Houston skyline. Courtesy of Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC).
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County Judge Ed Emmett, Director
Harris County Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Management
Each and every day, partnerships and collaboration are making our community better prepared and more resilient.

TranStar, the first facility of its kind in the nation to combine emergency management and transportation under one roof, is the region’s epicenter for homeland security and emergency management. Harris County, METRO, the Texas Department of Transportation and the City of Houston collectively facilitate transportation management, and emergency planning and response. With an eye to the future, a major expansion is under way to make TranStar operations even more efficient.

The Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management is a national model of best practices in emergency planning, preparedness, response and recovery. In a dynamic region with more declared disasters than most states, the formula for success is the engagement of all levels of government, the business community and volunteer organizations. Public safety is our common goal and a shared responsibility.

A new hazard mitigation action plan update takes a coordinated approach to reduce threats to life and property from the disasters most likely to occur in Harris County, be they natural or man-made. Participants in the plan include 28 cities, the Harris County Flood Control District, Harris Health System and dozens of stakeholders. The robust plan includes input from the most essential partners—members of the community.

Together we build partnerships that make us better prepared and have collaborative plans in place that make us resilient.

Sincerely,

County Judge Ed Emmett, Director
Harris County Office of Homeland Security
& Emergency Management
Gas pipeline fire in east Harris County, January 2013.
Mission Statement

The Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HCOHSEM) will be a national model of best practices in emergency planning, preparation, response and recovery.

HCOHSEM will help prepare, safeguard and protect the residents and property of Harris County from the effects of disasters through effective planning, preparation, response and recovery activities. To accomplish this mission, HCOHSEM will:

- Develop, maintain and coordinate a comprehensive emergency management plan.
- Activate and staff an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to coordinate and support efforts to respond to, and recover from, emergencies and disasters.
- Develop and assist in the delivery of effective public outreach programs.
- Collect, provide and disseminate information for elected officials, the media, our residents, partners and other stakeholders.
- Train, educate and prepare for emergencies through the development and delivery of effective classes, drills and exercises.

Gas pipeline fire in east Harris County, January 2013.
Downtown Houston. Courtesy of H-GAC.
HCOHSEM exists to enhance safety and preparedness in Harris County through strong leadership, collaboration and meaningful partnerships. Its goal is to protect lives and property by effectively preparing for, preventing, responding to, and recovering from all threats, hazards and emergencies.

Every year, HCOHSEM becomes more efficient in its emergency management role. This success is due to its all-hazards approach and strong partnerships with federal, state and local partners.

HCOHSEM continuously maintains, reviews and updates plans, annexes, appendices and supporting documents that guide preparedness, response and mitigation activities that can be applied to any disaster affecting the region.

Its proximity to the Gulf of Mexico makes Harris County vulnerable to hurricanes; however, the area experiences its share of other incidents including floods, winter storms, wildfires, hazardous material and industrial accidents.

Harris County has the largest population in Texas with almost 4.2 million residents, making it the third most populous county in the United States. There are 34 cities in Harris County; this includes Houston, the nation’s fourth largest city. The county government is the primary provider of basic services to the 1.6 million people that reside in the unincorporated part of Harris County. There are 54 fire departments, more than 125 law enforcement agencies, 22 major watersheds and more than 1,200 municipal and public utility districts.

Brays Bayou during severe weather incident, October 2013.
Tropical Storm Andrea, June 2013. 
Courtesy of NASA GOES Project.
Despite predictions for a busy 2013 hurricane season, the United States was spared from any significant tropical weather and had the least number of hurricanes since 1982, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The first storm of the season, Tropical Storm Andrea, was the only system that made U.S. landfall. Most of the storm systems developed and stayed in the mid-Atlantic Ocean or closer to Africa. HCOHSEM kept a close eye on storms that entered or formed in the Gulf of Mexico.

Through the end of November, a total of 13 tropical systems formed in the Atlantic Ocean with Humberto and Ingrid being the only systems strong enough to become hurricanes with sustained winds of 74 mph or greater.

