



Photo Credit: National Guard Bureau

# After-Action Report

SAFEGUARD IOWA PARTNERSHIP

Vigilant Guard Full-Scale Exercise

June 2009

### **What is the Safeguard Iowa Partnership?**

The Safeguard Iowa Partnership is a voluntary coalition of the state's private- and public-sector leaders, who share a commitment to strengthen the capacity of the state to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.

Created in 2007 by the Iowa Business Council and representatives from key state agencies, the partnership helps integrate business resources, expertise, and response plans with those of government during all stages of disaster management. The organization uses designated initiative teams to accomplish the goals laid out in the strategic plan.

**Together. Helping Iowans.**

## Exercise Overview

The four-state Vigilant Guard 2009 exercise involved National Guard and other emergency responders from Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska. During the exercise, emergency responders from Iowa worked to improve their emergency response skills while responding with federal, state and local government agencies and organizations that might come to Iowa's aid if overwhelmed. Vigilant Guard was one of the largest emergency exercises conducted in Iowa and significant because it linked multiple levels of local, state, regional and national response. The development of the exercise was led by the Iowa National Guard and involved dozens of emergency response organizations.

The exercise included activation of Iowa's Emergency Operations Center (EOC), where Safeguard Iowa's State Emergency Operations Center (EOC) liaisons, drawn from business and nonprofit member partners, were deployed. As part of the statewide response, nine Safeguard Iowa members organizations in the Des Moines Metro area also participated in receiving information relayed through the Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons. Other Safeguard partners also participated in exercise site visits and in a discussion exercise for elected leaders from the Polk County (Des Moines) area.

A series of linked scenarios included a massive flood that impacted northwest Iowa and parts of Nebraska, a scenario where law enforcement learned of possible terrorist activity in the upper Midwest and took action to prevent any attacks, a scenario where domestic terrorists were able to derail a train with hazardous chemicals and finally introduction of a foreign animal disease in Iowa livestock. Events continued with a biological attack on Iowa's food distribution system and then a second terrorist attack which occurred in Kansas.

Safeguard Iowa focused participation on the Des Moines train derailment. Safeguard Iowa also simulated resources and expertise in support of the flooding and animal disease scenarios. The Safeguard Iowa role supported of the entire incident from the State EOC in Johnston, Iowa, and participation by nine partner organizations in the Des Moines area.

Vigilant Guard proved to be a valuable opportunity to validate Safeguard Iowa's capacity to respond to future disasters. Of the three primary objectives, two were met while one objective was not validated. The objective not confirmed, Safeguard Iowa notification of the State EOC activation, resulted from a delay in pre-scripted exercise events. All other objectives were met and 50 hours of training were gained by the Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons.

Safeguard Iowa was able to exercise, validate, and develop the Safeguard Iowa EOC liaison concept in concert with thousands of other responders. The investment in time and effort helped Safeguard Iowa evaluate where improvements are needed to prepare for future disasters.

## Vigilant Guard Exercise at a Glance

- Vigilant Guard was a National Guard and Northern Command (NORTHCOM) sponsored national-level exercise involving more than 2,000 civilian and military participants
- Designed to stress state and local response to overwhelming events
- Multiple scenarios to push beyond Iowa's capabilities using four simultaneous scenarios:
  - Des Moines-area hazardous materials incident
  - Flooding in northwest Iowa
  - Foot-and-Mouth Disease outbreak
  - Human disease throughout Iowa

### Participating State Agencies and Organizations:

- Iowa National Guard (primary sponsor)
- Iowa Homeland Security & Emergency Management
- Iowa Dept. of Public Health
- Iowa Dept. of Public Safety
- Iowa Dept. of Transportation
- Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources
- Iowa Weapons of Mass Destruction Special Weapons and Tactics Teams
- Iowa Bomb Squad Task Force
- Iowa Hazardous Materials Task Force
- Additional emergency agencies and military units from Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska

### Participating Local Agencies and Organizations in the Des Moines Area:

- Polk County Emergency Management
- Polk County Sheriff's Office
- Polk County Public Health
- Polk County Medical Examiner
- City of Des Moines Fire-Rescue, Police, 911 and other support departments
- Emergency Medical Agencies
- Mercy Hospital
- Iowa Health System Hospitals
- Safeguard Iowa Partnership
- Numerous local businesses and nonprofit organizations

## Concept of Operations for Safeguard Iowa Emergency Operations Center Liaisons

Safeguard Iowa Partnership Emergency Operations Center (EOC) liaisons are a cadre of private-sector representatives who have received specialized training to work in emergency operations centers. Safeguard Iowa initially established this capacity to respond to the State of Iowa's EOC and is developing a capability to work from local EOCs as well.

