Observing and Documenting the Inter-Organizational Response to the September 11 Attacks

ICDRM

The George Washington University

John R. Harrald

Institute for Crisis, Disaster, and Risk Management

The George Washington University

Presented at:

"COUNTERING TERRORISM: LESSONS LEARNED FROM NATURAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL DISASTERS"

Natural Disasters Roundtable
Board on Infrastructure and the Constructed Environment
The National Academies
February 28 - March 1, 2002

Preliminary Conclusions

- System designed for All Hazard Consequence Management worked well responding to 9/11 terrorist attacks

- Preparedness requires **organizational framework**, **pre-existing relationships**, **adequate resources**, **appropriate skills/knowledge**

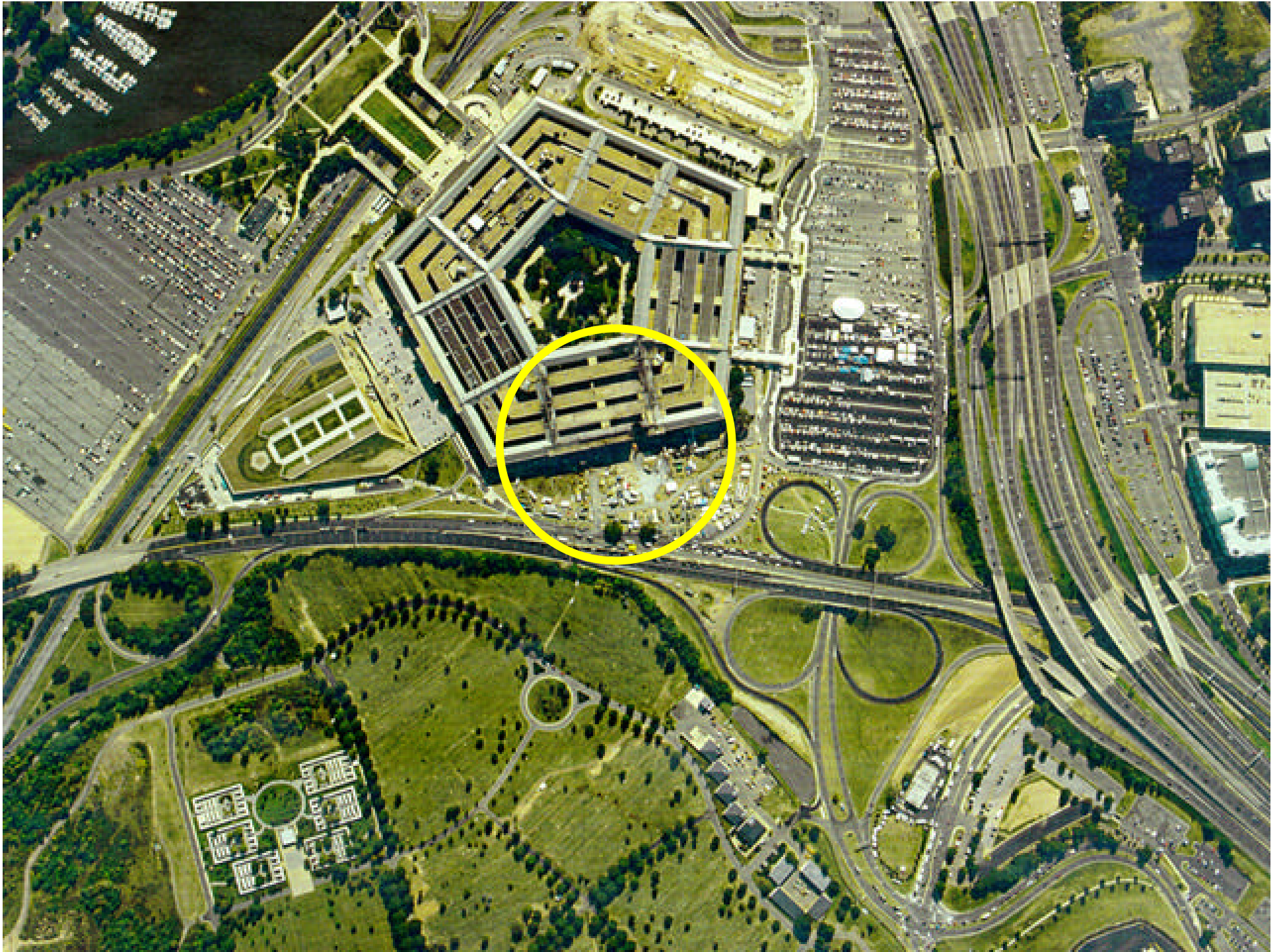- Response requires creation of complex adaptive organization

