

Health officials finalizing inauguration prep

By Sara Michael
 Examiner Staff Writer

As Inauguration Day nears, Baltimore-area hospitals are finalizing plans and testing systems to ensure they can handle a possible influx of patients.

"The hospitals have really kicked in with encouraging staff to develop primary and backup commuting plans to get staff there," said Fran Phillips, deputy secretary for public health services at the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

Hospitals have been checking schedules and adding staff to handle any injured or ill sent to Baltimore from Washington, D.C.

Officials have estimated that of the more than 1 million expected to attend President-elect Barack Obama's inauguration Tuesday, about 10,000 will visit satellite clinics near the National Mall. About 300 will be transported to area hospitals.

At the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore, officials have been reminding staff to allow extra time to get to work and anticipate traffic or public transportation delays, said

Did you know?

A fleet of law enforcement personnel, including about 600 officials from 17 agencies in Maryland, is preparing for an epic security operation for Tuesday's inauguration in Washington, D.C., but Baltimore-area police departments said they won't be short-staffed in their own public safety efforts. The state is contributing special operations units from Baltimore, Howard County and Anne Arundel County police departments, among others, that will assist with crowd control and public safety on the National Mall, authorities said. Baltimore County police are sending 55 officers trained in crowd control, and Howard police will lend 40 officers to assist Park Police, but those officers haven't been given specific assignments yet, said Howard police spokeswoman Sherry Llewellyn. Those teams don't include patrol officers; therefore, routine law enforcement efforts around Maryland won't be affected, according to county police departments. — Carolyn Peirce

spokeswoman Ellen Beth Levitt.

"There's a lot of planning going on right now," she said.

The Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems, which coordinates emergency services, is sending three ambulance strike teams down for the inauguration, which includes 18 ambulances, said spokesman Jim Brown.

State emergency officials will be coordinating with hospitals and other emergency responders, he said.

During the past couple weeks,

the state health department has been hosting regular conference calls with hospitals and health departments to coordinate plans for the inauguration.

The state health department also has added investigators to respond to any unusual reports of an outbreak, Phillips said.

"We are at a high level of readiness," she said, "and we continue to review all our operations to make certain we are overcommunicating rather than leaving any gaps."

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Inaugural Response: An Inside Look

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**LISA SNOWDEN and
SUSAN NICOL KYLE**
Firehouse.Com News

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The phone rings constantly these days in District of Columbia Fire Chief Dennis Rubin's office.

There are a multitude of details to tend to before the arrival of millions of visitors from around the world anxious to be part of history next week when the first black president is sworn in.



Susan Nicol Kyle/Firehouse.com
Chief Dennis Rubin, seated, goes over a section in the response plan with Billy Hayes, director of public information.

Planning for the inaugural events started six months ago. John Donnelly and Henry Lyles -- both special operations officers -- have been at the table representing the fire department's interest. Federal and city officials also have been crafting a response plan second to none.

"This is an exciting time, but a work-intensive time as well."

In recent months, more and more people have become involved in planning what many are calling the largest national security event in history.

Rubin agrees with that summation. And, believes this is just the beginning. "With the excitement he (President-elect Obama) is generating, we think we'll be seeing other events that may attract a million or so."

At arm's reach on his desk is a white binder "2009 Presidential Inauguration."

Every agency has developed its own document according to their specific responsibilities. "One plan overlaps another plan, but they all fit together in a tight way."

While there have been many briefings to keep the public informed about parking, street closures and security issues, there are a multitude of details that Rubin says have to be kept close to the chest.

While he can't say how many extra EMS and fire personnel will be in the city that day, Rubin said they're grateful to have the cooperation of nearby counties, involved with the National Capital and Baltimore area Council of Governments (COG).

The chief said working through COG is the only way to guarantee that the responders are qualified. "We can't have freelancers. If someone showed up from another state to volunteer, we'd have to say: 'thanks, but no thanks.' We would have no idea how to determine who they are or if they are really certified."

