From Chaos to Control

Vigilance on the part of security workers is critical, but cannot prevent all disasters
By David Thompson

Disasters happen, from global and domestic terror, to accidents and natural disasters. Everyone is vulnerable, especially those of us in the United States, where we cherish our personal freedoms. Vigilance on the part of our security and safety personnel is critical, but unfortunately, it cannot and will not prevent all disasters. Here in the United States, we have paid a high price to learn this lesson. We also have learned that in order to protect the personnel involved, guard on-site evidence and minimize the trauma to our local communities and greater societies, it is critical to effectively manage our on-site disaster response and rehabilitative efforts.

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Developed by the Department of Homeland Security at the request of the president, the National Incident Management System integrates effective practices in emergency preparedness and response into a comprehensive national framework for incident management. The NIMS enables responders at all levels to work together more effectively and efficiently to manage domestic incidents no matter what the cause, size or complexity, including catastrophic acts of terrorism and other disasters.

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The success of recovery operations will depend on the ability to mobilize and effectively use multiple outside resources. This will only be possible if we unite, plan, exercise and respond using a common National Incident Management System. The equipment is now available to keep track of everyone on location.

A First of its Kind

Franklin County, Ohio, has established its Terrorist Advisory Team with representatives from police, fire, EMS, emergency management, health, communications and public works departments. The Terrorist Advisory Team is one of the first in the United States to request and receive Homeland Security funds to be used for what they have called Disaster Scene Perimeter Entry Control System. In fact, Franklin County's Terrorist Advisory Team will be used as a model for other agencies and task forces to emulate and learn from.

The team began developing requirements for a perimeter management solution in 2002. The group contacted one of its local identification and badging dealers, and described its needs. The

dealer worked with a leading smart card systems integrator to implement one of the first solutions of its kind to be approved by DHS. The solution is slated to be available for use by the end of the first quarter of 2005.

"Positive control of a disaster scene is vital to ensure the safety of both emergency responders and the general public," said Sgt. Timothy McVeight, of the Columbus Police Department and the project coordinator for the Terrorist Advisory Team. "Once a perimeter is secured, entry control points must be established to permit only authorized personnel into the area. A credentialing system must be set in place using established protocols to identify those with legitimate entry needs and qualifications."

Logs maintained at each entry control point provide specific documentation of personnel, including date, time and function upon ingress and egress, he said.

"Electronic credentialing and entry control will provide a method of securing the scene with minimal manpower and immediate access to critical information," he said.

Like many other regions across the country and the world, the Franklin County Terrorist Advisory Team is taking proactive measures to be prepared any potential disasters. The solution provides on-site managers control, information and documentation to bring order to a chaotic environment. It monitors the movement of credentialed people in and around the disaster area. The ad hoc wireless communications package provides the capability to transmit data around debris and buildings, and is critical for keeping track of on-site personnel. The robust communication technology being used is designed for transmission over distances exceeding 10 miles.

The solution's topology includes a command center that monitors and records the location of on-site personnel. The command center can keep track of who has been in certain areas and the length of time they have been there. Data from self-contained field units based on patented DynaGate™ technology is transmitted to the command center, providing the capability to run absent and present reports on real-time data. Rules and policies can be created and enforced to track people who have been in certain areas beyond a designated period of time.

The access control aspect of the solution is critical. Access levels are important in all domestic incidents like the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon or the downed plane in Shanksville, Pa. The system has the ability to assign access levels according to the first responder's level of expertise or on-site requirements.

The system generates personnel reports on-site in the disaster area, which are valuable when establishing accepted methods of controlling access at a disaster scene. This capability meets with NIMS requirements for the management of personnel resources at a disaster scene. Agencies must meet the NIMS requirements in order to qualify for DHS funding.

The disaster site management system is a smart card-based solution. Local first responders are pre-badged prior to any emergency; if necessary, responders from surrounding counties and states will be provided with badges at the on-site enrollment station. Advantages of a smart

solution include the ability to store personal data on the card, such as fingerprint, blood type, allergies and emergency contact information. The smart card also can include multi-level security features to be used as an official credential outside of the disaster scene. The smart card can be used in the first responder's place of business, replacing older-technology ID cards.

How many times do you see state and local agency employees wearing three and four different ID badges around their necks? With the smart card solution, a single card can be integrated with other diverse systems, from logical access and computer networks, to physical access at disaster scenes and cashless vending in the office.

Transmitting to the command center are the DynaGate stations located at zone entrances and exits. Security personnel are located near each station to prevent unauthorized access. As a member of the recovery team enters and exits the disaster site (or defined zones within it), his or her smart card is read, and fingerprints are scanned and compared to that stored on the card.

Security personnel maintain the police line that has been used to cordon off each zone. Guards should be placed around zone lines to ensure that unauthorized people do not enter. There is value in knowing which staff is in what area. It is imperative that security personnel maintain a tight perimeter and direct all individuals to the entry and exit access points.

Rapid setup and deployment of equipment is crucial at a disaster scene. The equipment is rugged and designed for use in all weather conditions, and can be easily set up upon arrival at a managed site. The configuration is modular, so only the specific equipment required for a given site is used. The system operates on its own wireless network. All electronic equipment is battery-operated, including the DynaGate stations and the communication units. Batteries are rechargeable and last up to 10 hours.

Preparing for the Next Time
We have seen our fair share of disasters in the United States. Despite our best efforts, the list of causes is growing longer. Our local communities, states and the federal government are no longer naïve enough to think that it can't happen to us. The professionals in our local police and fire departments and other safety and law enforcement agencies across the country are preparing for the next disaster.

Fewer things are more important than a well-managed disaster site. The Smart Disaster Site Management System is a critical tool in moving from chaos to control.

This article originally appeared in the March 2005 issue of *Security Products,* pgs. 98-100.