Some weather experts believe the amount of dust blowing out of Africa could have contributed to lower intensity storms in 2013. Also, an upper level wind pattern with strong wind shear kept tropical systems from getting stronger.

![2013 Hurricane Tracking Chart.](Image)

*2013 Hurricane Tracking Chart. Courtesy of National Hurricane Center.*
United States Coast Guard patrols Houston Ship Channel. Courtesy of Port of Houston Authority (PHA).
HCOHSEM is prepared to quickly adapt to changing events and situations. Through effective situational awareness, HCOHSEM prepares the community, protects lives and secures critical infrastructure against natural and man-made threats. It also develops, reviews and coordinates emergency management programs to meet the region’s homeland security goals and needs.

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND KEY RESOURCES
Securing critical infrastructure and ensuring its resilience is a shared responsibility of federal, state and local government, as well as the private sector and individual residents. All entities play an active role in keeping it strong, secure and resilient.

Harris County faces significant challenges in preparing for, responding to and recovering from disasters. Of particular concern are the impacts that natural hazards (including hurricanes, wildfires, floods and droughts) have on the region’s critical infrastructure systems.

Enhancing partnerships with the private sector has emerged as an urgent goal. To accomplish this, HCOHSEM works closely with various business associations, the Department of Homeland Security, local first response agencies and fusion centers.

HCOHSEM’s Emergency Management Coordinator serves on the State, Local, Tribal and Territorial Government Coordinating Council (SLTTGCC). The SLTTGCC supports geographically diverse partnerships to ensure state, local, tribal and territorial officials play an integral role in national critical infrastructure protection and resilience efforts.

CYBER SECURITY
HCOHSEM is dedicated to the protection of cyber security infrastructure through the identification and mitigation of vulnerabilities, monitoring cyber events and promoting cyber security awareness within the region.

In 2013, HCOHSEM’s Public Information Officer was appointed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to serve on the Communica-
Severe weather activation, October 2013.
tions Security, Reliability and Interoperability Council (CSRIC).

The CSRIC is a federal advisory committee that provides guidance, expertise and recommendations to the FCC to improve the security, reliability and interoperability of the nation’s communications systems. The council addresses issues concerning emergency alert systems and cyber security.

HOUSTON SHIP CHANNEL SECURITY DISTRICT (HSCSD)

The HSCSD is a public-private partnership that provides security and safety for facilities, employees and communities surrounding the Houston Ship Channel. It supports projects and initiatives that enhance the capabilities, communications and joint operational readiness of existing first responder, law enforcement and regional organizations. Its projects and services increase preparedness and response capabilities needed to address potential security threats within district boundaries.

The Harris County Sheriff’s Office, which heads the HSCSD, was recognized at the 2013 Government Security News Homeland Security Awards for its 24/7 security monitoring program.

HARRIS COUNTY SHERIFF’S OFFICE (HCSO)

The HCSO Emergency Management Unit at TranStar assists with daily operations, situational awareness and training events. Officers also help coordinate planning and response activities with military forces, maintain and update homeland security emergency plans and participate in various drills and outreach programs.

In 2013, HCSO participated in numerous events and activities including the Texas State Guard Battalion training, Southeast Texas Regional Advisory Council’s Mass Casualty Management Symposium, Department of State Health Services exercise, Physical Security Information Management workshop, the Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Initiative workshop, Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services full scale exercise and the 2013 Emergency Management Summit. They also hosted foreign dignitaries, including the Mayor of Monterrey, Mexico.

Port of Houston fireboat.
Courtesy of PHA.
HCOHSEM fulfills response and recovery roles during widespread emergencies or disasters.

**EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER (EOC)**

HCOHSEM’s Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is activated for small and large-scale emergencies or special events. Emergency incident response and coordination serves to help the community recover from the harmful effects of disasters. In 2013, the EOC was activated 14 times.

Construction continues at TranStar to expand HCOHSEM facilities. A new and larger EOC will provide additional office space for HCOHSEM employees and emergency management partners. The expansion project is expected to be completed in 2014.

