

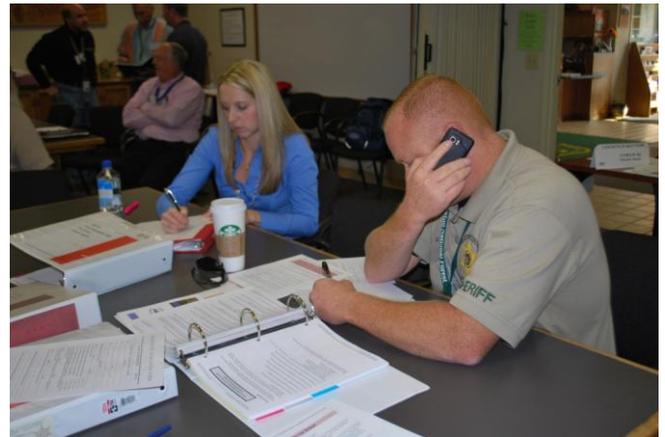
Emergency Exercises: Building Partnership and Experience

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Take a large earthquake, mix in an uncontrolled release of water, add communication outages, and fold in the spicy nuances from response cookbooks in California's Glenn County, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Reclamation's Mid-Pacific Region... and what have you got? Emergency management!

At the Mendocino National Forest Office in Willows, a group of people from the Corps' Black Butte facility, Glenn County Sheriff's and Public Health offices, the Orland Unit Water Users Association and Reclamation came together to deal with the challenge of working through a large-scale seismic event exercise.

The realities of dealing with a large earthquake near Reclamation facilities are complex. In a real event, there would be communication outages, roads would be closed or out of service, casualties and injuries would occur, natural gas lines could rupture and the list goes on. In an exercise, in order to not get too complicated or unmanageable, only certain capabilities are tested to see how they work and to build familiarity and confidence in people who will need to respond. The capabilities of search and rescue, water management and flood control, emergency planning, structural damage assessment and communications were the objectives for the October 2011 exercise.



During that exercise, as personnel at the national forest office were dealing with the seismic scenario, personnel at Reclamation's nearby Stony Gorge Reservoir received a simulated distress call via 911 dispatch from a father and son fishing on the lake. A group of the Region's Northern California Area Office rangers exercised their patrol and search pattern and procedures to rescue the pair. Twice they got stuck on sand bars due to the low level of the reservoir (for real) and twice they figured a way to continue the mission. When they found the mannequins that had been prepositioned to simulate the father and son, the rangers practiced triage, first aid and CPR. Through the use of Glenn County's Amateur Radio Emergency Services operators, contact was made with 911 dispatchers to call out a "medi-vac" to the site.

Meanwhile, dam operators at Stony Gorge and the nearby East Park Dam assessed simulated damage to the facilities and called in reports that were relayed to the Keswick Control Room. The senior operator at Keswick made use of the Region's new multi-facility Emergency Action Plan to notify necessary Reclamation and local agency contacts.

Corps engineers met to deal with the seismic event and also the simulation of increased water flowing to Black Butte from simulated damage at the Stony Gorge facility. Corps operations worked through their emergency response actions and notifications. Operational responses were carried out to mitigate the problem of the simulated large inflow.

Each organization involved in the exercise was able to complete their tasks, build an understanding of the emergency response process, gain confidence and practice, and make recommendations on how to improve their capabilities. The exercise participants met and worked with their agency counterparts to build a foundation of trust and cooperation. Everyone walked away from the exercise feeling more confident and able should an emergency situation occur--and that was exactly the goal.