"There are just too many unknowns to allow that to happen."

Three ambulance strike teams -- personnel with 18 transport units -- from across the state will be headed to the Nation's Capital next week. The effort is being coordinated by Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS).

Jurisdictions sending support in that capacity include Allegany, Baltimore County, Charles, Frederick, Howard, St. Mary's and Aberdeen Proving Grounds.

"It's been quite an undertaking," said Jim Brown, MIEMSS public information officer. "A lot of people have volunteered to participate."

Personnel who are coming in to lend a hand have undergone certain security clearances. Vehicles also will be cleared.

MIEMSS also will have staff working along side of D.C. fire and EMS officials as well as in the hospital coordination center, Brown said.

Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) will open its emergency operations center Jan. 17. There, state officials will be keeping tabs on what's happening across the state as well as in Washington.

Transportation officials have warned motorists to be ready for extensive delays. Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley also suggested people not travel on the major highways around the Nation's Capital next Tuesday unless they absolutely have to.

MIEMSS officials also will be keeping track of bed status at various hospitals throughout the area. That's done through CHATS (County Hospital Alert Tracking System), Brown explained.

Rubin said hospital officials have been involved in the process, and are gearing up with their own response plans.

"We want to have a 30 minute turnaround time at the hospitals. That's so we can get the ambulances back out on the streets.

Warming tents and first aid stations will be set up throughout the city. Some buildings also will be open to provide shelter for visitors.

When the ambulance crews arrive for their briefing Tuesday morning, a D.C. firefighter or EMT will be assigned to their unit.

Virginia also is sending crews to assist. Ambulances from as far away as Richmond are headed this way.

Rubin said all stations across the city are being beefed up next week. "We run about 400 to 450 calls a day. We have our citizens to take care of in addition to these visitors..."

He said everyone in the department knows how important it is that things go smoothly, and that they are prepared.

The first big test of the operations will occur Sunday when nearly a million people are expected to turn out for a concert and fireworks on the Mall.

Command staff from other cities will be shadowing local officers next week.

* Rubin said they are anxious to learn how it's done.

Because of their close proximity to Washington, personnel from Montgomery and Prince George's Counties will be busy come Inauguration day.

"We have been planning for quite a while, getting all of our marching orders from downtown," Pete Piringer, public information officer for Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Services, said..

Montgomery will be sending specialized personnel and apparatus into the city on the big day.

Piringer said at least three EMS units will be sent to the district. Montgomery County's Urban Search and Rescue Team will be put on standby. Personnel from the National Medical Response Team will be stationed in D.C. under the direction of the fire department. County bomb squad personnel will be assisting as well.

Prince George's County will not be providing any equipment or personnel on Jan. 20, says PIO Mark Brady, but crews there will be busy nonetheless.

Brady said preparation efforts began in November, and have become more intense as Inauguration Day nears.

"It's really come to a heated pace now. I have attended a minimum of two inauguration meetings or conferences calls every day of this week."

Brady said his department's main focus will be transportation issues. Bridges and roadways going into the district from Virginia will be closed, which means lots of traffic will be attempting to come in through Maryland.

"There are several Metro stations that we anticipate will be extremely crowded, long lines of people waiting to go downtown. We expect it to start around 3 a.m."

He said the county will have an operation center monitoring traffic. And there will be plenty of close-by inaugural activity for responders to stay on top of.

"Balls are going on at FedEx Field, the National Harbor and just about every major hotel in Prince George's County," he said.

Although Jan. 20 is a holiday in Montgomery County, fire officials have made sure to provide extra resources that day.

"Because of the current fiscal climate, we have to be prudent about overtime," Brady said. So, officials are relying heavily on volunteer firefighters and EMTs to provide additional manpower.

Brady said his county's operations center will be partially activated and essential personnel have been alerted that they should be ready to be called into service at a moment's notice.