**ON-CALL**

HCOHSEM is on-call 24-hours, providing response partners with access to a trained staff member for the reporting of significant events and after-hour resource requests. Calls range from severe weather information to assistance requests for high impact chemical spills.

In 2013, HCOHSEM documented 2,532 notifications, requiring more than 734 hours of staff time.

**INDUSTRY**

HCOHSEM’s industrial liaison responds to industrial incidents and supports the Harris County Hazardous Materials Response Team on large-scale incidents. The liaison provides updates and information for HCOHSEM and its stakeholders and also serves as an on-scene safety officer.

HCOHSEM is active in nine Industry Community Advisory Councils and Panels and multiple Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs); and works with many fire and EMS associations and workgroups.

In 2013, HCOHSEM responded to the following industrial incidents:

- Skid fire at a major pipeline facility
- Trimethylacetyl chloride release at a chemical facility
- Explosion at a gas facility
- Acetylene cylinder fire
- Compressor shutdown at Houston Ship Channel
- Liquid propane tanker truck accident
- Scrap metal facility fire
- Boron trifluoride leak

Starting in 2014, HCOHSEM’s industrial liaison will be stationed at the new United States Coast Guard (USCG) facility located at Ellington Field. This will allow for a more rapid response to the industrial areas of east Harris County.
Disaster Recovery Communications workshop.
HCOHSEM manages, develops and updates emergency plans based on an all-hazards approach. The plans follow local, state and federal requirements.

In 2013, HCOHSEM revised and updated 23 annexes and 19 internal plans including the following:

SECURITY, WATER, ENERGY, ACCESSIBILITY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS (SWEAT) PLAN

The SWEAT Plan provides a process to ascertain situational awareness about accessibility and availability of Security, Water, Energy, Accessibility and Telecommunications during a post-disaster situation. Various county agencies and local jurisdictions within Harris County assess their operational status and capabilities of each SWEAT element to generate a county-wide report to aid in recovery operations. In 2013, the Planning Section reviewed and revised the SWEAT Form, SWEAT Operations SharePoint Site, SWEAT Standard Operating Guidelines and each SWEAT element to ensure all critical aspects of recovery operations are thoroughly addressed.

BUSINESS COMMODITIES PLAN

The Business Commodities Plan is based on partnerships between the public and private sectors. The plan provides critical points of contact and locations of major grocers and retailers that offer life sustaining commodities within Harris County. The plan allows the county to determine the impact to the retail infrastructure, need for Points of Distribution (PODs) by location and overall response level necessary for basic commodities.

HCOHSEM also created three new internal plans in 2013:

AVIATION INCIDENT PLAN

The Aviation Incident Plan provides guidance and procedures for coordinating resources to support emergency response to an aviation incident that affects unincorporated areas. While many aviation incidents occur during takeoff or landing near the airport, the potential exists for an aviation accident to occur within Harris County, outside of George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH), William P. Hobby Airport (HOU) or Ellington Airport (EFD). Harris County will coordinate response to aviation incidents that affect the unincorporated areas of Harris County outside of IAH, HOU and EFD.

RAILROAD EMERGENCY PLAN

The Railroad Emergency Plan outlines a comprehensive plan for law enforcement, rescue, medical and firefighting operations to combat the effects of a major rail disaster. The plan establishes procedures that protect life and property in the event of a rail emergency.

COMPREHENSIVE RECOVERY PLAN

The Comprehensive Recovery Plan provides strategies and guidance for communities impacted by a disaster. The plan guides recovery actions that result in a resilient, safe, physically accessible, sustainable and economically strong community. These actions address long-term community recovery planning, housing restoration and reconstruction, economic recovery, infrastructure and lifeline restoration and reconstruction, continued provision of public safety and security, continued community services, and protection of natural and cultural resources.
Communications Points of Distribution (POD) drill, September 2013.
The Logistics Section provides quality logistical support and resource management by providing equipment and services including budget, administration, communications and information management.

