The Persistent Management Challenges of MCMDs

Dr. Amy K. Donahue
amy.donahue@uconn.edu

The same lessons, disaster after disaster

"We'd been through a major incident, and when the next one was inbound, we thought we were ready, thought we'd learned and knew what to do. Then the incident hits and we have the same problems all over again. Turned out we didn't really learn what we thought we had."

—An Oklahoma City Fire Chief

MCMD Management Challenge 1: Leadership

- Unclear, multiple, conflicting, uncooperative, isolated command and control structures

- Too many self-established command posts that operate independently

- Weak implementation of team-based collaborative decision-making

- Poor coordination leads to duplication, free-lancing, and sub-optimal approaches

- Command centers can be political, parochial, and focused on blame

- Command approaches not based in a common operating philosophy

MCMD Management Challenge 2: Communications

- When communications fails the response is undermined
- Major investments in hardware, but less attention to systems
- Lack contingencies for how to communicate when technology fails
- Lack a system that everyone agrees to, commits to, and uses
- Effective communications systems rest on trust and relationships

MCMD Management Challenge 3: Logistics

- Hard to credential personnel, maintain accountability, track assignments
- "Self dispatched" agencies can't connect to command system or support themselves
- Every-day resource acquisition systems break down in emergencies
- Poor management and utilization of donated resources and volunteers
- Lack adequate resources to support large, long-duration operations
- Scarcity breeds hoarding

Research Questions

- **What are the big, persistent challenges?**
- **Why don't we learn from previous disasters?**
- **What are the underlying causal processes?**
- **Are solutions scalable? Generalizable?**
- **Which problems are technology problems, and which are not?**