

Think Big

RMS for small site emergencies

Virtually every industrial manager in Canada is aware of the Response Management System (RMS). Managers at most large industrial sites receive training and subsequently participate in the RMS process for their sites. However, managers at smaller industrial sites, while still aware of RMS, are often not as well prepared.

What should smaller industrial sites do to prepare for emergencies? And when does an incident become big enough to warrant a full-blown RMS response?

The answer to both questions is that no organization is too small and no incident is too insignificant to warrant a comprehensive response. The RMS model is not just for large catastrophic events.

RMS provides a template for every emergency that makes responder safety paramount, saves valuable time and efficiently directs resources. It helps organizations mount an organized response under which the responsible parties and local agencies all speak the same language and operate within a familiar framework.

Following RMS for small incidents offers two major benefits. By responding immediately with the proper resources, a minor incident will be effectively managed from the beginning, which may result in faster mitigation and the avoidance of a larger emergency. As a side benefit, responding to small events also provides valuable experience to help your organization respond to larger incidents.

RMS SHARPENS RESPONSE

RMS is a process that defines and brings together five basic functions in order to effectively address any

emergency response situation: Management, Operations, Planning, Logistics and Finance/Administration.

RMS finds its roots in the U.S. Incident Command System (ICS) and operates under the theory that it's not enough to simply react to a disaster as it develops since a reactive approach leaves too much to chance and doesn't fully address all aspects of the event. RMS demands that each of the five disciplines be engaged from the outset in order to safely respond to the immediate condition, anticipate changes and quickly marshal required resources.

Although a detailed RMS plan is developed for each industrial site, the plan must also fit into a larger framework that includes local, provincial and national authorities, as well as safety and mitigation specialists, so that everyone works from a common playbook using a common set of terms, working towards a common goal.

This supports one of RMS' fundamental functions: to efficiently add resources within the command structure as they are required. The various responding organizations, such as the industrial fire suppression team and the local fire department, may have similar expertise and responsibilities in their day-to-day functions. However, under the RMS command structure, they must collaborate with or defer to the other organizations during the incident.

The response manager must work with each of these individual operational structures and create a command structure that manages information, delegates responsibilities and coordinates the actions of all of the responders. The reverse is true as well. RMS provides a framework for scaling back the response as the incident comes to conclusion by orchestrating the orderly decommissioning of operational groups as their specialized skills are no longer necessary.

PRACTICE

Operations management at every industrial site, regardless of size, should receive RMS training. Site-specific procedures should also be developed and communicated to middle management and staff.

Staff should know who to contact in the event of an emergency, and all of the players should know precisely what their roles are as the incident unfolds. (See article, page 57.) Rehearsals enable all participants to understand their responsibilities, become familiar with RMS terminology, operate within the command structure and experience how added resources affect their roles and the overall response. Whether the safety function is part



by Scott Metzger

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of the Operations or Planning teams, or reports directly to the incident commander, it should be considered separately and be part of pre-operations planning.

Consequently, it's necessary to stage mock emergency drills that involve all of the potential onsite responders, as well as likely outside specialists and authorities.

A simulation of a relatively minor incident (e.g., a leaking barrel of Acetone) would provide an excellent hazardous event for a "dry run." In this scenario, the problem is reported to the plant manager who is also the prime RMS manager. He immediately notifies managers for each functional response area (Operations, Planning, Logistics and Finance) who are charged with concentrating on their areas of responsibility according to the previously-developed manual.

Operations performs the tactical functions of marshalling an appropriate, safe

initial response and evaluates the situation; Logistics immediately begins evaluating the need to call in pre-qualified specialists and perhaps putting those additional resources on standby; Planning anticipates future actions based on previously examined scenarios; and Finance tracks and reports all costs for proper booking, insurance claims, etc. The plant manager retains overall command responsibility and is charged with documenting the response.

As additional resources are added, the task teams adjust to merge the new skills and technologies of additional responders and, in some cases, defer to the new resources or act in a support role. For instance, in the case of this drill, the RMS-trained local fire department and perhaps provincial or federal safety regulators, as well as chemical response HazMat specialist teams, will operate within a common, expanded RMS command structure, while

functioning as coherent units within their areas of expertise.

As the mock cleanup is completed, the specialist teams will wrap up, and site management will return to normal. A post-mortem, as well as follow-on reporting and administrative/financial/insurance reviews will continue.

Taking an RMS approach to even this small mock event provides a roadmap to ensure that an incident of this nature is adequately addressed by top and operational management, that prescribed procedures are followed, that the appropriate resources are called in as necessary and that the response and expenditures have been properly recorded.

HMM

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