Logistics maintains and updates applicable plans and participates in exercises and training activities. It also maintains facilities and infrastructure for emergency operations by ensuring that equipment, supplies, materials and services are readily available.

Logistics is actively involved with the planning and design of the new EOC and the technical systems that will be installed, while maintaining the existing EOC to ensure readiness during the transition.

In 2013, the logistics team accomplished the following:

- Completed State of Texas certified Communication Unit Leader and Communications Technician training to ensure the highest level of interoperability in radio communications, video services, telephony and satellite connectivity.
- Completed the FCC mandated rebanding, narrow banding and digital transition ahead of schedule and is currently assisting other law enforcement and fire departments with interoperability, as well as providing training for regional partners.
- Developed portable radio/computer remote systems as a regional asset to assist smaller jurisdictions with communications in disasters.
- Developed training for Point of Distribution teams to ensure a continuity of operations can be successful. Exercises continue into 2014.
- Became the charter Military Affiliate Radio System Emergency station in Texas with 10 licenses for its Amateur Radio station and remote kits. This allows for usage of non-amateur military radio frequencies and procedures to be used as a backup to normal public safety tools.
- In cooperation with the American Radio Relay League, completed 14 Amateur Radio license test sessions with more than 70 new licenses or upgrades being issued.
- Completed a major radio project allowing for direct communications with the Houston Chapter of the America Red Cross. This allows communications regardless the status of land line, cellular and internet.

Harris County Flood Control District staff in EOC during severe weather activation, January 2013.
Harris County Community Services staff at POD drill, September 2013.
The focus of HCOHSEM’s training and exercise program is on the capabilities of operational communications, public information and warning, and health and human services.

HCOHSEM participates, promotes and provides numerous training opportunities for partners to help in the continual development of essential emergency management skills and to introduce new technology. Such trainings included ongoing courses in National Incident Management System (NIMS), continuity of operations, joint information centers and various communications courses.

HCOHSEM hosted six exercises and participated in more than 28 partner exercises throughout the region, including the following:

**REGIONAL JOINT INFORMATION CENTER (JIC) FUNCTIONAL EXERCISE**

Lessons learned from past events have reinforced the importance of getting accurate and timely information to the public. The Regional JIC serves as one of the most important points of coordination before, during and after an event.

In 2013, HCOHSEM hosted the Regional JIC functional exercise. Close to 100 federal, state and local public information professionals, representing more than 50 organizations, participated in this exercise that tested and evaluated public information during a disaster.

**RAIL HAZARDOUS MATERIALS VIRTUAL TABLETOP EXERCISE**

HCOHSEM and several other county departments participated in a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) virtual tabletop exercise alongside the cities of Humble and Houston to test response capabilities. The scenario involved a chemical release from a train derailment. This unique tabletop provided the opportunity to coordinate face-to-face with other local response organizations and correspond virtually with nine other communities. This was accomplished via conference calls and through video teleconferencing technology.

**COUNTY STAGING AREA (CSA) - POD TRAINING AND DRILL**

HCOHSEM and the Harris County Community Services Department held a POD drill focused on the testing of communications equipment and standard operating guidelines between the CSA and the Harris County EOC. This two-day event was a result of lessons learned from Hurricane Ike, as well as our 2012 full-scale hurricane exercise. The drill gave participants who serve as part of the CSA the opportunity to review the county’s current POD plan and test communication capabilities when standard methods go down. This drill served as an initial stepping stone into an eventual functional exercise.

Other partner exercises included:

- United States Coast Guard SecureEx Functional Exercise
- Regional Allocation Distribution and Dispensing Strategic National Stockpile Full-Scale Exercise
- Texas Medical Center Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Tabletop Exercise
- Various LEPC and industrial exercises
7th Annual CERT Rodeo Round-up, February 2013.
HCOHSEM works jointly with the Harris County Citizen Corps building resilient communities through education, training and volunteer service. This makes communities safer, stronger, and better prepared to respond to the threats of terrorism, crime, public health issues and disasters of all kinds.