During certain emergencies, the private sector may be requested to staff a liaison position at the state or local EOC. This includes emergencies where private sector entities are threatened or affected. The Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons may act as a conduit of information and guidance between the affected area's emergency command and private sector organizations. These roles were performed by the

Safeguard Iowa Executive Director during the 2008 tornado and flooding responses that affected much of Iowa. Creation of a trained cadre will create more depth for this key coordination role.

Primary missions for liaisons include:

- Act as a communicator between the EOC and the private sector by gathering status reports and information from critical private sector constituents and providing this information to the EOC Planning, Operations and Logistics Sections using authorized automated or manual reporting methods.
- Act as a contact for the acquisition of donated supplies, such as ice, water, food, clothing, bedding, etc. from the private sector during a disaster. It is not the State EOC liaisons’ role to manage or coordinate all donations but to work with the donations management coordinator on private-sector donations.
- Disseminate information efficiently and effectively to the business community and act as an advocate for the private sector.

The Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons will staff a regular EOC work shift, usually 12-13 hours. Liaisons will be scheduled to continue staffing activated EOCs throughout the event, until such time as a designated representative of the Partnership, in coordination with EOC Operations, determines representation is no longer required.

To address any concerns over potential conflicts-of-interest, the Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons are governed by a Code of Conduct, which requires liaisons to stay current in emergency management issues, avoid conflicts of interest, protect confidentiality and report violations.

Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons are also expected to complete a specific Safeguard Iowa Emergency Operations Center training course, plus additional incident command and emergency management training courses. Each prospective liaison is required to receive sponsorship from his or her employer and submit an application for review and approval by Safeguard Iowa.

## Exercise Objectives

Safeguard Iowa developed three primary objectives as part of the Vigilant Guard exercise design. The table below summarizes the exercise results.

<b>Objective</b>		<b>Result</b>
Coordinate communication with the private-sector during a disaster.		<b>Partially Successful</b> – the Safeguard Iowa EOC liaison role did coordinate information.
Exercise the Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons role at State EOC.		<b>Successful</b> – the Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons role at State EOC was tested and validated.
Test the procedure to notify Safeguard Iowa for State EOC activations and Safeguard Iowa alerting and notification response to EOC notification.	X	<b>Not verified</b> - Safeguard Iowa was not notified of the State EOC activation, in part because of a delay in pre-scripted exercise events.

Vigilant Guard was the first test of the Safeguard Iowa Partnership State EOC liaisons. Overall, the exercise demonstrated a valid role for the Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons and confirmed appropriate training and operational issues had been addressed.

Nine Des Moines-area businesses participated in the exercise on June 18-19:

- Allied-Nationwide
- The Conley Group
- EFCO Corporation
- Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines
- InfoBunker
- ITS/SHAZAM Network
- Principal
- Vermeer
- Wellmark

Each company provided contact information for the two-day exercise. Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons passed information to the participating partners, primarily through e-mail. Opportunities for improvement were noted in the information-sharing process, as noted in the next section of the report.

Safeguard Iowa partners also participated in events for local elected officials. Safeguard Iowa representatives from four businesses participated in specialized training for elected officials sponsored by Polk County Emergency Management. Safeguard Iowa partners also attended a discussion exercise for elected officials from the Polk County (Des Moines) area along with representatives from the Iowa National Guard and the Iowa Homeland Security Division.

## Review of Key Exercise Issues

Vigilant Guard was the first test of the Safeguard Iowa State EOC liaisons as well as a significant test of community preparedness. Overall, the exercise demonstrated that joint training provided by Safeguard Iowa and the Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division addressed the necessary core competencies for the Safeguard Iowa State EOC liaisons. However, a number of corrective actions were noted by the participants that could enhance participation in future incidents.

### Key issues from the Vigilant Guard exercise:

- Notification of Safeguard Iowa liaisons to respond to the State EOC
- Sufficient staffing
- Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons handbook
- Event logs and pre-defined messages
- Validating the Safeguard Iowa radio capacity
- Training on WebEOC and other programs
- Regular training sessions, quarterly or semi-annually

### Notification of Safeguard Iowa liaisons to respond to the State EOC

The concept for notification of Safeguard Iowa liaisons is that upon activation the State EOC, a representative will alert the Safeguard Iowa Partnership's Executive Director and advise them of the need for an EOC liaison. The Executive Director will be responsible for scheduling the liaison(s) and in turn will alert the entire Safeguard Iowa Partnership of the EOC activation. An alert will be sent to all Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons upon initial activation and for future liaison scheduling.

Due to a delayed beginning of the Vigilant Guard exercise, the notification process did not occur as scripted. The Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons were advised to report to the State EOC ahead of time to maximize the training opportunity. Unfortunately, the Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons arrived before the point in the exercise where they would have been contacted due to a delayed start. Regardless of this artificiality, the liaisons immediately began participating in the exercise.

This disjointed part of the exercise did mean that one exercise objective was not verified.