Moving people out of the county and into D.C. is as big a priority for Montgomery County as it is for Prince George's.

Piringer said that officials there have been coordinating with police and transportation officials to make sure everything goes smoothly.

"Most of our operations will be related to people and traffic," he said.

- He said station up-staffing is planned, and crews that are sent elsewhere will be
- supplemented with volunteers at various places. Additional staff will also be on hand at the county's communication center.

Most personnel will be working 24 hour shifts on that day, as usual. Specialty units will be working 12 hour shifts and some people will be prepared to work 72 hours as needed.

"Whatever it takes," Piringer said. "People are prepared for whatever is necessary."

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D.C. Officials Reflect on Record-Setting Inauguration Response

EMSResponder.com Interviews D.C. Fire/EMS Medical Director Dr. James Augustine and Assistant Chief James Schultz

Posted: January 26th, 2009 12:23 PM GMT-05:00

SUSAN NICOL KYLE

EMSResponder.Com News

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- A record 2,100 calls for assistance were received by D.C. Fire and EMS on Tuesday as 1.8 million people descended on the city to witness the inauguration of Barack Obama.

The majority of calls handled by local personnel and crews from surrounding jurisdictions including Maryland and Virginia as well as some recruited by FEMA involved exposure issues as the temperatures never budged out of the 20s.

Several people were treated in a Metro station after they complained of chest pains and shortness of breath after being forced to walk up escalators that failed.

There were no major incidents on Inauguration Day. Sen. Ted Kennedy, who suffered a seizure during the Presidential luncheon, was transported to Washington Hospital Center.

Having the right equipment and crews at the ready paid off Saturday for a person attending the concert on the Mall, said Dr. James Augustine, the fire department medical director.

"The first call was for a cardiac arrest. It was a save. The combination of CPR and an AED made the difference," he said.

Officials, who have been planning for Inauguration Day event for months, were forced to adjust to handle an onslaught of calls that came in before crews were credentialed and units cleared.

They had planned to have the mutual aid crews in place to handle incidents involving the visitors. But, the calls started coming in hours earlier.

That left D.C. crews responding. They quickly found out that the Secret Service checkpoints were up and running. Units were stopped to be checked, and personnel cleared before entering certain areas.

Thousands of visitors hung around the area through the frigid night while others left bars, and headed straight to the Mall.

There were at least 50,000 people in the area before 8 a.m.

"We modified on the fly," Augustine said with a laugh. "There was a lot of cooperation under extreme circumstances."

In addition to bombarding the system with calls for help, the crowds prevented volunteers from getting to the aid tents set up throughout the city.

It didn't take long for officers in the fire department's command center to realize the tents were not staffed. "What was important that we modify what we were doing to make sure someone was taking care of patients," explained Augustine, the department's medical director.

All but one of the 40 tents was eventually opened, and staffed.

When the plans changed, the safety of the EMS crews also concerned officials. They had positioned personnel on Gators near the aid tents. The idea was for them to get off, and stay warm between runs.

But, those breaks never came. They were constantly attempting to weave through the crowds to get to patients.

Getting units around downtown anywhere was almost impossible. Lights and sirens were ignored by the masses as they headed toward the Mall.

A military crew moved aside when a throng of people started marching toward them. The once closed street quickly filled with pedestrians.

One crew who assisted with a cardiac arrest patient returned to find people on top of their engine. Police were called to help get the people off and the rig out of the area.

Assistant Chief Larry Schultz, who headed inauguration command, said he was pleased with how things went. "It certainly was challenging for all of us at times. But we adapted."

Schultz said Inauguration Day started much earlier than planned. When the crowds started gathering hours before anyone anticipated, he realized that the best laid plans were about to change.

Dispatchers transferred calls for help from the Mall area to the EMS branch office set up at the command center in Engine 2. Personnel getting the information jotted it down, and held up papers with the details. "I have a woman down near the Washington Monument," one man said as he waved his slip.