HARRIS COUNTY CITIZEN CORPS

Each year, the Harris County Citizen Corps creates opportunities for local residents to volunteer to help their communities prepare for and respond to emergencies, and 2013 was no exception.

With a database of more than 80,000 volunteers contributing millions of training and service hours in the past 11 years, the Harris County Citizen Corps membership includes 19,788 trained volunteers involved in 250 Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT); 21,537 volunteers from 24 Volunteer in Police Service agencies; 3,727 volunteers from the Medical Reserve Corps; 5,515 volunteers from the 336 neighborhoods participating in the USA on Watch program; and 24 Fire Corps agencies. With more than 10 million hits, its website harriscountycitizencorps.com is a trusted source for preparedness information and training opportunities.

This year, FEMA awarded an honorable mention to the Harris County Citizen Corps for its outstanding work providing CERT training to the deaf and hard of hearing community. The 2013 Individual and Community Preparedness Awards honor the innovation and achievement of individuals, Citizen Corps Councils, and non-profit, faith-based and private sector organizations around the country. Harris County Citizen Corps, in partnership with HCOHSEM and the Houston Center for Independent Living, collaborated to provide training for the deaf and hard of hearing. The effort began in 2009, and in 2012, Harris County Citizen Corps introduced the first CERT Basic Training Course lead by a deaf instructor.

CERT RODEO

The 7th Annual CERT Rodeo successfully rallied 37 CERT teams from around the region and state in an intensive and challenging environment where they demonstrated the knowledge and skills learned during their training. This competition required participants to work collaboratively with their teammates and test their skills in various areas including: basic medical operations, search and rescue, fire suppression, incident command, and other aspects of emergency preparedness and response. The purpose for the CERT Rodeo is less about winning, and more about honing skills, developing relationships with first responders and other volunteers, and sharing best practices. This annual event is a realistic example of how well trained disaster volunteers can effectively assist their community when a disaster strikes.

HARRIS COUNTY CITIZEN CORPS HONORS STUDENTS

The Harris County Citizen Corps recognized two Huffman Independent School District students for their courageous actions last October after the school bus they were riding swerved off the road and into a ditch. Sixteen year old ROTC cadets, Charles “Patrick” Payne and Kade Baldwin, courageously rendered aid to fellow students and to their bus driver who was pinned to the steering wheel. Both students had gone through the Teen CERT program at Hargrave High School earlier in the year.

Harris County Citizen Corps recognizes Huffman ISD students.
Regional Joint Information Center functional exercise, July 2013.
Communications

HCOHSEM constantly improves its collaborative approach of providing the public with timely and accurate information before, during and after an emergency. HCOHSEM works directly with emergency management and media partners to deliver important public safety information to area residents.

During the past few years, the Regional JIC has become a one-stop shop where people can get information directly from the source. The JIC concept is catching on and growing in the field of emergency management.

REGIONAL JIC FUNCTIONAL EXERCISE

In 2013, HCOHSEM partnered with the Houston/Galveston Regional Public Information Officers Network, the Central Texas Coastal Area Committee, Witt-O’Brien’s, Huntsman Corporation, Houston Downtown Management District, the Fort Bend Office of Emergency Management, the North Texas Public Information Officers Group, the Regional JIC Group and other local emergency management communication experts to produce an exercise that involved the collaboration of multiple JICs.

The exercise was a huge success because it allowed participants to test plans that were implemented from lessons learned from prior incidents. An after action report helped identify what worked well and what areas needed improvement.

SOCIAL MEDIA

HCOHSEM effectively utilizes social media to communicate with Harris County residents. All public safety information that HCOHSEM posts on its JIC website is also posted on Facebook and Twitter.

VIRTUAL COUNTDOWN TO HURRICANE SEASON

HCOHSEM partnered with Clear Channel Outdoor to launch the very first virtual countdown to the start of the 2013 Hurricane Season on digital billboards located within the county. A total of six digital billboards and five traditional billboards displayed preparedness messages throughout hurricane season.