Implications for Emergency Management

New/Expanded Organizational Relationships

- Local First Responder ✍ Federal Responder

- Private Sector ✍ Public Sector

- Emergency Management ✍ Public Health/
  First Responder Acute Medical Care
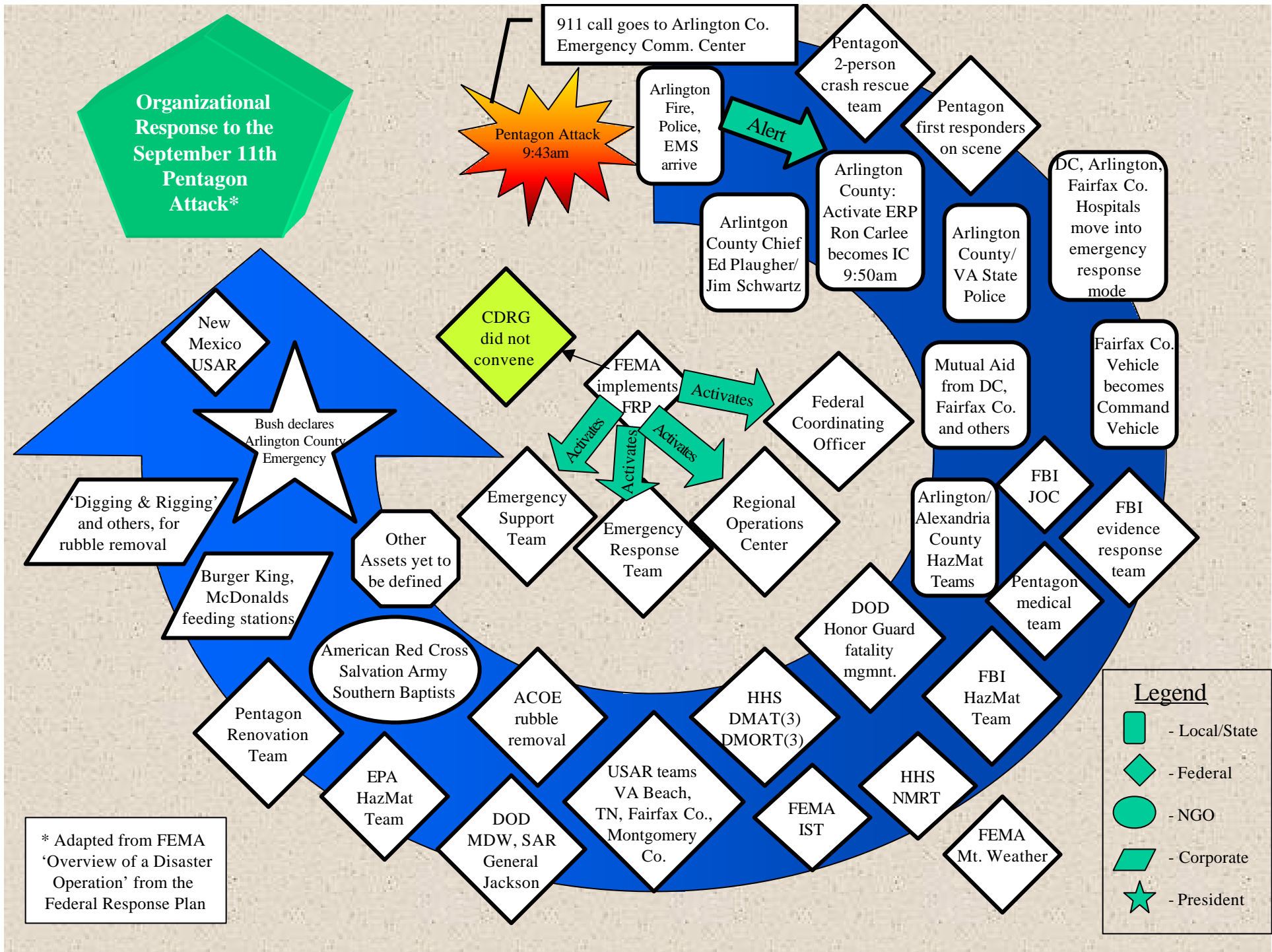
- Local First Responder ✍ Military

The Organizational System

- **Federal** - Federal Response Plan/National Contingency Plan
  - Federal/State Relationship
  - Federal Support/Federal Specialty Teams/Federal Structure

- **Local** - Incident Management Systems/Unified Command
  - On-scene Organization Building/Coordination/Communication

- **Mutual Aid** - Mutual Aid Agreements, Training
  - Leveraging of Local Assets/Backfilling

