Leading during a disaster is not easy. How you perform will matter in profound ways across your community. Many will measure their lives in terms of what they were like before and after the event. Perform badly and people will suffer physically and economically; perform well and it will lessen the impact of the disaster on their lives.

Emergency managers rarely speak from a position of power. Instead they are typically layers down from the seats of power in the jurisdiction. Yet when a disaster occurs, it will be their job to step to the forefront and lead a group of people who are not used to working together, who are under tremendous pressures to accomplish the seemingly impossible task of restoring normality as quickly as possible. This is all done under the scrutiny of the press, outside agencies, and the public.

If operations go well and the community returns to normality in a timely fashion, the elected officials will garner all the credit. If
operations do not go well, the emergency manager will be blamed and set up as the scapegoat. Yet being an emergency manager in just such a situation can be one of the most challenging and gratifying jobs around. Knowing that you have led your community back from devastation to recovery provides a profound sense of accomplishment. But the kind of leadership needed to accomplish this does not come with a job title. It must be earned over time.

How effective a leader an emergency manager is during a crisis is not determined when the disaster occurs. It is determined long before a disaster strikes by the relationships the emergency manager establishes within the community. An emergency manager holds a unique position within the bureaucracy. He or she is responsible for the response of the entire community to a disaster. Yet he “owns” no single resource needed to accomplish this goal. He must influence departments, agencies, and people across organizational lines of authority if he is to accomplish his job. The ability to develop this kind of cooperation among a volatile mix of organizations and people under stress does not suddenly emerge. The stage is set long before a disaster threatens.

It involves a lengthy process to lay a groundwork of expertise, trust, policies, and procedures. Through this preparation an emergency manager will be able to overcome the chaos that follows a disaster. The process requires patience, courage, expertise, and a stubbornness to overcome the organizational resistance that is natural in any bureaucracy. It is absolutely essential if an emergency manager is to lead the community’s efforts.

Disasters require an unprecedented and completely unique level of coordination both within the community as well as with outside agencies. Not only are everyday lines of authority broken into entirely new organizational structures, but also the organizations themselves and the individuals who run them must work together to accomplish a completely new set of tasks under the added pressure of time and public scrutiny.

This is a new organizational paradigm that calls for a new type of leadership role. A role where the emergency manager has no “official” power over these various organizations, yet his leadership is accepted and recommendations are followed. This new leadership style requires that the emergency manager make recommendations to
officials who are their superiors. They must speak truth to power, a
skill that comes from trust and is developed over time.

Leonard J. Marcus and Barry C. Dorn of Harvard University, with
Joseph M. Henderson of the U.S. Centers of Disease Control and
Prevention, discuss this leadership style at length in their ground-
breaking 2005 paper “Meta-Leadership and National Emergency
Preparedness.” The key points of the paper are distilled into an execu-
tive summary, “National Preparedness and the Five Dimensions of
Meta-Leadership of the National Preparedness Leadership Initiative,”
a 2007 Joint Program paper by the Harvard School of Public Health
and the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. There
are five major points emphasized in this leadership style.

**Meta-Leadership**

1. A meta-leader has the ability to instill confidence in other leaders within
his community through his expertise or “frame of reference.” He is able to
present the correct “choice points” so the best decisions for the
organization and community are made.

2. A meta-leader has situational awareness; with often incomplete
information he creates a broad frame of reference for the team as a whole,
thereby presenting the team with the proper choices at the proper point in
time. The leader is able to chart and present the progress of those
decisions so a continuous situational awareness is retained even in a
fast-moving and confusing environment.

3. Meta-leaders lead their silo—they develop subordinates into similar
leadership roles within their spheres of responsibility so they have a team
of people who foster the same types of relationships with their
counterparts.

