

## **Interview: H. Doug Hoell, Director, North Carolina Division of Emergency Management**

*Doug Hoell began his career in emergency management in 1976 as an administrative officer with the Raleigh-Wake County Emergency Preparedness. Two years later he moved on to the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management (NCEM), serving as a trainer with later an operations officer. He later worked at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) before returning to NCEM in 1997, becoming assistant director in 1998 and director in 2005. He is a graduate of North Carolina State University.*

### **Could you give our readers a sense of your primary responsibilities and what a typical day or week is like?**

My responsibilities are first and foremost to serve as leader of North Carolina's emergency response team. And my function takes into account everything from preparation for grand-scale disasters to the organization of the response, to the long-term recovery. We also measure the mitigation program here in the state of North Carolina, but we deal with all-hazards: Everything from natural disasters, to potential technological disasters, to even the unthinkable; the terrorism events. Our days run full-tilt. It's quite frankly a lot of meetings. I meet with representatives from all agencies of state government; I meet with local emergency managers, local county managers, with the (North Carolina) League of Municipalities, with the Association of County Commissioners, with the elected officials, members of our General Assembly, we meet with the representatives from the governor's office. I serve on a number of task forces, one in particular that I've recent gotten appointed to in North Carolina is for hazardous material and hazardous waste issues that we might face based on our response to the chemical plant fire we had in Apex a couple weeks ago. In addition to that, I manage the long-term recovery for the 2004 hurricane season. Our general assembly appropriated \$247 million to deal with problems that weren't covered by FEMA's disaster recovery programs. I've been administering that money, and we have the homeland security program in our division in which we work very closely with the Division of Crime Control and Public Safety Secretary Brian Beatty to administer the homeland security program through our agency, so we have quite a bit of responsibility, actually.

### **What are the top issues you focus on?**

I would have to say that one of my top issues is mutual aid. In all honesty I believe that mutual aid is the key to our success. And when I say that, I think that there's no way in today's world that every city or county—or state government for that matter—can have all the resources that they're going to need in response to grand-scale disasters. You can use Hurricane Katrina for a grand-scale disaster example. They had to borrow resources from other communities whether they were inside the state of Louisiana or Mississippi, or whether they were outside those states through the emergency assistance compact, so mutual aid is a big focus of ours both here in North Carolina. I also serve as the chair of the EMAC committee, that's the Emergency Management Assistance Compact for the

National Emergency Management Association, so I have some responsibility there as well.

**What's your professional background, and how has that helped you out in your current job?**

Well I've spent my whole career—30 years—in the emergency management business. I started in emergency management at the local level of government in 1976 as an administrative officer here in Raleigh-Wake County. I graduated from there, so to speak, and went to work for state government as a trainer in the emergency management business, becoming an operations officer in the emergency management business at the state level. I left state government and went to work for a contract group in the Southeast region doing training for FEMA Region 4 back in the late 70s early 80s. I ultimately went to work for FEMA in Region 4 in the radiological emergency preparedness program, and then I transitioned back to North Carolina as a field manager for the division. I had an area of counties in the northeast area of the state, and then ultimately went back to NCEM as assistant director and I was promoted to director in July of 2005. So I've had a 30-year career in this business and it's all been in the emergency management business. I've worked at the local government level so I have a sense of what kinds of issues problems are experience there. I've worked at the federal level so again; I have a sense of how we relate from a state and local perspective to the federal level and how they relate back to us. So I think that I have a well-rounded experience. It's given me a lot of different perspectives, and allows me to function as a state director with a sense of where everybody's coming from.

**What's the biggest challenge of your job?**

There are a lot of challenges that come our way. The biggest challenge would be getting everybody to understand that we're all part of a significant team. The team is not just an emergency management system. It takes into account public works and public health and fire and EMS and law enforcement and all of those different disciplines to come together to do the business of emergency management. So there has to be an overall plan. There has to be a recognition on the part of all those who contribute that they're part of a team effort, and there has to be leadership that stands forward and leads the whole team to do things, even in incidents that aren't necessary in big disasters. It's why the (U.S. Department of Homeland Security's) National Incident Management System program is so important. We learn to operate and work under a unified command, so that we all understand the same basic principles and we can come together from different walks of life and do what's necessary.

**What's surprised you the most in your job?**

The biggest challenge is that I have as a state director is trying first of all to manage a budget, and to make sure that we have the funds necessary to accomplish a task that we're charge to do in our division. What we're trying to do is move our budget down to the lowest level so that everybody has a hand in it, and quite frankly it hasn't been

managed that way in the past. So we're trying to move the budget pieces down to the people that are out in the field trying to do the job. Empower them to do the job, give them the tools to do the job, and hold them accountable and responsible for doing the job. I think that's been successful here in North Carolina. People are enthusiastic. We've got people who have been around for a long time that want to do a quality job, and I'm just very fortunate to be in a leadership role with a group of people that are professional and want to do what's necessary.

**What kind of cooperation do you get from the federal government?**

We deal pretty directly with FEMA Region 4, and they have been a quality group of people. Quite frankly most of them—or a lot of them—I have known for years because I've been in this business so long. But in recent times my discussions have been with the director, David Paulison, the FEMA director, and George Foresman, (DHS') undersecretary for preparedness, and those are two people that are really trying to do a quality job. I just think they're giving it all that they've got to try to fix things that they believe need to be fixed, and bring the right people together. So I have nothing bad to say about the federal government. Again, my experience has been good in disaster response, in activation for real emergencies, so I think that things are all really positive for North Carolina and for where our program stands.