After checking with staging officers, another commander would give the word for a crew to be dispatched.

Augustine said plans called for as much face-to-face interaction as possible in the field. "I've learned at other events in my career that's its so much better when you give someone an assignment in person. In addition to lessening the chance of confusion, it also cuts down on radio traffic..."

Augustine said the exact number of patients seen will probably never be known. While documentation is required for a person transported to a medical facility, it is not for simple treatment.

He said those in the aid tents did the best they could to document, but were overwhelmed by the number of people who showed up.

Schultz said there will be a critique or after action meeting next week. "I've been getting e-mails from chiefs around the country who were monitoring what we were doing. They said they were impressed."

During the operation, Schultz kept tabs on every aspect of the function. He was constantly checking in with his command staff for updates on logistics, traffic, staging, EMS and safety.

Change and adapt were the rules of the day. There was no time to dally, just relay the information and prepare to adjust accordingly.

Schultz said the operation went as well as it did because of those involved. "There were a lot of people who made this work. There were no major incidents. We were all just extraordinarily busy all day."

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Inauguration Day a Mass Gathering Learning Opportunity

Posted: January 21st, 2009 01:20 PM GMT-05:00

LISA SNOWDEN-McCRAY

EMSResponder.com News

Keeping the crowds safe and flowing smoothly on Inauguration Day is a huge task -- and an even bigger learning opportunity.

That's why fire-rescue crews stationed at the inauguration command center had some company.

Officials from Montgomery County, MD., Philadelphia, Mount Laurel, N.J. and Chesterfield County, Va. are stationed in D.C. for the day to learn how to better conduct safety operations in their own communities.

"This is just a great experience," said Battalion Chief Henry Costo. "There's not going to be a bigger event than this."

Costo, along with Philadelphia Captain Jesse Wilson, traveled to D.C. two weeks ago to sit in on a planning meeting.

"The planning process was every bit as valuable as this," he said, referring to today's activity.

Wilson said seeing Washington's incident action plan change and develop was a great learning experience. He said it was also interesting to see officials in the command center adapt and respond as various emergencies developed in the field.

"I see innumerable ways to enhance operations in Philadelphia," he said.

Philadelphia has had its share of big events. Last summer, they had to deal with the Phillies winning the World Series and the city's Independence Day celebration, where Elton John performed, within days of each other. And Costo said officials had only a small window of time in which to plan.

He said because D.C. deals with large crowd control on a pretty frequent basis, they have become practiced at utilizing the National Incident Management System.

With a population of 50,000 and taking up 22 square miles, the city of Mount Laurel, N.J. is much smaller than D.C. or Philadelphia, but Battalion Chief Greg Collier said what he learns today would be a huge benefit to his department, just the same.

He said no matter the scale of an event, some of the details don't change.

"It's nice to see what we're doing in a small town in New Jersey, they are also doing in a major metropolitan city like the District of Columbia."

He said it's his job to scale back what he learns today, and apply it to his own community.

"What I'll take back is some of the issues," he said. "I have seen those same things when we ramp up an operation center."

Chesterfield County, Va. Battalion Chief A. Lee Williams said he, along with two other Battalion Chiefs are here to learn how to improve operations in their own state.

"We're looking at the possibility of forming a local incident management team," he said.

Williams said when he goes back home, he hopes to compare D.C.'s practices with his own department's practices -- and use that information to create the best possible operating standards for his community.

Williams spoke highly of the way today's events were handled.

"D.C. Fire and EMS has got a lot to be proud of," he said. "They've done an outstanding job."

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Crowds, Cold Challenge D.C. Responders at Inauguration

Posted: January 22nd, 2009 03:00 PM GMT-05:00

SUSAN NICOL KYLE and LISA SNOWDEN-McCRAY
EMSResponder.com News

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Long before the sun came up over the Nation's Capital Tuesday, hundreds of thousands of people were filling the streets and packing Metro stations.