4. Meta-leaders lead up—they guide their bosses. Not by political
manipulation or bureaucratic maneuvering but by becoming a “fair
witness” by speaking the truth to power from a point of accepted
expertise and not self-interest. If a leader trusts a subordinate to give
recommendations that are in the community’s best interest, then he will
follow those recommendations. During a disaster what is best for the
community as a whole is best for the any elected or appointed official.

5. A meta-leader leads cross-agency connectivity. Long before a disaster
strikes, a meta-leader establishes relationships of mutual respect with
other departments, bureaus, and agencies by respecting the expertise of
these individuals and the need for that expertise during a disaster. The
emergency manager clarifies their roles and establishes relationships that
will function during a disaster.
These five tenets are the guiding principles for emergency managers if they are to become effective leaders during a disaster.

**HOW TO BECOME A CRISIS LEADER**

This roadmap for an emergency manager to create a place in the community had not been articulated when I began my career in emergency management. Prior to the landmark disasters that came to define emergency management—Hurricane Hugo, Hurricane Andrew, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina—emergency management was a sleepy backwater in a busy bureaucracy. Resources were scarce or nonexistent; little attention and just plain indifference surrounded the job. Despite my jurisdiction being located in Florida, it had been over 30 years since a hurricane directly struck our community, and the intuitional memory of its effects had been lost. The city was unprepared and complacent about any disaster, much less a hurricane.

Yet it became my job to prepare my city for such eventualities. With no models to follow I approached the job using strategies that seemed to make common sense. Without knowing it I used meta-leadership tenets as defined by Marcus, Dorn, and Henderson in their groundbreaking paper to carve out a respected leadership role in disasters and disaster preparedness.

The meta-leadership definition distills years of my own lessons learned. This style of leadership is not one that will be bestowed on the emergency manager upon his appointment; rather it is one that will be earned by creating such a role in an existing organization. It will require time, effort, and patience. It is not an organizational style that will necessarily be rewarded. The value of the role will only become apparent when a disaster or crisis threatens.

Ideally an emergency manager would report directly to the most senior elected official of a community. More typically the office of emergency management is buried in another department. In my case it was the fire department. Fire departments are one of the more common departments for emergency management at the local level, but it can be located in almost any department. At the writing of this book the Florida Division of Emergency Management is under the Department of Community Affairs. The placement of most offices of emergency management under another department and not in direct
control of the jurisdiction’s response resources is the reason the meta-leadership model works so well for any emergency manager.

The fire chief had the official title of emergency manager for the city, and he reported to the mayor. I worked directly for him, and it was with his voice that I spoke when I went to meetings or coordinated with other departments. To be able to represent an appointed official, you must develop a good working rapport. When the chief appointed me as the emergency manager, he added it to two other jobs I already performed for him.

There is no set model across the county; it will vary from state to state. In Florida counties are required to have an emergency manager. Cities are not required to do so, but depending on their size some feel the need to have one. Unless they are required to have one, most communities do not have the money to fund a full-time emergency manager. So, as in my case, it is given to someone as a second responsibility.

Once he appointed me I was able to spend enough time discussing emergency management with him to develop an approach that we both felt comfortable with. That did not mean we spent a large amount of time on the subject; he expected me to spend the time needed to accomplish the tasks, then brief him on the progress. Planning and developing relationships with other departments was up to me. He literally had other fires to put out as well as budgets, the union, and the administration all competing for his time. No matter what department an emergency manager works for, it is critical that he develop a working trust with the head of that department. It also must be known that the manager represents the department head on the subject. It provides him with the cachet needed to begin developing the needed relationships.

While being a designee was important, it was only the first step. It did not give me the respect as a leader with other departments that would be needed during a crisis. That level of respect was going to have to be earned over the next months and even years. This lack of respect is not out of pettiness; instead it came from a realization that should a disaster strike, the careers of these officials would be on the line. Until I proved myself as a trusted advisor, they would be reluctant to take recommendations from someone when their performance and their department’s performance would be so closely scrutinized. That respect would have to be earned.
BECOME THE EXPERT

Part of the answer to becoming a crisis leader in your community is to become the authority on disasters and how to respond to them. If you are appointed, you must have credentials, but that does not necessarily make you an expert in the eyes of others in your community. You become an expert in the eyes of others by continuing to learn, by striving for more certifications and education. The continued pursuit of additional education and training creates the image of someone truly interested in their subject matter.

