

## **The Illinois Report 2009**

### **Chapter 9: Emergency Preparedness in Illinois**

#### **Transcript of video interview with author Patricia Rushing**

“In 1995, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency and the Illinois State Police started planning for all kinds of catastrophic events for the state of Illinois. They began that initiative with a comprehensive assessment of Illinois’ critical infrastructure and assets, you know bridges, things like that, to determine what needed to be done to plan for and respond to catastrophic events. Illinois has ice storms and tornadoes and earthquakes and man-made disasters, airplane crashes, things like that, all count.

“In 2000, the Illinois Terrorism Task Force was formally formed to actually implement the state’s terrorism strategy. It also serves as a governing board to the governor, it advises the governor on what’s going on in the state of Illinois, what’s going on nationally.

“Illinois has distinguished itself in a number of ways from the rest of the country. The first thing that we should be extremely proud of is our mutual aid network. We are the largest in the country, with law enforcement, fire services and medical professionals, and we have pre-arranged arrangements with communities across the state, so if someone needs help, it’s already arranged so that they can do that. So mutual aid is a big thing for the state of Illinois. The second thing is our interoperability, our communications strategy is beyond anything else in the country, we are able to speak from one end of the state to the other between all first responders and emergency services personnel, so that’s unique to the state of Illinois. The second is the creation of our Statewide Terrorism Intelligence Center, our STIC center. And it is an operation that’s open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, law enforcement can query on activity that they have noticed within their community, as well as enter data into it, so we’re talking to one another across the state, as well as across the country.

“One of the other things that Illinois was working on before most of the country was its anticipation of pets and their involvement in catastrophic events. The 2006 Pet Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act came along when the country noticed that people did not want to evacuate without their animals. Many of the individuals who lost their lives in Katrina did so because they were not allowed to take their animals. So, Illinois has been instrumental in writing the national standards in how state and local communities need to write their emergency evacuation plans or their emergency plans.

“Of course we need money to reinforce many of the projects, our infrastructure, we know we could use another VACIS system, which is able to see what’s inside containers without opening them, those types of things. So, you

know, funds are always an asset to the continuation of our program. One of the things that Illinois and the rest of the country does need to work on is personal preparedness throughout the state. It's one thing to have a national plan, it's another thing to have a state plan, state plans don't work well unless we take some personal responsibility for what we are doing in our home. Catastrophic events are all local events, what happens, happens in your own backyard."