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## Strategic Operations Helps Boston Disaster Preparedness

May 3, 2013

## Boston Is One of the Best Prepared Cities to Handle a Crisis

Henry Grabar Apr 19, 2013



Witnesses repeatedly described the scene Monday at the finish line of the Boston Marathon, where two bomb blasts ripped through a crowd of spectators, as Security experts called Friday's citywide "shelter-in-place" order unprecedented. Onlookers could only compare the siege in Watertown, where soldiers, SWAT teams, helicopters and armored Humvees cordoned off a large swath of the neighborhood like a movie.

But emergency management personnel in the Boston region had not only been through such a complex scenario, they had been rehearsing it.

Over the past two years, area hospitals had sent teams of doctors and nurses to participate in training exercises and run internal drills for mass casualty incidents like bombings, plane crashes, and fires. Vivid, citywide disaster simulations – conducted in 2011

put hundreds of officials through hypothetical 24-hour crisis situations. Boston is one of four U.S. cities whose all-hazards plan has been accredited by EMAP, the national emergency planning evaluation program.

"Even local businesses these days have response plans in place," says Rick Jarman, a veteran of the National Counterterrorism Center and a senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

So when two pressure-cooker bombs exploded on Monday afternoon, Boston's emergency operations centers knew what to do. Emergency medical personnel affixed tourniquets to Boston's first responders all carry these battlefield dressings, though many do not – to bloodied limbs. The most serious casualties were treated at a hospital distributed among area hospitals, a technique known to optimize critical care during disaster events. Boston Marathon medical tents set up for fatigued runners were transformed within minutes into trauma centers. Police officers took up positions to clear spectators off the course and turned back runners approaching the finish line.



*Police block the entrance to Boylston street near the scene of one of the explosions at the Boston Marathon in Boston, Massachusetts April 15, 2013. (Scott Eisen/Reuters)*

As the medical response unrolled, a parallel series of preventative measures was taken. Service on Boston's Green Line, which has a station at Copley Square near the scene of the attacks, was suspended between Kenmore and Park Street. Security barriers were installed at local transit hubs. The FAA temporarily grounded all flights from Logan International Airport.

The scene on Boylston Street was an admirable display of bravery, skill and coordination by emergency responders and volunteers. But less remarked, and equally remarkable, was the city's foresight. Few U.S. cities could have been better prepared for the crisis of that week.

"Everything that you saw happen within seconds of the explosion," says Jarman, president of security consultancy Cytel Group, "was all because someone thought they should be prepared for that." Baker would know. In the past 24 months, he had seen Boston run two massive, 24-hour worst-case scenario simulations that bore a striking resemblance to the situation unfolding this afternoon in Watertown.

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Over the past decade, the Department of Homeland Security has funneled billions of dollars towards the protection of U.S. cities. Boston is one of the DHS's "Tier 1" metro areas -- in DHS's view, one of the country's ten most likely targets for terrorism. The Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI), the largest part of the Homeland Security Grant Program, distributes half a billion dollars annually to 31 U.S. metros, with \$100 million to Boston in the 2012 fiscal year.

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The Metro Boston Homeland Security Region (MBHSR) -- nine cities including Boston -- directs that money into an array of local counterterrorism programs. In the past few years, the MBHSR has upgraded over 5,000 portable radios for first responders and installed a communication system inside the tunnels of the Boston T.

Part of that money must go towards live drills, so over the past couple years Boston has conducted two citywide disaster simulations with Cytel Group's Urban Shield program. The first preparation and after-action reports from the first trial (in May 2011) to improve emergency preparedness in the second, in November 2012. (The city also hosted an emergency management summit last August.)

U.S. cities have been doing disaster drills for decades, and some exercises have been of some magnitude. But in the last decade, the trend in disaster drills has moved from the purely local exercise to the vertically integrated simulation that coordinates response across the different levels of government. "What is different," Nelson says, "is the range and depth of missions they're responding to."