But simply accumulating more training, education credits, and degrees is not enough. You must go above and beyond what may be considered normal qualifications. One way is to read as much about the histories of disasters as you can lay your hands on. (See the reading list in this book for some good titles to start with.) History is context. Look for detailed histories filled with firsthand accounts that are rich in detail. The kind of detail that can be translated into specific impacts a similar event would have on your community. These details will become recognizable issues for your community that you will be able to use to plan and emphasize during training. These historical details will make the training more compelling and relevant.

A couple of excellent examples that should be on every emergency manager's reading list are *The Great Influenza* by John M. Barry and *City on Fire* by Bill Minutaglio. *The Great Influenza* is a richly detailed account of the pandemic that ravaged the world in 1918. It describes specific details of its impact on society and the disruption it caused in cities across the world. The authors go into the particulars of how some cities took precautions and were able to ameliorate the impact of the disease, while others did not take those same precautions, with terrible consequences. It was a source of more useful information than any other during the Bird Flu and Swine Flu scares.

*City on Fire* details the explosions of two cargo ships carrying ammonium nitrate in the Texas City harbor just after World War II. The devastating effects are the closest you will ever come to understanding the impact of terrorist use of a tactical nuclear weapon on a U.S. city. This book should inform any emergency manager responsible for developing plans for such a contingency.

Another rich source of information are the reports of lessons learned created after major disasters. They are not consistently
produced, but there are some excellent resources with the kind of
detail that will provide you with rich information. The Internet is
your primary source for these reports; searching on the type of disas-
ter will bring up a range of sites that can be farmed for what you
need. Find them, read them, print then out and start a library. If they
are detailed enough to include timelines, and specific minute-by-
minute accounts, they are an excellent source of ideas and informa-
tion for the creation of exercises and training.

When you teach a class or lead an exercise, referring to specific
problems or consequences in previous disasters only adds weight to
your point. It also quiets the "that would never happen" skeptics
who always seem to be included in any audience. So when they ques-
tion an issue or problem because it could not really happen, you can
simply quote the source and explain why you included it in your
training. This is also a tactic that works well in meeting rooms as you
fight for money and resources; few can argue with actual events. Your
knowledge of past disasters also reinforces your role as an expert.

Whenever you use an example from a previous disaster, make
sure you make the point that our society is becoming more and more
fragile and susceptible to to disruptions caused by a disaster. Any
disruptions in power will be magnified significantly. An example is
included in a study done by the Urban Institute of the University of
North Carolina at Charlotte on the effect of Hurricane Hugo on that
city. They found that 80 percent of the businesses in the city had been
severely or moderately affected by the hurricane. The top cause of
this damage was loss of electrical power. Something as simple as the
long-term loss of power leads to severe impacts on businesses and
emphasizes the fragility of today's society and the fact that the his-
torical impact will be magnified by the complexity and interdepend-
dence of today's world.

While you should read widely about disasters, do concentrate on
your community's most common or direct threat. In Florida our most
common threat is, of course, hurricanes. So I became a weather geek.
I read everything I could on hurricanes and the affects they had on
communities. I taught myself how to read the hurricane products cre-
ated by the National Hurricane Center. I found some of the earliest
software online that showed the modeling of the storms and how the
forecasters used them to make their forecasts. I started tracking
storms long before anyone else. I was constantly trying to get smarter
about storms, their histories, and the effects on the community. This was after Andrew but before the constant barrage that seems to have attacked the state in the last few years. As I mentioned earlier, a storm had not affected my community in over 30 years. This meant there was no intuitional memory of what that would mean in terms of damage and disruption of services. The same holds true for almost any type of recognizable threat to your city, county, or state. It is your job to learn as much about the possible impact as you possibly can.

