. This was by far the largest WebEOC exercise in Idaho to date, and the first time that the American Red Cross and all Public Health Districts participated with local

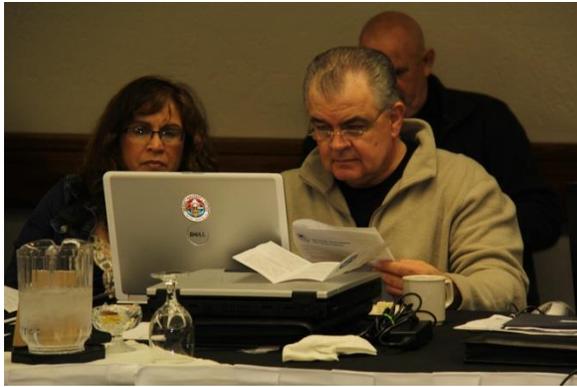


jurisdictions in a WebEOC exercise. Many of the county

and tribal emergency managers participated on portable computers while present at the conference, demonstrating the ability of WebEOC to be utilized anywhere internet connectivity is available. Other local emergency managers, Red Cross personnel, and Public Health District staff



participated from their own locations. The IDEOC players participated from the State of Idaho Emergency Operations Center. This exercise demonstrated the ability to utilize WebEOC to provide immediate situational awareness across Idaho from multiple locations.



Strengths and areas for improvement were identified during and after the exercise. Participants reported that the exercise provided an opportunity to get a better picture of how the entire process for



requesting assistance and completing a mission assignment in WebEOC works. Several participants commented that it was easier than they thought it would be. The exercise was also the first time that ARC has participated in a WebEOC exercise in Idaho, and their willingness to do so was appreciated by all participants. One of the most significant findings was the identification of potential gaps in providing situational awareness among the emergency management community as a whole, thus providing an opportunity to address those areas for improvement before a real world incident.

While the State of Idaho is fortunate that large scale disasters and emergencies do not often occur here, this does not allow many opportunities for emergency management to utilize some of the tools available to help manage significant events. In order to maintain proficiency in “untangling” WebEOC, all users should continue to use it in as many exercises as possible. Thanks go out to IEMA, the exercise director (Greg Adams from Teton County) and the exercise design team for providing this opportunity for the Idaho emergency management community.



