

DDPW's Murdock Part of TOPOFF 2

Alan Murdock, Program Analyst, Defense Distribution Depot Puget Sound, Washington (DDPW), is also a DLA Emergency Preparedness Liaison Officer (EPLO) in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region X. As an EPLO, Murdock was part of TOPOFF2, the recent national exercise conducted to test and evaluate "Top Officials" of federal, state and municipal agencies in responding to a weapons of mass destruction (WMD) disaster scenario, and was conducted May 11–17 with two simultaneous venues in Chicago and Seattle.

Murdock was part of a team, along with other military service Regional Emergency Preparedness Liaison Officers (REPLOs), in providing Department of Defense (DoD) knowledge and expertise in the event of required Military Support to Civil Authority under a Presidential Disaster Declaration. "As a member of the REPLO team," Murdock said, "I was requested to be a Controller/Data Collector at the Initial Operating Facility established by the Department of Homeland Security at the Seattle venue."



Murdock (right) assists in programming an HF Radio.

"As a team we plan, train and exercise our capabilities and utilization for disaster response under the Federal Response Plan (FRP)," Murdock said. The FRP will soon be replaced, Murdock said, by the Department of Homeland Security National Response Plan.

"National security is everyone's responsibility," CDR Nicholas Mato, SC, USN, DDPW Commander said. "DDPW is very fortunate to have Alan on our team and we're proud he is also an important liaison with many of our DoD (Department of Defense) and federal counterparts."

"As a Controller/Data Collector for the TOPOFF 2 exercise," Murdock said, "I was assigned to the FEMA Emergency Response Team - Advanced (ERT-A) to observe and collect data on anything pertaining to their involvement in the exercise. The ERT-A is the initial response unit sent to a scene of disaster prior to a Presidential Declaration, and they operate from a Mobile Emergency Operations Vehicle that is set up on scene in conjunction with a Multi-Radio Van by a FEMA Mobile Emergency Response Support Detachment.

"The ERT-A Team Lead becomes the Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) for the disaster following a Presidential Declaration," Murdock said. "I was given freedom to monitor any and all

personnel involved in the Initial Operating Facility (IOF) and to be an observer for data collection. I attended conferences, planning and decision-making events that I felt were of consequence.

"The two geographically separated venues (Chicago and Seattle) had different scenarios that were predicated on a terrorist group conducting simultaneous attacks on principal cities in the United States and impacting Canada," Murdock said.

"The most difficult aspect of the exercise was keeping track of all the significant communications that were taking place," Murdock said. "As well as the ramifications and complications posed by the many different agencies fusing together under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The difficulties of communications for the transition from Crisis Management to Consequence Management, as well as the jurisdictional responsibilities and authorities of many agencies, acting in concert with each other under a WMD scenario were extremely challenging."

"I was able to be a fly-on-the-wall and attend many policy-making meetings and conferences that were conducted involving municipal, state and federal authorities," Murdock said. "The night shift ERT-A team lead had served as the FCO for the 9/11 World Trade Center disaster, and the opportunity to shadow him and have privy to his insights and expertise in emergency management was the opportunity of a lifetime."

"Everyone engaged in the exercise, from federal to on-scene Incident Commanders, learned that the task of coordinating an over-arching authority for crisis/consequence management is a daunting task," Murdock said. "As usual, communications (need to know, what to know and when to know) proved the greatest challenge. The exercise provided the opportunity to compare lessons learned from the first national TOPOFF exercise conducted two years ago with the multiple venues of Providence, RI, Washington, D.C., and Denver, CO. In comparison, there has been significant improvement, but there remains a great deal to be done before we can truly say we are fully prepared for another major act of terrorism upon our shores."

"To better ensure national preparedness," Murdock said, "TOPOFF exercises will be conducted every two years that will provide many other communities the opportunity to test their preparedness. Likewise, I would hope that the lessons learned and conveyed through the 'hot wash' process that I have participated in, will serve as benchmarks for training and testing in the interim."

For communities around the country, Murdock encourages, "Plan, train and exercise. Make sure that when it happens in your backyard you know the players and the plan. A disaster is not a good time to pull the plan off the shelf for the first time, and a difficult place to make introductions about who you are and what you do. Be vigilant and resolute in a determination to thwart terrorism."