Organizational Response to the September 11th Pentagon Attack*

911 call goes to Arlington Co. Emergency Comm. Center

Pentagon Attack 9:43am

Arlington Fire, Police, EMS arrive

Alert

Pentagon 2-person crash rescue team

Pentagon first responders on scene

Arlington County: Activate ERP Ron Carlee becomes IC 9:50am

Arlintgon County Chief Ed Plaugher/ Jim Schwartz

Arlington County/ VA State Police

DC, Arlington, Fairfax Co. Hospitals move into emergency response mode

New Mexico USAR

CDRG did not convene

FEMA implements FRP

Activates

Activates

Activates

Activates

Federal Coordinating Officer

Mutual Aid from DC, Fairfax Co. and others

Fairfax Co. Vehicle becomes Command Vehicle

Bush declares Arlington County Emergency

'Digging & Rigging' and others, for rubble removal

Other Assets yet to be defined

Emergency Support Team

Emergency Response Team

Regional Operations Center

Arlington/ Alexandria County HazMat Teams

FBI JOC

FBI evidence response team

Burger King, McDonalds feeding stations

American Red Cross Salvation Army Southern Baptists

ACOE rubble removal

DOD Honor Guard fatality mgmnt.

Pentagon medical team

Pentagon Renovation Team

EPA HazMat Team

DOD MDW, SAR General Jackson

USAR teams VA Beach, TN, Fairfax Co., Montgomery Co.

HHS DMAT(3) DMORT(3)

FEMA IST

HHS NMRT

FBI HazMat Team

FEMA Mt. Weather

Legend

- Local/State

- Federal

- NGO

- Corporate

- President

* Adapted from FEMA 'Overview of a Disaster Operation' from the Federal Response Plan

Organizational Complexity in New York

449 Responding Organizations Identified in Media Reports:

- __159___ U.S.Public Sector

- __67___ International Public Sector

- __58___ Non-Governmental Organizations

- _165___ Private Sector Organizations

Incident Management

- The incident command used by Arlington County seeks to establish two things: Central Authority and Span of Control

- I hate to think what would have happened without the immediate ICS. It was the only way to lend sanity to the instability. I'm thankful we use it every day.

- Up until 2pm, the operation was under single command. There was too much chaos about the arrival of resources to get a handle on a Unified Command team. C.S.

- Unified Command is used in two situations: when the incident crosses jurisdictional boundaries and when there are a large number of disciplines involved. This response required a considerable number of separate agencies at many jurisdictional levels.

- Unified Command avoided an FBI/Arlington/DOD 'fist-fight'. J.S.

Personal Relationships

- Because some of the same agents that responded to Nairobi and Oklahoma City responded to the Pentagon, there was an operational confidence level already established with USAR.

- The most valuable preparations done was the TOPOFF exercise. This exercise created many contacts that were vital in the September 11th response.

- The TOPOFF exercise taught me that there were not enough personal relationships between the government agencies for them to work effectively. These personal relationships are vital, but fragile.

- Most of the commanders had exercised together before, so there was an immediate link when we came together on the 11th.

Victim-Responders

Many of the military and civilian people were true heroes. They were lining up to go into but building with no protective clothing, and no breathing apparatuses. Many of these people were wearing nothing but surgical masks, trying to get into a building burning with 6000 gallons of jet fuel. This was like a mission to them.

Logistics

- By 11pm, a written agreement was set up between OEP and FBI to determine who pays for the response, signed by 6am the next morning. - GM

- The badging system was a monumental task. At one point there were over 8000 people with badges. - C.S.

- Early in the response to the Pentagon crash, logistical efforts were all facilitated by Arlington County. This was before USAR arrived, but after the patient issues were resolved. - CS

- Nobody 'Asked for a check' until the incident was over.CS

- There are two types of mutual aid agreements, those made directly between municipalities, and those that are coordinated by the state. Direct local agreements are common for traditional response but are not eligible for Federal

Communications

- There was a two-day period before good communications was established. Lack of communications was the greatest weakness in this disaster. G.M.

- Tactical Communications were out. Inside the Pentagon, there was no way to communicate due to security which prevented transmission in or out of the building. - CS

- Northern Virginia uses 800 MHz frequency, which is not used by Maryland and Loudon County departments. As result, local responders had to be paired up with mutual aid responders. – CS

- Computer aided communication was hampered by a virus that shut the Fairfax computers down for 8 days during the response. CC

Concluding Observation

"Normally, plans are built on either experience or assumption. After the Pentagon attack, there are many areas where assumptions can be replaced with experience, and new, improved plans can be made."

Chief Schwartz