



Organizing First Responder Resources

On a section of rural highway, a tanker truck carrying toxic chemicals slides through a wet curve, overturns, and begins leaking its contents.

The nearest town in this remote, mountainous area has a population of under a thousand and a police department of just a few officers. The chief of police knows he and his community lack the resources to deal with such a serious incident.

Thanks to a software project funded through the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice (NIJ), however, he knows where he can turn to locate the critical help that he needs-CIRDRA.

CIRDRA, short for Critical Incident Response & Disaster Recovery Assistance, is an asset inventory and resource management system designed to function as a universal "Rolodex" for categorizing, indexing, locating, tracking, and sharing critical resources during emergency preparedness, readiness, response, and recovery activities.

Available at no charge to qualified first responder agencies, CIRDRA uses a simple open source design with a tiered hierarchy to help State and local law enforcement and emergency management departments organize their resources. Once an agency begins using CIRDRA to inventory its own assets, it can also enter into cooperative agreements with other neighboring jurisdictions to pool and share information and expedite the resource sharing needed to respond to many critical incidents.

CIRDRA had its origins in an effort to help members of NIJ's National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC) System identify and document the assets available to first responder agencies in the wake of a natural disaster such as Hurricane Katrina or in the event of a terrorist attack. NIJ called on Fred Davis from the Border Research and Technology Center, part of the NLECTC System, to coordinate the effort. Davis is a retired captain from the North Carolina Highway Patrol.

"We wanted to find a software solution that would meet the needs of the NLECTC System but would also

provide a quick and easy way for the law enforcement community to identify, categorize, and share critical resource information," Davis says. "It dawned on us, if we make it generic enough, it could be used by State and local police departments, and maybe eventually as a national database." In early 2007, research lead Davis to find Marc Bracken, Senior Systems Architect for C4DB, Inc., who had developed previous systems with the desired features. Four months later, C4DB delivered a workable prototype and a Web-based version of CIRDRA that launched in September 2007.

NLECTC-Northwest in Anchorage, Alaska, now manages the CIRDRA database for the NLECTC System on a Web server, with each center having a point-of-contact person and entering its assets into the system. Davis also has distributed a number of the no-cost CD-ROMs at conferences, generating plenty of positive feedback from law enforcement and other first responders.

Davis says that CIRDRA allows agencies to comply with National Incident Management System (NIMS) requirements by cataloging all of their resources, including equipment, communications capabilities, personnel, volunteers, special teams, supplies, and services. The open source software runs on a basic PC or laptop using either the Windows Server or the Windows XP operating systems, and utilizes a Web-served structured query language (SQL) database with a simple, user-friendly appearance. Installing and/or customizing CIRDRA requires information technology support; however, C4DB (for a fee) offers assistance to agencies too small to have their own IT departments.

"CIRDRA can be used to help build relationships between agencies as they share information and resources," Davis says. "A lot of times, rural police don't have the needed resources in their own inventory when they respond to critical incidents, but the neighboring jurisdiction might have it. In law enforcement, we're always willing to share.

“In the next phase, if we can obtain funding, we want to integrate interactive GIS mapping of resources, the ability to patch communications systems together via integrated Web services, and event logging.”

To obtain a copy of the CIRDRA software program, visit www.CIRDRA.com and follow the instructions to perform a secure download. For more information on the project, contact NIJ program manager Mike O’Shea at Michael.Oshea@usdoj.gov

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CIRDRA

The CIRDRA (Critical Incident Response & Disaster Recovery Assistance) software program was recently recognized in INFOGRAM, an online newsletter produced by the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s U.S. Fire Administration. Here is what the newsletter had to say:

Beginning in FY 2005, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security mandated that emergency services sector (ESS) organizations seeking Federal preparedness funds must adopt and use the National Incident Management System (NIMS). In FY 2006, State, territorial, tribal, and local jurisdictions were required to categorize and describe their inventory response assets to conform to the 120 NIMS Resource Typing Standards. The purpose of resource typing using the standard definitions is to ensure responders have the information they need to request and receive the appropriate resources during an emergency or disaster. It also enables the selection of specific resources for mutual aid purposes based on mission requirements, capability of resources, and response time.

The newsletter went on to say that the National Institute of Justice developed CIRDRA, a program that is free to ESS organizations. CIRDRA is a forms-like software database that works as a “universal Rolodex and bulletin board” for categorizing, indexing, locating, tracking, and sharing critical resources for purposes of emergency readiness, preparedness, response, and recovery. CIRDRA uses the NIMS resource typing standards; nine buttons engage different functions and templates for each resource type are provided. The CIRDRA website contains project information and the downloadable source code to the program itself.

As an entity of the Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Emergency Management Agency, the mission of the U.S. Fire Administration is to reduce loss of life and economic losses due to fire and related emergencies, through leadership, advocacy, coordination, and support. Visit the agency’s website at www.usfa.dhs.gov/ for more information.