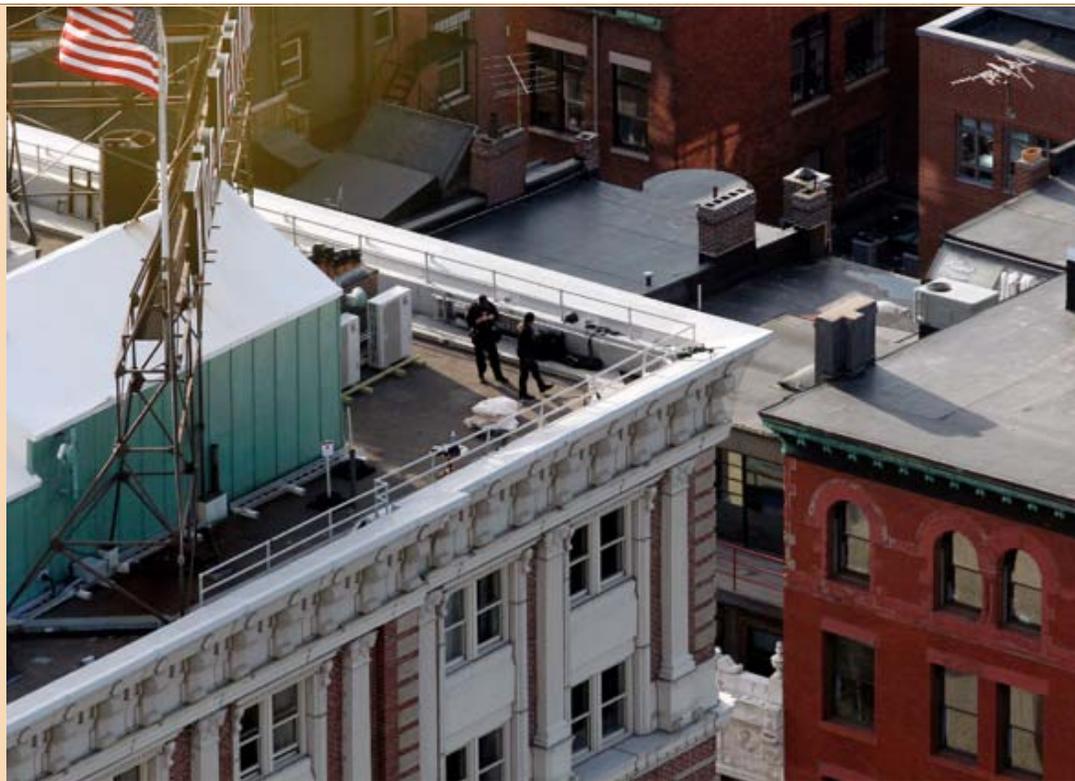
Urban Shield, which Baker started in 2007, is one of several drill programs that have sprung up over the last decade in response to DHS grants for thorough emergency preparedness training. In 2010, it received UASI's honorable mention for best emergency program.

In Boston, Urban Shield was sufficiently disruptive and expansive that Mayor Menino's felt obliged to ask residents to remain calm:

"Urban Shield: Boston will run for a 24-hour period. As a result residents in the downtown area may hear simulated gunfire, observe officers responding to simulated emergencies, or see activity in the Boston Harbor. Each scenario will be repeated multiple times, and organizers urge residents not to be alarmed."

The drills, which included hostage situations, HazMat incidents and a movie theater shooting, brought together emergency officials from the city, state and federal government, as well as from the Boston Police, SWAT teams, the Fire Department, local hospitals, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, the Coast Guard. In all, there were over 600 participants in the November drill, from over fifty different departments and agencies.

"What the Urban Shield program does is test it all at the same time -- bomb squads working, swat teams working, fire, HazMat, search and rescue, command centers activated, all your radio systems, hospitals activated -- everyone's kind of working together," says Baker, who worked closely with the city to execute the simulation. "It's where you start to find your gaps -- who can't speak to whom on the radio. It's the real problems when you get everyone together."