For my trouble I was called everything from somebody justifying my position to “Chicken Little.” It was not until the first storm threatened our community and I briefed the senior staff that the importance of what I had emphasized become apparent. I briefed the staff on the projected course, what the impact might be, and as of the current forecast when they could expect to feel the first effects from the storm. I made recommendations about the preparations that should be made by each department and set a time frame for the next update.

At the end of the meeting one of the senior public-works administrators came up to me and said, “That was the briefing I had always hoped to receive before a storm.” The various department heads were able to make the best decisions about preparations they would have to make and when they would have to make them.

By becoming the recognized expert who is truly interested in the field you have chosen and can be depended on to deliver timely information to decision makers, you can carve out an important role in your community. If you get drawn into the day-to-day bureaucratic infighting, you will be seen as just another official jockeying for position. If you are going to direct the disaster operations for your city, you must be seen as an impartial advisor and expert.

**BECOME A TRAINER**

The role of trainer is critical in establishing your leadership authority in your organization. Develop classes aimed at the specific audiences in your community—fire, law enforcement, public works, etc. Teach the classes using emergency-management needs as a lever to build two-way communications of ideas and expertise. Understand that you are standing in front of subject-matter experts in their fields; respect their knowledge because you are going to need it during a
disaster. As you teach the classes, involve them by asking them as a police officer, firefighter, or public-works expert what they see as issues or solutions to the problems presented. Involve them and respect their input because, depending on the disaster, you will need them to take a lead role in the response. Specific types of disasters require some very specific skill sets, and you as an emergency manager will have to work closely with the needed subject-matter experts.

Develop a series of classes for the various departments individually and together to build disaster-response expertise. These classes should lead up to a full emergency-operations center (EOC) exercise with all of the various departments in attendance. The objective of this exercise is to bring together the various individual skills sets and begin to build a team. As you plan the exercise, make sure it is understood that this is not a test of their skills. This is a learning experience for everyone. This is very important. Professionals with years of experience do not like to be put in a position of being tested like a school kid. Instead, emphasize the need to pull all the various "experts" together to allow them to practice their new skills. At the end of the exercise hold an informal "hot wash," a give and take about what went right and wrong. Do not stand in front of them and point out their mistakes. Instead, ask them what they thought about the exercise and what they thought went right and wrong. You will find they will be harder on themselves than you ever would be and have insights you had missed.

Since hurricane season has a specific beginning calendar date, it provides an ideal excuse for an exercise. We convinced the administration to have a hurricane exercise to raise awareness and prepare for the upcoming season. I researched lessons learned from Hurricanes Hugo and Andrew and drew up a timeline and scripts of problems for each department. We sent out reports of the training hurricane's approach for several days. Each day the reports of the storm escalated as it approached the coast. I led a class on EOC procedures the day before the exercise to make sure all participants were comfortable in their roles. I borrowed radios so controllers could report problems as if from the field just as they would in a normal storm. I had off-duty dispatchers give situation reports and pass on problems just as they would during a normal storm.

The exercise was a success, and the participants felt as if they had received good training that would translate to a real emergency. The
hot wash after the exercise produced a very useful list of deficiencies that needed addressing. The exercise was a success.

Not long after the exercise a real tropical storm struck our area of the state. We geared up for real. The storm turned out to be a minor one, but everyone felt more confident in his or her roles. Afterwards I received what I thought was one of the biggest compliments of my time as emergency manager. One of those who had participated both in the exercise and the storm response said, "Your exercise was harder. The storm was a piece of cake." That one well-planned exercise went a long way to validating my role within the community.