They had one mission -- to witness the inauguration of the nation's first black president.

D.C. Fire and EMS personnel also were geared up, ready to protect the masses that included the elderly, children and people with special needs. Crews from nearby COG regions answered the call for mutual aid, sending units and people.

They've been swamped with calls. Crews -- that include six EMS task forces -- handled 1,148 responses between 4 a.m. and 4 p.m. Personnel in first aid stations on the Mall treated 490 people, and transported 31.

Sen. Ted Kennedy was taken to Washington Hospital Center after suffering a seizure during the luncheon.

The temperatures -- in the teens overnight -- actually dropped after dawn. Although numerous heating tents were set up across the city, many visitors flagged down EMS crews for assistance.

Officials in the command operations center -- located in Engine 2 -- said there was a crush of calls between 4 and 5 a.m. that stretched local resources because mutual aid crews had not arrived.

People started arriving way before anyone expected. "I heard people were gathering about 1 a.m. That caught us by surprise," said Deputy Chief of Operations Larry Schultz.

He said crowds began forming as early as 1 a.m., but resources were not scheduled to arrive until 6 a.m. Since local units and personnel had not been cleared by Secret Service, they had to stop at check points along the way. Schultz said they had to deal with the delay especially since emergency vehicles have been used in terrorist attacks in other countries.

By 3 a.m., crews were overwhelmed by the masses who were braving the frigid temperatures for a spot. Although there were 40 warming tents set up, and several buildings were open, many suffering from exposure didn't take advantage of the care.

Schultz said people didn't want to leave their prized spots.

By 8:25 a.m., officials said there were more than 400,000 on the Mall. The requests for EMS were continuous. Fire officials said that between the hours of 4 a.m. and 10 a.m., they responded to 262 calls. Those included everything from falls to people with diabetic emergencies, and exposure issues.

EMS crews were busy at the L'Enfant Plaza Metro station when several people required medical assistance after escalators broke down under the weight of the crowd. In addition to several suffering chest pains and difficulty breathing after climbing the stairs, others were complaining of heat issues, officials said.

A woman fell onto a Metro track near Gallery Place, but was not seriously injured.

D.C. Fire Chief Dennis Rubin said a heavy volume of people crowding the city's Metro system had created issues. Eventually, police put a stop to what he called "crushing" pressure at several stations by controlling the number of people allowed inside.

Rubin said D.C. Mayor Adrien Fenty had instructed officials to be prepared for the absolute worst, and so far what crews have experienced has been nowhere near that.

The department prepared for the high volume of calls. There were roughly 200 ambulances stationed in the city, with 80 from D.C. Fire. FEMA supplied nearly 100 ambulances.

"Every call for service has been handled appropriately," Rubin said.

It was just as important to keep EMS crews warm as they provided care and watched over the crowds. When they arrived for the briefing Tuesday morning, each was given meals and drinks. Schultz said they had to be self-sufficient once they were in the perimeter.

Getting relief crews in was all but impossible.

At Engine 2, second floor offices were equipped with flat screen televisions which monitored several different news channels. There were also maps stretched across walls, white boards filled with important information, and cameras monitoring local roadways.

Ambulance crews from nearby jurisdictions were assigned a navigator who was helping guide them through the city.

Additional ambulance crews that were on standby were called into the city to assist. Schultz said it was fortunate that those units were at the ready.

"The mayor declaring a state of emergency was a brilliant move," he said, because it ensured that fire officials had the resources they needed. Sirens blared as units attempted to weave through crowds. People often ignored the emergency vehicles.

In the command center, officers were keeping tabs on resources, the crowd, traffic and requests for assistance.

Every two hours, all section chiefs gather in an office to report on what's happening. Schultz keeps the meetings short, telling the officers to relay only the pertinent information. Many were operating on little sleep.

Schultz said plans call for the center to stay open until at least 3 a.m. Wednesday.

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