

Lost Time = Lost Lives: A Case for Enhanced Inter-Operability in International Relief Operations

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A disaster occurs and the world responds; a scenario that is becoming increasingly familiar. When every minute counts in the successful rescue of disaster victims, time lost due to misunderstandings and incompatible routines can be critical. Mutual cooperation between responding elements is essential.

One means of achieving such cooperation is through standardization. The desirable levels of such standardization are, in ascending order: 1) compatibility; 2) interoperability, 3) interchangeability; and 4) commonality.

While universal standardization obviously would produce the ultimate results, the capacity of nations to meet stringent compatibility standards, particularly for equipment, will vary considerably. The application of common terminology to functional elements, position titles, facility designations, and resources would be a significant first step enhancing the ability of multi-national organizations to work together.

While many jurisdictions, particularly in North America, have embraced the Incident Command System (ICS)² model for site-level emergency management, there still remains a considerable shortfall in universality. In an effort to promote operational effectiveness and to improve efficiency in the use of scarce resources in an international disaster scenario, this presentation will examine some realistically achievable initiatives, such as:

- 1) Common terminology — organizational functions, resource³ elements and facilities, status conditions;
- 2) Common identifiers — colours and/or symbols;
- 3) Integrated communications — single language (English); and
- 4) Standard response structure.

Footnotes

1. The process of developing concepts, doctrines, procedures and designs to achieve and maintain the most effective level of interoperability in the fields of operations, administration and material.
2. A standard emergency management system addressing, amongst other things, terminology, identification, and facilities.
3. Primary and secondary support equipment.

Keywords: communications; disaster; emergency; health; identifiers; interoperability; terminology; structure

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Review of Disaster Medicine and Regional Medical Resources after the Chi-Chi (Taiwan) Earthquake

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After the Chi-Chi (Taiwan) earthquake, it became apparent that more effort was needed from civilians and the government to establish an emergency medical service (EMS) in our country. There is too much apathy in our training of doctors in Disaster Medicine. The Disaster Medicine doctor is important as response coordinators and planners for inter-organizational resource management. This article suggests that each organization follows an existing plan and establish a Geographic Information System (GIS).

Keywords: assistance; Chi-Chi (Taiwan); Disaster Medicine; earthquake; geographic information system; information; physicians; Taiwan

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