

WEMD Hosts National Trial of New Joint Information Center Course

Eighteen public information officers (PIOs) and responders from across Washington took part in the first trial of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)'s new course on Joint Information Systems and Joint Information Centers.

PIOs Rob Harper and Mark Clemens hosted the class July 28 at Camp Murray on behalf of the Washington Emergency Management Division (WEMD). They served as course instructors along with Cheryl Seigal Layman, FEMA public affairs officer (PAO) in Hermiston, Oregon, and Steve Sautter, Benton County PIO. James Yates, WEMD's training program manager, and Deanna Cleman, secretary senior in WEMD's training section, provided technical and staff support for the class.

"We volunteered our services to the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) last January to hold the class," said Harper. "We saw it would be a key step in a two-year process by FEMA and the National Emergency Management Association to upgrade PIO training across the nation,"

Harper said students in the one-day class were volunteers who responded to invitations from WEMD's training section. The group represented a range of public information experiences and backgrounds, and each PIO held current positions in city, county and state agencies.

Phil Politano, training specialist and PIO course manager at EMI, led the class evaluation team which included:

- Michelann Ooten, public information manager with Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management and chair of the NEMA public information subcommittee;
- Mike Tellef, public information officer with the Peoria, Ariz., police and fire departments; and
- Matt Stanley, planning chief and PIO with Chatham Emergency Management (Savannah, Ga) Agency.

Class observers were:

- Josh deBerg, external affairs officer, FEMA Region 7.
- Lt. Col Tim Marsano, PAO for the Idaho National Guard and Emergency Management Division; and
- Mark MacIntyre, senior public information officer with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 10.

Politano said the joint information system and center course was the third new PIO product nearing completion at EMI. He said trials were conducted earlier this year for an on-line introduction to Emergency Public Information and for a two-day classroom version of the Basic Public Information Officer course.

"I think we will have a solid trio of new offerings based on evaluations thus far," Politano said. He said he expected the three courses to be ready for use within the next six months.

The new courses "will bring dramatic changes to the existing G290 Basic Public Information Officer Course and will significantly improve the training for emergency public information officers," he said.