The previous year, Harris, Galveston, Fort Bend and Brazoria counties partnered with Clear Channel Outdoor to form the Gulf Coast Emergency Communications Network (GCECN). The GCECN works with emergency managers to provide and display vital emergency information on area digital billboards to keep commuters informed during a disaster.

HURRICANE IKE REPORT

On the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Ike, HCOHSEM released its “Hurricane Ike Five Years Later: A More Resilient Community” report. The report summarizes the actions the county has taken to improve response and recovery capabilities since this major hurricane impacted the upper Texas Gulf Coast in 2008. It also focuses on internal issues that have been addressed to improve the county’s ability to handle disasters.

NEWS & PUBLICATIONS

HCOHSEM partners year round with the news media to provide the public with accurate and timely information when an emergency occurs. Last year, close to 300 inquiries and interviews were provided for the television, radio and print media.

Emergency Management Magazine profiled HCOHSEM’s public information officer as a Major Player in its November/December 2013 issue.

Digital billboards keep commuters informed during a disaster.
Hurricane Workshop at George R. Brown Convention Center, June 2013.
A strong public outreach program is a key part of HCOHSEM’s mission to encourage personal disaster preparedness. Each year, HCOHSEM works closely with private sector partners, faith-based organizations, school districts and other groups to promote an all-hazards approach to disaster preparedness.

**NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE HURRICANE WORKSHOP**
The largest and best attended hurricane preparedness event each year is the National Weather Service’s Hurricane Workshop that is held at the George R. Brown Convention Center. In 2013, more than 3,500 residents from Harris and surrounding counties discussed hurricane preparedness with elected officials, local television meteorologists and other experts.

**MEDICAL COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS EVENTS**
HCOHSEM works hard to ensure that our public education program is accessible by as many groups as possible. Last year, HCOHSEM worked with the medical community to participate in health and safety fairs at several major hospitals. In May 2013, HCOHSEM joined the annual Texas Children’s Hospital Bridge Event which draws more than 1,000 employees of the Texas Medical Center as well as patients and their families. Similarly, HCOHSEM participated in events at Lyndon B. Johnson and Ben Taub hospitals at the invitation of Harris Health Systems.

**HOMEOWNER ASSOCIATIONS**
One of HCOHSEM goals for 2013 was to engage community and homeowner associations as a means of improving our preparedness culture. The Greater Houston Neighborhood Association’s annual seminar and trade show last February served as the kick-off for that effort. Hundreds of homeowners from all parts of the county gathered to hear an address by Harris County Judge Ed Emmett and learn more about improving disaster preparedness in their neighborhoods. This event led to nearly a dozen events at homeowner association meetings throughout the year.

**INDUSTRY**
HCOHSEM’s petrochemical industry partners represent some of the most safety conscious groups in Harris County. In 2013, HCOHSEM collaborated in more than 20 presentations at safety meetings for companies such as Baker Hughes, Chevron, ExxonMobil, BP and Schlumberger.

**PREPAREDNESS MATERIALS**
During the course of 2013, HCOHSEM and Harris County Citizen Corps members distributed more than 20,000 hurricane preparedness brochures and more than 50,000 “disaster wheels,” DVDs, Citizen Corps publications and other preparedness items. Nearly all items were available in multiple languages.

**EOC TOURS**
In 2013, more than 900 visitors toured the Harris County EOC and TranStar, including almost 100 dignitaries from Azerbaijan, China, Ghana, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Nigeria and Singapore. Harris County organizations, businesses and residents can request a presentation or tour by visiting www.readyharris.org and completing the online request form.
Joint Information Center Exercise: Disaster Communication on a Regional Scale

SUMMARY
Harris County, Texas is the third most populous county in the United States, home to the nation’s largest petrochemical center and vulnerable to multiple serious weather threats. Communicating to this diverse and growing community, the 10th largest U.S. media market, in a disaster is a monumental challenge. The Harris County Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Management (HCOHSEM) and its regional partners in both the government and private sectors staged a Joint Information Center (JIC) exercise to test their ability to communicate with the public, and each other, from multiple JIC sites.

