

**Case Study:
Partnering to Improve
Cross-Border Regional Pandemic Preparedness
in the Pacific Northwest**

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Pandemic Preparedness: Some Progress—A Long Way to Go

- **Current status of planning**
 - **Federal government focused and engaged**
 - **Active planning at state and local level**
 - **Larger, more enlightened private sector organizations developing and exercising pandemic plans**
 - **Cross-jurisdiction coordination and collaboration, public information are major challenge**
 - **Steep learning curve on pandemic impacts associated with critical infrastructures and essential services and determining optimal mitigation approaches**
 - **Limited knowledge or misconceptions on what to expect**



Pandemic Resilience Challenges

Need to develop *regional pandemic resilience*

- **Bring together public-private and other key stakeholder organizations to develop cross-sector pandemic preparedness and management plans, identify/prioritize shortfalls, and collaborate to improve/develop plans, policies, and technology solutions**
- **Coordinate public and private sector continuity of operations and business plans**

Pacific Northwest as Pandemic Preparedness Test bed

- **Pacific Northwest Economic Region and Public-Private partnership development**
- **Members: Alaska, Alberta, British Columbia, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Washington, Yukon**
- **Focus on regional infrastructure interdependencies**



Blue Cascades Regional Exercise Series

- ❑ **Blue Cascades I (June 2002)—focused on a physical disruptions**
- ❑ **Blue Cascades II (Sept. 2004) focused on both cyber and physical disruptions**
- ❑ **Blue Cascades III (March 2006) Recovery & Restoration from major earthquake**





Regional Pandemic Exercise

- ❑ **Blue Cascades IV (January 25, 2007)– Critical Infrastructures and Pandemic Preparedness**
- ❑ **Exercise created by 50 organization Scenario Design Team lead by state/provincial/local public health officials**
 - **Two-month intensive process of conference calls and meetings**
 - **Much informal information sharing and building trusted relationships**



Blue Cascades IV Objectives

- Provide a realistic expectation of the impacts from a pandemic on regional infrastructures and essential service providers and the communities they support**
- Provide a basic understanding of existing local, state, and federal pandemic preparedness plans, policies, regulations, expected actions and available resources**
- Assess the level and effectiveness of communication on and coordination of public- private sector and other organizational preparedness and continuity of business or operations plans**



Exercise Objectives, cont.

- Examine roles and missions of local, state/provincial, and federal (civilian and defense) agencies under the Incident Command System and of other key stakeholder organizations and their contribution to decision-making**
 - How intelligent ad hoc decisions are made under changing situations**

- Create an integrated After Action Report that identifies shortfalls and points toward cost-effective mitigation measures**



Focus and Scope

- **Exercise was based on following assumptions and understanding that a pandemic requires a different approach to disaster preparedness**
 - **Susceptibility will be universal**
 - **Civil disturbances and breakdowns in public order may occur**
 - **Illness rates expected to be highest among school-aged children (40%); among working adults 20% depending on characteristics of new virus**



Focus and Scope, cont.

- Absenteeism rates of 40% or higher may result from illness, the need to care of ill family members and fear of infection**
- Typically, the risk of transmission will be greatest during the first two days of illness**
- Isolation/quarantine measures are likely with restrictions on travel**
- Epidemics will last 6-8 weeks in affected communities**
- Multiple waves of illness are likely to occur, with each wave lasting 2-3 months**



Focus and Scope, cont.

- Because of the mobility of the human population, the pandemic will have global impact**
- Has ramifications for health, national and economic security and the functioning of society**
- Sustaining the operations of critical infrastructure under conditions of pandemic influenza will depend largely on each organization and corporation's plans for business continuity while facing staff shortages and the need to protect the health of its workforce**



Exercise Process

- Interactive format in 3 phases: pre-event, initiating event, and recovery with events followed by questions to raise issues, highlight challenges and preparedness gaps**
- Representatives from regional infrastructures and organizations facilitated each event and group discussions**
- Public health and other government officials and experts provided data and insights on key issues**
- Participants seated alternately in sector and cross-sector groups to facilitate coordination and discussion**



Key Lessons Learned

- Participants identified a broad range of preparedness challenges and gaps in several broad areas**
 - Understanding of pandemic health impacts and optimal mitigation measures**
 - Interdependencies impacts and related vulnerabilities**
 - Cross-jurisdiction, cross-sector cooperation/coordination**
 - Information sharing—mechanisms and procedures**
 - Roles and responsibilities—“who’s in charge”**
 - Response challenges**
 - Restoration of services and resource management**
 - Public information needs**
 - Role of media as a “first responder” and communicator**



Next Steps

- ❑ Review of exercise report by Scenario Design Team followed by review and validation by exercise participants**
- ❑ Action Planning Workshop to create strategy of prioritized, specific short-term (one-year), medium-term (18 months-two years) and longer-term projects to address readiness gaps**
- ❑ Incorporation of Action Plan projects into state, local, and private sector planning**
- ❑ Cooperative development of requirements/project implementation**



Utility of Regional Pandemic Preparedness Initiative

- ❑ Helps identify pandemic impacts on critical infrastructures and essential services**
- ❑ Improves cross-sector, cross-jurisdiction, cross-border coordination/collaborative planning/problem solving**
- ❑ Assists in promoting public health/safety, economic security and mission assurance**
- ❑ Facilitates alert and warning and information sharing and builds trust**
- ❑ Serves as test-beds for pilot projects for pandemic preparedness/mitigation**



For Further Information:

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