*Police are seen on the roof of a building overlooking Boylston Street where explosions w  
117th Boston Marathon in Boston, Massachusetts April 15, 2013. (Jessica Rinaldi/Reuter*

The drills are intended to be strikingly lifelike. Urban Shield has worked with Strategic Operations, a Hollywood effects company that also helps prepare army medical units for battlefields. (Their disaster scenario staff, Baker says, include an amputee.) The generous helping of moulage, their drills aim to force officials to confront the logistical and atmospheric challenges of a disaster.

"The leadership is outstanding," Baker says, referring to Boston. "I have found that cities are proactive and forward thinking – they invested a lot of time and energy in being ready for something that they never thought would happen."

Speaking of the Urban Shield program in a video released in September, Dennis W. Sullivan, superintendent-in-chief of the Boston Police Department, sounded oddly prepared. "We have to train for things that may be out of the ordinary," he said, "because we know for them to happen to be ready."

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Nationwide, the hierarchy of emergency management can be staggeringly complex, and the varying power structures within U.S. states — think of how L.A. County covers 88 cities, while New York City contains five counties — make it difficult to get a handle on about who calls the shots.

"Even local businesses these days have response plans in place."

For example: Boston has an Emergency Operations Center run out of the city's Emergency Management. Massachusetts has a State Emergency Operations Center out of the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency. The MBHSR (which includes the Boston Regional Intelligence Center) is a federal jurisdiction that contains responsibilities for the region.

What began as the Cold War-era Office of Civil Defense has long since evolved into a more complex and multi-layered system.

alphabet soup, which poses two related problems for disaster planners: first, how do these agencies communicate when something goes wrong, and second, and more importantly, how does the DHS begin to regulate and standardize city response? It's not always easier for the federal government to lock up with local jurisdictions during

Since 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, experts say, collaboration and communication between agencies and jurisdictions has been one of DHS's highest priorities. "Government agencies are better at talking to each other, coordinating, cooperating," says Stevan Weber, a psychiatry professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago who studies courts, terrorism, and resilience. "They're better at partnering with other entities, local community, and business community."



*Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents arrive at the scene after explosions near the Boston Marathon in Boston, Massachusetts April 15, 2013. (Neal Hamberg/Reuters)*

Though every city has an all-hazard plan by one name or another, it can be difficult to predict how various authorities will interact in a time of crisis. "Coordination is key," says Nelson. Boston's MBHSR, like many regional DHS jurisdictions, is working to implement the National Incident Management Program (NIMS), a national framework for disaster reporting and response.

"When you talk about disasters, it's all about partnerships," says Ken Kondrachine, a disaster specialist at the Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management. Training and coordination are indispensable. Last month, Kondrachine says, L.A. County performed an exercise in response to an imagined 7.8-magnitude earthquake, working out hypothetical scenarios with the National Guard, the Red Cross and dozens of city and county departments in

Not every effort at integration across departments has gone so smoothly. In 2011, the FBI began to develop a network of "fusion centers," cross-agency intelligence centers designed to assist law enforcement, public safety, emergency response, and other relevant agencies and authorities in "preventing, protecting against, and responding to crime and terrorism." The program has had its growing pains: a 2012 Senate investigation found that many centers mostly gathered "irrelevant, useless or inappropriate intelligence," and often operated in a haphazard and frivolously.

