



**EAST CENTRAL TASK FORCE (ECTF) OFFERS SAFETY OFFICER TRAINING
PRESS RELEASE
(FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE)
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More than 30 professionals involved in the field of emergency services gathered last week to participate in a four-day Safety Officer Training Course presented by the East Central PA Regional Task Force. This advanced All-Hazards Incident Management Team Safety Training course, the first of its type to be presented regionally, enhanced the proficiency of the personnel responsible for overseeing the health and safety of responders during emergencies that may arise in the Commonwealth or the nation. An Incident Management Team is a multi-disciplinary team of emergency responders which can be activated to manage major or complex events such as natural disasters, or to assist in large-scale public gatherings. Class members representing Incident Management Teams from the East Central Task Force, the South Central Task Force, and the South Central Mountain Regional Task Force participated in this intensive training opportunity, as did several members of the Pennsylvania State IMT.



The four-day Safety Training Course provided classroom experience, tabletop exercises, and a written evaluation, all designed to build upon the expertise of those involved with their respective regional IMTs. The class was lead by experts from Federal IMTs who have completed extensive training in all areas of safety preparedness and response.

The obvious irony of the timing of the workshop, which commenced just hours after the news of the devastating earthquake in Haiti, was lost on none of the participants. In fact, several members of the class were awaiting their own imminent deployment orders to Haiti as members of various response teams assigned to assist in rescue and recovery efforts in the quake-ravaged country.



“Tragedies such as the earthquake in Haiti underscore the crucial role played by Safety Officers in the field of emergency management,” according to Dr. Joseph A. Cocciardi, Program Professional for the East Central Task Force and lead instructor for the course. He went on to say, “The role of the Safety Officer is critically important in emergency situations. Not only is this person responsible for the development and recommendation of protocols designed to ensure the safety,

welfare, and accountability of incident personnel, s/he is also charged with the identification, anticipation, and mitigation of hazardous conditions in advance of operations. The Safety Officer’s responsibility cannot be overstated – all facets of preparedness and oversight concerning issues of safety fall to this officer, both in the planning and in the execution of all response activities.”

Bob Orrill, Battalion Chief of the Flagstaff Arizona Fire Department, was one of the two-member instructor team, and shared experiences gained over 25 years of service. “Classes such as this provide the opportunity to get people together to study curriculum content and to learn from the shared experiences of the other participants. The networking among constituents provides an excellent forum to review and expand upon appropriate processes for managing emergent events.”

The East Central PA Regional Task Force, serving Berks, Columbia, Luzerne, Montour, Northumberland, Schuylkill and Wyoming counties, is committed to providing comprehensive, on-going, state-of-the-art training to all members of its Incident Management Team. Each team member is assigned to primary and secondary roles within the group, and role-specific educational opportunities are provided to equip all with the content area competencies that will be called into play in the event of emergency situations and large, pre-planned public events.

This is the second in a series of specialized training courses offered by the ECTF; in December, Liaison Officers gathered for a similar experience. Upon completion of this training, several members of the ECTF IMT put their skills to good use as Liaison Officers at regional H1N1 Mass Vaccination Clinics conducted by the PA DOH earlier this month. Both of these trainings utilize protocols developed and required by the National Incident Management System (NIMS), a FEMA initiative developed for incident response following 9/11.

Walter Peters, Montour County Emergency Management Coordinator and Chair of the East Central Task Force, commented on the positive outcomes of trainings such as this. “Sessions such as these provide an unparalleled opportunity for members to engage in team-building, not only with members of their own regional teams, but also with their counterparts from teams across the state. Our IMT has completed extensive training and is well-prepared to serve the region in the event of an emergency.”

Former East Central Task Force Chair Arthur D. Kaplan, under whose leadership this workshop was planned, was equally pleased with the event. “This inter-regional networking enhances the response capabilities for all involved, as well as ensuring optimal information-sharing and resource assistance in the event of an emergency.”

The training session ran from January 13-16, and was held at Bloomsburg University.

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