**BECOME A FACILITATOR**

Each department in your community will need to develop its specific section of the comprehensive emergency management plan (CEMP) for your jurisdiction. Do not simply ask a department to develop a plan to include in your overall plan and then leave it without some guidance. Hold planning sessions with each of the department's staff given the responsibility to produce this document. Explain that you are there for two reasons, to help with any questions about how the plan might fit within the larger document and, just as important, to learn as much as you can about how their department works. Understanding how your community's critical infrastructure works is a vital piece of knowledge for an emergency manager. You do not have to become an expert in all the fields, but you do need to understand each department at a systems level. Assist in the development of their expected action guides (EAG). (See Chapter 3.) Establish relationships within the department with the midlevel personnel. These are the individuals who make the department work every day. They will be the ones with the responsibility to hold it together during a disaster.

The purpose of this role is twofold: to assure that the departments within your community have a plan that works within the CEMP and to establish you as a fair advisor. By this I mean someone whose agenda is the protection of the community and not a personal one. It also establishes you as someone who is interested in their departments' particular problems and who wants to assist them in their efforts and by doing so to accomplish the overall goal of preparedness for your community.
This is a difficult and politically sensitive line to walk. Some departments are very insular and resistant to outside "intrusion." You may need an ally to gain access. In my case the city manager let it be known that she expected departments to cooperate with the development of the plan. Once it became known that I had her blessing, many doors opened. While you may be able to walk in that door, it will still be up to you to establish the relationships needed. All of the critical response departments have very specific cultures and skill sets, and acceptance in each will be a challenge. If you can gain access and facilitate at least parts of their planning process, you will have accomplished enough to build a working relationship.

**USE IT OR LOSE IT**

If you have managed to jump the hurdles and have the beginnings of a community-wide emergency-management team the next step is to move from training to actual activations. A disaster does not have to occur to have an excuse to bring at least some of the team together. A major special event takes a lot of coordination between law enforcement, traffic, vendors, and the venue staff. Open a makeshift emergency operations center as a convenience to those managing the event. The cross-departmental communication will lay the groundwork for a disaster response. Take advantage of every opportunity to show how emergency management would work, and you will begin to build a team before the disaster strikes. It can also provide some unexpected benefits.

During the Florida wildfires of 1998 our city was never threatened. The state was burning around us, but my county was never affected to the extent that others were by the fires. So we, along with other fire departments within the county, became a resource for manpower and equipment through mutual-aid pacts across the state. The city eventually had units and personnel in five different counties. This was not strictly an emergency-management problem given the fact that only one department was affected, but we were able to take advantage of the situation to demonstrate the importance of citywide coordination.

The fire chief had me establish a makeshift EOC in a conference room to track our units and manpower around the state. We moved some computers into the room, set up projectors, and began to put
together a picture of where and what our units were doing. We used fire-department personnel to staff the room and to coordinate the city's efforts. When the mayor wanted a briefing on the situation, the chief brought her to our thrown-together EOC. She was impressed. Impressed enough to give us permission to establish a mini-EOC in that conference room permanently.

We secured a State of Florida grant that allowed us to equip our new mini-EOC with projectors, TVs, computers, and office furniture. Once everything was installed, we realized that it made the perfect wired class or conference room. We made it available to any department needing a room with multimedia capabilities. It was used for classes and presentations from then on by a number of different departments. When we were threatened by hurricanes, it was ready for use for our briefings. The mini-EOC established the need for a larger, more complex facility to serve everyone and led the city to build a permanent EOC in the city's new combined communications operations center.

When you are able to activate your system, even if it includes only part of the team, it establishes your role in the community and provides practice for the larger events. Our room became well known because of its use for classes and presentations. On 9/11 it was filled with people from all departments watching the feeds from all of the media outlets, both local and national. I eventually had to ask them to leave to prepare for the mayor, but it had done its job by establishing the need for a central point for information for the city. The same would hold true for any jurisdiction.