DESCRIPTION
The JIC Functional Exercise took place on July 24, 2013. Along with HCOHSEM, the Central Texas Area Coastal Committee (CTAC), Fort Bend Office of Emergency Management, the Houston-Galveston Public Information Officer Network, the Houston Downtown Management District, Huntsman Corporation and the Galveston County Public Information Officer’s group each stood up a JIC. In all, 97 Federal, state, and local public information professionals representing more than 50 organizations participated. Many of those agencies use a PIER Systems website as the core of their public information efforts. PIER, a division of Witt-O’Brien’s, generously gave their time and technical expertise before, during, and after the exercise to ensure that exercise play was as realistic as possible.

This exercise was the largest hurricane exercise in the five years since Hurricane Ike in 2008. In addition, it was the first to incorporate multiple JICs.

The scenario centered on Hurricane Polly, a mock-Category 4 storm that caused heavy rain, flooding, and devastation across the region and an ethylene oxide spill into the Houston Ship Channel. Before landfall, more than 2 million residents evacuated the region, including 20,000 evacuees sheltered at the AT&T Stadium in the DFW Metroplex.

The exercise validated two crucial emergency public information pieces. First, multiple JICs throughout the region were able to communicate with each other and the public using a common technology interface. By using the PIER RSS feed feature, different websites could communicate consistent information to different communities in the region with no additional effort and with a negligible lag time.

Second, the involvement of private-sector resources, such as the Houston-Galveston PIO Network and Huntsman, expanded the base of public information talent. This infusion of trained PIOs allowed the JICs to stand up and begin distributing information faster.

The JIC Functional Exercise was successful in that it allowed HCOHSEM and its regional partners to operationally test communications plans that were implemented as a result of lessons learned during hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Ike. The lessons learned from the exercise will be incorporated into updates to the HCOHSEM JIC and Emergency Operations Plans. Future PIO training will be developed based on LLIS.gov defines Innovative Practice as successful and innovative procedures, techniques, or methods developed and/or implemented by the emergency management or response community to adapt to changing circumstances that others may wish to emulate.

DHS innovative practice document highlights HCOHSEM and its regional partner’s collaboration on the 2013 JIC exercise that incorporated multiple JICs.
EXCELLENCE IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AWARD

The Emergency Management Association of Texas (EMAT) recognized HCOHSEM for the development and implementation of its Situational Intelligence Gathering Tool for Emergency Response (STINGER). The system enhances HCOHSEM’s ability to obtain situational awareness information and maintain a more accurate operational picture during a critical incident.

STINGER is a proprietary geo-spatial monitoring tool developed internally by HCOHSEM and is operable from any computer with internet access. Compared to traditional methods, it has decreased initial situation information gathering time by 70 percent.

The Excellence in Emergency Management Award recognizes outstanding state and local emergency management projects, activities and campaigns that further the goals of saving lives and protecting property by mitigating, preparing for, responding to, or recovering from disasters and emergencies in Texas. The award was presented at the 2013 EMAT Annual Awards Banquet in February 2013.

FEMA INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS AWARD

FEMA recognized the Harris County Citizen Corps’ deaf and hard of hearing community CERT program with an Honorable Mention at the 2013 Individual and Community Preparedness Awards for making our communities safer, stronger and better prepared for any disaster or emergency.

The Harris County Citizen Corps, in partnership with HCOHSEM and the Houston Center for Independent Living, will continue collaborating to provide training for the deaf and hard of hearing.

DHS INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) included the 2013 Regional JIC Exercise on their Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov) website where emergency management partners share information that can help others with their planning, training and operational practices.

This innovative practice document highlights HCOHSEM and its regional partners ability to communicate effectively with the public and each other from multiple JIC sites.

The Regional JIC Exercise was also profiled in the International Association of Emergency Managers newsletter.