The Boston Regional Intelligence Center (BRIC), one of 77 U.S. fusion centers, is not available for comment this week. But Mike Sena, the President of the National Intelligence Center Association, who defended the program after the Senate report, said

designed to operate in exactly the sort of inter-agency crisis situation occur  
"This is what fusion centers were built for," Sena told the *Wall Street Journal*

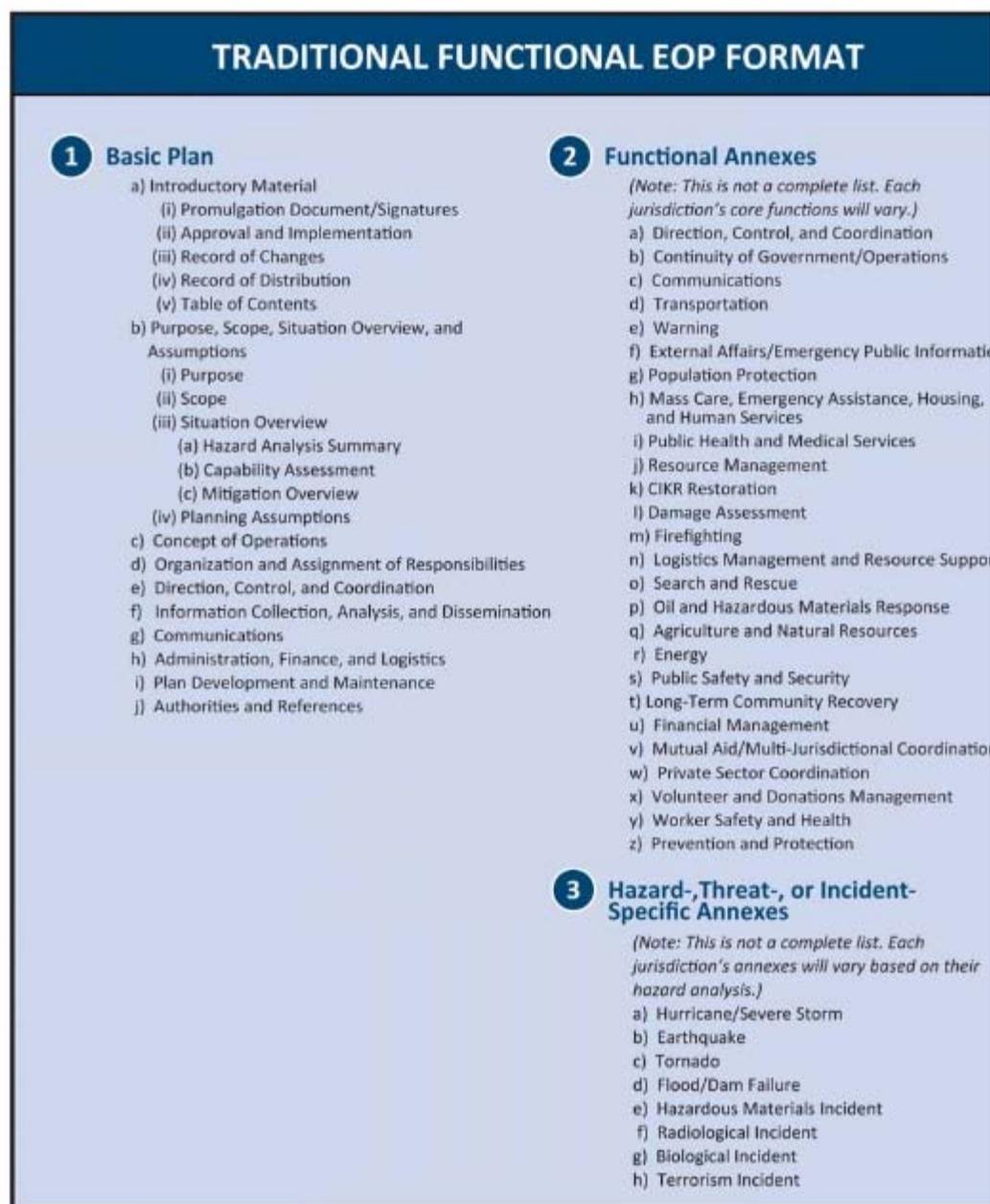


Officials work on Boylston St. three days after two explosions hit the Boston Marathon in Massachusetts. (Lucas Jackson/Reuters)

The DHS has also strived to institute a system of best practices across cities. Cytel's James Baker, the impetus for this is obvious: "If we're doing it one way, you're doing it another way, we should figure out which way is better."