**ULTIMATE GOAL**

I started this chapter by explaining how establishing a meta-leadership role within your community is vital to accomplishing your job as an emergency manager. The meta-leadership model includes situational awareness as one of its strengths. This situational awareness should be developed so that it is shared with the community as a whole. Given the vast amount of information needed to manage a disaster, creating an understandable frame of reference that reflects the situation requires the construction of a system that feeds the proper information to the proper personnel at the proper time. This type of system is difficult to be turned on like a light switch when a
disaster occurs. Instead, the infrastructure within a community must be there and working. Once you have established yourself as a metaleader within your community, you must begin to make emergency management part of the community’s everyday operations.

Emergency management, if it is to truly function as needed during a disaster, must create a functionality and role that establishes its visibility and value in the community daily. We cannot simply sit in a corner and write plans and provide training and then expect to step into the role we must fill during a disaster. We need a daily role. The local law-enforcement agency, fire department, information systems, traffic control, and public works all have specific and well-defined roles. Their responsibilities and the reason for their existence and funding are accepted without question; the only real arguments concern the extent of their funding. This is not true of emergency management. Even today post-9/11 and Katrina most offices of emergency management are understaffed and underfunded.

There is a role that is emerging in many communities that needs to be filled. Technology has emerged to the point that geographic information systems (GISs), global positioning systems (GPSs), digital radars, and a myriad of other technologies are affordable and available to communities. These technologies allow a community to track in real time everything from traffic to the location of each law-enforcement patrol car and fire-engine company. If properly coordinated they can be used for real-time decision making in daily community operations. It would amount to a city or county operations center with feeds from law enforcement, fire, traffic, and public works all coalescing in one place. In this age of terrorism and increased security I would call it the Warning Point. (I will explain in a minute where I stole the idea and name.)

Emergency management would be in charge of running and disseminating the information as needed. Should a disaster strike, all the technology needed to run the Warning Point would then be available and already in use for the response. It would be collocated with the EOC, and all you would have to do is to turn on the EOC lights. There are two real-life examples that if combined would fulfill the concept of the Operations Center/Warning Point.

The State of Florida established a State Warning Point as the clearinghouse and situational-awareness center for all major incidents within the state. The state established a set of minimum standards for each incident report that were trigger points so that only the most
serious would be reported. The point of the effort was to have an ongoing understanding of all the major emergencies in the state that could impact a county, region, or even the state as a whole. The following is a list of the incidents needing reporting.

The State of Florida Warning Point Incidents to Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>Incident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aircraft Incident</td>
<td>Nuclear Power Plant Drill/Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Disease</td>
<td>Biological Threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bomb/Threat</td>
<td>Petroleum Spill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking Water Facilities</td>
<td>Radiological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy Emergency</td>
<td>Railroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment Crime</td>
<td>Search and Rescue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire-Brush/Forest</td>
<td>Security Nonspecific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire-Major Structure</td>
<td>Severe Weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Sinkhole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazardous Materials</td>
<td>Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wastewater</td>
<td>Migration/Immigration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Warning Point is an effort to not only maintain statewide awareness of all significant incidents but to exercise the system, to keep the communication lines open to the counties all of the time so they could establish lines of communication within their own response community. It is manned 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It provides totals of the types of incidents and their status on a daily basis. Trends can be followed and progress can be tracked on statewide issues.

A county or city emergency-management office could serve as just such a Warning Point for its jurisdiction with no extra equipment or technology; all that would be needed is the establishment of a set of priorities for which incidents are reported by each department each day. A report could be generated each shift or day of the major incidents within the city and disseminated to all departments. This could be accomplished by a set of Core Liaisons (see Chapter 10) assigned to the Office of Emergency Management (OEM). Or it could be accomplished informally with the right relationships and the right political climate. This simple report would begin to establish emergency management as part of the day-to-day operations of a jurisdiction. The final goal would be a significant and long-term project but one that I think is worth the time and effort to take on given its power for the community.