**If you could change your relationship with the federal government, how would you?**

In terms of homeland security I would change how programs and monies are rolled out. I would make sure that we had more lead time for quality planning. I know it's an effort in progress, and consequently there are short lead times and there is a "hurry-up and go" to invest this money, but I think that if we had more lead time, and could do quality planning on where we wished to invest the homeland security dollars that are coming in on building better capability, better quality jobs could be done. I think that we've got to partner with the federal government because again, as I said, no state, no county, no city is going to have all the resources that they need, so we're going to have to borrow from our partners at the federal level in terms of response and support when we have big disasters, and we're going to have to borrow from each other through mutual aid, so those are out things that need to work hand-in-hand. They ought to be compatible programs.

**How do the sources of your budget and spending break down?**

Our sources of money are state appropriations and appropriations from the federal government, primarily the emergency management performance grant, and then we also get a contribution from the private sector through the radiological emergency preparedness program at the nuclear power plants. We have four nuclear power plants that we deal with here in the state of North Carolina. So those are three main sources of revenue: state appropriation, federal appropriation, and the nuclear power plants. Our state funds are for our personnel, and they pay for our operating cost. We've tried to build robust capability in the state of North Carolina. Also, the homeland security dollars we get have contributed to trying to build mobile components in our state for medical surge,

for search and rescue, for response to chemicals and biological and radiological and that sort of thing through our hazardous materials response teams; we've tried to build the capacity to deal with special medical needs when they need to be moved from one location to another, so we're trying to invest the money that we receive from all of the sources in building capability. I'm a firm believer in building mobile capability. Build components, but make sure that whatever components you build, if they're not needed in a particular city, they can be moved to another through mutual aid.

**Are the federal fund all-hazards or are they earmarked for specific incidents?**

I think that they are labeled all-hazards, but there tends to be more of a terrorism focus on the funds, I suppose, as far as homeland security funds go. But we have been invested in things that we believe could be used for terrorism events, but could also be used for hurricanes, or tornadoes, or winter storms or other things. Our medical surge capability is something that we believe has a practical use in all hazards. Our regional response teams for hazardous materials were of great value to us in our recent fire with environmental quality over in Apex, and have proven themselves time and again where we needed them in big disasters.

**What has the state learned from hurricanes, and how does it help in other areas?**

I think we have a well-defined system and a lot of that has grown out of our response to hurricanes. It certainly works for us. We have divided the state into three geographical regions: basically an eastern region, which is our coastal plane; a central region, which is our Piedmont; and a western region, which is our mountains. And for each region, we have a central office that becomes a regional coordination center whenever we activate for threats or actual events. Those regional coordination centers have to file an incident action plan with our state emergency operations center, and we commit to them physical resources, and they can dispatch those resources as need be to respond to incidents or emergencies that are happening in their area of responsibility. At the same time, we stand up the state emergency operations center, and we have an inventory of resources that belongs to the state that can be deployed directly out to local governments or can supplement or add to the inventory in our regional coordination centers. We work very closely together. We also have a warehouse that we operate for the stocking of and delivery of commodities that need to be delivered to local governments, we use a critical incident management system that is Web-enabled or Web-based so we can share information back-and-forth from our local governments at our state EOC. And our response quite frankly to preparation for the nuclear power plant facilities we have to do those exercises every six months. I think we've built a system that is just well-organized, and it's all NIMS-compliant.

**Has the state conducted any exercises? What have you learned?**

We have done exercises, including this past spring on pandemic flu. That's new territory for all of us, so we worked very closely with our partners at public health, and with a number of our local jurisdictions and we set up an exercise to walk through the problems

that might face us if we had a pandemic flu event. There are a lot of things there that lead you to think, "Gosh, we haven't thought about that." I can't say to you that we solved every problem, but we're following up with after-action reviews, we're looking to improve upon our current planning, and we're looking to potentially do more exercises like that some time next spring to build on what we learned from the last. It's a different environment when you're thinking about as many as 40 percent of your employees may or may not show up for work either because they think that they're going to get the flu or they've actually contracted it. So it presents you some significant challenges: distribution of limited resources to combat the flu, and allowing people to continue normal life, in terms of where their food is going to come from and are the services still going to be provided. There are lots of challenges with something like that.

**Does your office work with the private sector to share intelligence and plans for response and resilience?**

That's new territory for us as well. We do work with the private sector in the energy arena. I say that because Duke Power and Progress Energy are both partners in our emergency operations center. Whenever we crank it up for business, they come to help us with issues in their area of concern. We participate with business continuity planners. There are two groups in North Carolina that we meet with on a frequent basis: the Contingency Associates of the Carolinas, or CPAC, out of Charlotte, and the Business Continuity Professionals of the Carolinas in the (Research) Triangle area, BCPC is their acronym. We try to talk with them about ways that we can better complement each other's actions in a crisis.

**What are your agency's goals for the coming year?**

We want to build a credentialing program for our emergency managers in this state. We want to improve upon the education process for them, and build them a professional credential that they can be recognized as professionals. What we're doing is we're building a certification program in North Carolina, and we're using our partnership with our community college system. And what we hope to do, parallel to achieving a credential in the business of emergency management that one would also be able to achieve some level of college credit and perhaps even degrees through our community colleges, on up to a bachelor's degree, on up to our universities if they chose to go down that path. But if you take a course for emergency management credit you ought to also get college credit at the same time. So we're trying marry those things up and make there be some value to what we're offering. We want to continue to work on the mutual aid program and by that one of our focus areas is going to be packaging and typing of resources. That's something that simply has to be done, and we're going to take it on as a serious challenge this year and see how much we can accomplish. So our effort is to build a strong team here in North Carolina between ourselves, our local governments, and multiple agencies that have role or a responsibility.

