

Advance Planning: The Key to Preparedness for Special Events

By JL Smither, *Special Events*

Well planned special events allow emergency planners to collaborate and prepare for a variety of potential incidents. When agencies and departments at various levels work together to plan for emergencies, they can ensure a successful event.

The District of Columbia's *Support to the 56th Presidential Inauguration After-Action Report Summary*, available on the recently redesigned *Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov)* website, proves the effectiveness of collaborative planning. Planners in the National Capitol Region (NCR) expected the inauguration of President Barack Obama in January 2009 to attract millions of people to Washington, D.C., with some experts predicting crowds as large as five million attending the three days of special events associated with the inauguration. In preparation for this high-security event, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security designated the 2009 Presidential Inauguration as a National Special Security Event (NSSE).

The District of Columbia's Homeland Security Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA) served as the lead D.C. agency in the planning effort. However, HSEMA planners realized that they would have to collaborate with other agencies throughout the National Capitol Region because of the scope and size of the event. To prepare for the inauguration, agencies throughout the region worked together on plans for communications, mass care, public health, sheltering, transportation, and the many other factors and situations involved. Although the agencies participating did not create a single all-inclusive NCR plan, the collaborative agency plans effectively provided a safe and successful event for the approximately 1.8 million attendees.

One major challenge the inauguration planners faced was how to control and manage such a large crowd. For safety reasons, planners designated specific entrances for certain types of tickets to the swearing-in ceremony on the Capitol steps on the west side of the Capitol overlooking the National Mall. In addition, planners closed a number of roads and bridges, provided separate vehicle and pedestrian routes, and designated bus parking areas. Even with these preparations, however, planners and law-enforcement officials encountered some crowd management issues. In some instances, for example, different agencies posted contradictory signs, confusing inauguration attendees.

Even where the signage was correct, though, some attendees waited in the wrong line, seeking access to areas for which

they did not have the proper tickets. Some of the attendees also co-mingled freely with other people who had different tickets, a complication that made the designation of separate lines less effective. In addition, some pedestrians formed a line in a tunnel that was not properly barricaded but, rather, was intended for emergency vehicle use only. (For future events, the National Capitol Region plans to create a crowd-management subcommittee that would be exclusively responsible for crowd management. Such a subcommittee could ensure the use of correct and comprehensive signage, the development of compatible transportation plans among agencies, and the establishment of information kiosks throughout the event grounds.)

Part of ensuring the safety of such a large crowd includes placing first-aid stations throughout the area. During the 2009 inauguration, over 700 attendees sought assistance from first-aid stations. Many agencies provided these services, including the D.C. Department of Health, which staffed 30 first-aid stations to perform basic medical care and triage operations. Although the Department of Health fully stocked each aid station, the freezing temperatures on the day of the swearing-in ceremony contributed to an especially high demand for first-aid services. When supplies at some first-aid stations ran out, the agency had difficulty resupplying them because of road closures and pedestrian-only routes. In future events, it was decided, agencies providing first-aid stations plan to keep back-up materials nearby both to hasten resupply and to help as many people as possible.

Although the 2009 Presidential Inauguration was a successful event without any major complications causing problems, the agencies involved still collected some valuable lessons learned to improve planning for future special events of similar magnitude. More of these lessons are captured in the National Capitol Region's *2009 Presidential Inauguration Regional After-Action Report Summary*, available on *LLIS.gov* (www.llis.gov). Overall, though, the general consensus was that the D.C. HSEMA and other agencies in the National Capitol Region effectively collaborated on plans and procedures, and the end result was a safe large-scale event.

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