But given the variations in the power structure, not to mention the geographic and structural differences between cities, a standard municipal operating procedure is beyond reach. "Every city has its unique requirements," Nelson says. Additionally, resource allocation varies widely. (New York City receives nearly one-third of the funding; many of the country's populous metros do not receive any at all.)

FEMA's "Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 101" [PDF], released in 2010, positions itself as a textbook for emergency operations plans -- while acknowledging critical differences between cities, and the virtues of bottom-up disaster planning (italics): "This Guide recognizes that many jurisdictions across the country have developed EOPs that address many emergency management operations. The Guide 101 establishes no immediate requirements, but suggests that the next iteration of EOPs follow this guidance."



*Figure 3.1: Traditional Functional EOP Format*

Above, a "functional" emergency operations plan format, which FEMA estimates is the most used EOP. Courtesy FEMA "Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 101."

The Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) further encourages convergence of local and state planning strategies. Established in 2003 under the leadership of DHS and FEMA, EMAP is the country's first accreditation program for all emergency management plans - the first comparative body that holds all municipal, state, and university emergency management plans to a common, respective standard. In November, under the leadership of Fielding, director of the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management, Boston became only four cities nationwide to receive EMAP accreditation.

DHS-funded programs like Urban Shield also help spread best practices between cities as they move from region to region, they share lessons learned. (Two of the accredited cities, Boston and Austin, have also held Urban Shield events.) The Urban Shield simulation also draws dozens of professionals from other, smaller cities to watch and learn.

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Municipal departments also study each other's tactics. While a city like Boston had a hard time learning from New York City -- the world's most sophisticated police department -- it actually *too good to be helpful* (they have over a dozen foreign operatives, and in some countries rivaling the CIA for intelligence) -- it can draw lessons elsewhere.

For U.S. cities, Israel is a particular area of focus. In October, officials from various police departments (though not Boston) traveled to Israel to study counterterrorism and resilience. And Israel is a case study for more than just police: Mass General Hospital in Boston, which received dozens of victims from the Marathon bombings, had previously consulted Israeli doctors to "revamp their disaster-response plan."

Resilience, in particular, is one area in which the Israelis excel -- and one that U.S. authorities have been eager to import to U.S. disaster areas.



*A member of the SWAT team trains a gun on an apartment building during a search for a suspect in the Boston Marathon bombings in Watertown, Massachusetts April 19, 2013. (Rinaldi/Reuters)*

"When you think about political violence, there's 'How do we stop it?', and then there's 'How do we respond?'" says Victor Asal, director of the Homeland Security Center for Resilience at the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy. "One of the key components is resilience -- how do you get back to the way things were. And that's different than finding out who did it."

"In Jerusalem, when a terrorist attack happens," he adds, "if you walk by the site later, you wouldn't know it. They clean it up and they get people going."

*The Atlantic's* Jeffrey Goldberg, writing in *Bloomberg View* on Tuesday, also talks about resilience. A decade ago, arriving at a Jerusalem cafe the day after a terror attack that killed seven people, he found the scene nearly indistinguishable from any other cafe. "There is no satisfactory solution to the problem of mass anonymous violence," he writes. "As a result, resilience becomes the paramount response. Keeping your wits about you as individuals, as a government and as a culture is what counts."

Whether today's Boston lockdown, prompted by the manhunt for Marathon

suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, constitutes a necessary security tactic or a fail resilience is already the subject of considerable debate. "A shelter-in-place magnitude is unheard of," says Nelson, who could not think of a parallel of recent U.S. history. It might be the first time since the Watts Riots of 1965 an urban area has been placed on lockdown.

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