I saw what the future should look like in the late 90s when I was sent to Houston, Texas, to research an upcoming project. Houston TranStar is a consortium of four government agencies to provide
transportation and emergency-management services to the Greater Houston area. It is made up of the Texas Department of Transportation, Harris County; The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County; and the City of Houston. It lists as its two main goals traffic management and emergency management.

TranStar leverages the multiple traffic technologies to manage and monitor traffic around Harris County and 50 miles to the coast through sensors and cameras. Emergency management has its EOC above and overlooking the operations floor. It has its own technology that includes an automated flood warning system, Doppler radar imagery, satellite weather maps, road flooding warning systems, and the regional incident management system.

To walk onto the operations floor is to feel as if you have entered into the war room at the Pentagon. It is two stories high with an open architectural plan with something on the order of 50 separate desks with operators sitting at each. The front of the room has floor-to-ceiling display screens with constantly changing views of the traffic throughout the metropolitan area. If an accident is reported or detected by cameras or other technology before being reported to the authorities, the cameras will stop their random views and focus on the accident and the surrounding traffic.

FIGURE 1.1 The TranStar operations floor with representations from numerous local agencies. Photo courtesy of TranStar.
FIGURE 1.2  Law Enforcement officers coordinate with transportation officials. Photo courtesy TranStar.

Figure 1.3  Emergency Management officials coordinate with other agencies. Photo courtesy of TranStar.
Representatives from the various traffic agencies; the road rangers who respond to non-accident-related problems; the relevant police, fire, and EMS agencies; and even the local radio station providing local up-to-the-minute traffic reports all are aware of the incident at the same time. Everyone needed to manage the problem sits in the same room and has the same situational awareness of the events so they can begin to take the appropriate action together.

In 2009, according to their annual report, TranStar managed 14,527 incidents and 138,000 operator-activated messages for everything from traffic alerts and rerouting to amber, silver, and blue alerts.

It costs an estimated $27.7 million a year to run, but TranStar estimates that the benefits in better, faster, and more efficient traffic and incident management translate into a $274 million saving or 9.9 to 1 benefit-to-cost ratio per year. TranStar took years of effort and team building to accomplish, but it stands as the first generation of community operational centers. It allows leaders to run day-to-day operations more efficiently and also to more effectively manage any disasters that may strike. It should be the goal for every emergency manager.

Figure 1.4 Transportation officials keep a close eye on traffic flow. Photo courtesy TranStar.
CONCLUSIONS

This chapter is an effort to give someone new to emergency management or even an experienced emergency-management professional a blueprint of how to establish oneself as a meta-leader and crisis manager in his or her community. Emergency management as a profession is still in its infancy. It roots go back only to the 1970s and the formation of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as a separate federal agency. No one today can point to a clear career path. Instead, there are a number of ways to enter the profession and as many different interpretations of what the job entails.

My career path was a real-life example of what the Harvard Study has so clearly defined. While it was first identified in the rarified atmosphere of a university, its outline of the needed skills of a meta-leader are a perfect outline of the skill set an emergency manager should possess:

- Become an expert not just through certification, education, and classes but through any and all means you can find to learn about disasters.
- Have a continuous working situational awareness of your community’s threats and disasters.
- Lead up by becoming a trusted advisor to leaders within your community
- Lead across all professional silos by developing yourself as an expert, trusted advisor, and facilitator to other departments.
- Develop subordinates who are also meta-leaders and expand your office’s ability to lead during a disaster.

Mine was not the only path to become an emergency manager, but it holds lessons for everyone. I was not connected politically when I was assigned the job, nor did I have specific expertise. I just had an interest. If you are lucky enough to be appointed as an emergency manager, it does not mean that the authority and respect will naturally follow. Use the meta-leader example as your guide to become a real crisis leader in your community so that if you are faced with a true disaster you have the skills and relationships needed to perform your job to the best of your ability in very difficult times with lives and property on the line.