CSEPP Public Information Officers Pilot New FEMA JIS/JIC Course

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A new FEMA Joint Information System (JIS)/Joint Information Center (JIC) training Course (G-291) was pilot tested by public information officers from the Umatilla, Ore., Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness (CSEPP) site July 27-29 at Washington State Emergency Management (WSEM) in Camp Murray, Wash.

Since its inception, CSEPP, part of the National Preparedness Directorate, has worked to ensure emergency public information capabilities are in place at each CSEPP site. CSEPP provides funding for each community to employ public information officers to plan, exercise and, when necessary, carry out the important task of informing the public during a chemical incident.

The National Incident Management Systems (NIMS) encourages communities to use a JIS and, in a disaster, a JIC to coordinate emergency public information. Four CSEPP public information officers (PIOs)—Steve Horwitz, FEMA CSEPP Public Affairs Officer; Cheryl Seigal Layman, FEMA public affairs officer assigned to FEMA’s Hermiston, Ore., Field Office; Steve Sautter, CSEPP PIO for Benton County, Wash.; and Mark Clemens, CSEPP PIO for Washington State Emergency Management—helped develop the new NIMS training course on JIS/JIC operations. They were part of a larger collaboration between FEMA’s National Integration Center (NIC), the Emergency Management Institute (EMI), PIOs from the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) and PIOs from the National Information Officers Association (NIOA).

Layman, Sautter and Clemens joined with WSEM’s lead PIO, Rob Harper, to make up the instruction team that delivered the one-day pilot course on July 28. “We routinely use CSEPP PIOs from both Washington and Oregon to help teach Basic PIO courses in both states,” said Layman. “This cadre of experienced PIOs will be a good group to help pilot the new JIC/JIS course.”

CSEPP has developed training courses on JIS/JIC operations and extensively trains and exercises emergency public information plans and procedures. “CSEPP PIOs built on the extensive use of JIS/JIC concepts during CSEPP exercises and non-CSEPP emergencies,” Clemens said, “to bring unique insights to the new NIMS course.”
Student and instructor feedback from the pilot course will help finalize the curriculum, which EMI plans to export to states this fall. Planning is also underway to develop a JIC Master course.

In addition to the JIS/JIC course that was piloted in Washington State, the CSEPP PIOs assisted in the development and pilot testing of new PIO Awareness (G-289) and Basic PIO (G-290) courses in Arizona in June.

“Teaching PIO courses is good for both the students and the instructors,” Clemens said. “We stay current on the latest trends in emergency public information, build our regional JIS, and provide interested students an opportunity to work a JIC during CSEPP exercises,” added Layman.

Fortunately, there has not been a major incident involving the chemical stockpile, but CSEPP-trained PIOs have used their skills during natural disasters, including responding to the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.