*Test the procedure to notify Safeguard Iowa for State EOC activations and Safeguard Iowa alerting and notification response to EOC notification.*

A related issue for consideration is credentialing or otherwise identifying the liaisons. Inside the State EOC, most liaisons will wear SIP shirts and staff an identified position. At this time, no authorization or credentials identify the liaisons. It was noted that if Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons are sent to staff a local emergency operations center, it may be difficult to pass law enforcement access control points in a crisis.

### **Sufficient staffing**

Two Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons staffing two computers were key to maintaining situational awareness and passing information to participating partners during the exercise. The liaisons were tasked to monitor WebEOC, the State EOC's web-based information management software, plus the Homeland Security Information Network Safeguard Iowa Portal (HSIN-SIP) and the Safeguard Iowa e-mail inbox. These activities are in addition to receiving phone calls, interacting with other State EOC responders and monitoring radio traffic. The combination of these tasks creates a high tempo of operations, even during relatively calm operational periods.

Numerous Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons observed that while they felt more comfortable in the role after the exercise, staffing may require more than one liaison. During the course of the exercise, the Safeguard Iowa position was staffed by two or three trained liaisons. Having two or more liaisons would allow for more participation in planning meetings or to provide rotating relief if staffing is available. However, many operations cease or are significantly curtailed at night, making the need for additional staffing less likely during the night shift.

Staffing with multiple liaisons may not be possible in extended events. All liaisons have existing positions with their sponsoring employers. Additionally, extended events like the summer 2008 disasters saw the State EOC open 24 hours a day for several weeks. Extended events may be difficult to staff due to fatigue and work commitments, especially with 12-13 hour shifts.

In future incidents, two positions with computers may not be available, so liaisons have suggested adding the capacity through a network hub and bringing their own laptop computers. Regardless, Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons should plan for limited working space, especially during catastrophic events. The State EOC, with 48 dedicated positions and additional break-out areas, was feeding 250 responders per meal during the height of 2008 severe weather response. Based on the size constraints, it is highly unlikely Safeguard Iowa will be able to receive more than one dedicated position in the State EOC.

The liaisons who participated in the Vigilant Guard exercise volunteered from the following organizations:

- EFCO Corporation
- Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines
- Merit Resources
- MidAmerican Energy
- Principal
- Vermeer
- Walmart
- Wellmark
- Wells Fargo

### **Safeguard Iowa Partnership EOC liaison handbook**

The Safeguard Iowa EOC liaison handbook was noted as helpful by several exercise participants. The 95-page handbook contained resource lists, list of Safeguard Iowa partners and log-in instructions for various communications systems.

The handbook was finished and distributed the same week as the exercise, which didn't allow exercise participants time for a detailed review. Regardless, the handbook assisted most of the participants in successfully logging into all the required systems without assistance. Most procedures were detailed with both computer screen shots and detailed step-by-step instructions. This detail was also cited as a key resource allowing liaisons to log into systems without frequent training.

### **Event logs and pre-defined messages**

Linked closely to the handbook, developing event logs and pre-defined message templates were noted another key improvement. Exercise participants noted that having developed materials would standardize the liaison actions and speed communication.

Event log formats and procedures were not defined for liaison role. This meant that detailed records were not kept for most of the liaison actions. While this documentation may be used post-crisis, the more significant issue is sharing information in rotating shifts. Since the Safeguard Iowa role may cover a wide variety of situations and actions, detailed documentation of incoming and outgoing information may be very valuable. During the summer 2008 disasters, when Safeguard Iowa extensively supported disaster response operations statewide, post-disaster details were requested for FEMA documentation and potential State of Iowa credit as part of an in-kind match of volunteer time. Creating a basic event log format and procedures would be a wise investment for future Safeguard Iowa EOC liaison activations.

Pre-defined message templates were noted as another key improvement that could maximize the liaison role. The liaisons were asked to send several messages to participating partners in Vigilant Guard. Messages included sharing general situational information, posting background information, issuing specific warning and requests for volunteers or other private-sector assistance. No message formats were developed for the liaison role during the exercise, though previous messages may have been available. Participants noted that the time to review information, write drafts, review the contents (between partners in the liaison role) and then issue the information by e-mail was significant. Pre-defined message templates would have sped the structuring and issuing of the information.

Evaluating sensitive information release was another related issue. Sensitive information related to law enforcement operations in the exercise was placed onto WebEOC and reviewed by the liaisons. The



Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons elected not to pass this information outside the State EOC, based on the rationale “if we would not know normally, we would not pass it on.” In the post-exercise debriefing among liaisons, this policy enjoyed general support as a guideline in the future.

### **Validating the Safeguard Iowa radio capacity**

Safeguard Iowa Partnership recently added four portable and one mobile radio to support private-sector response activities. The SIP radios will be used for emergency coordination in the Des Moines Metro area or to provide local area radio backup should telephones or other communications be disabled following a disaster.

Each radio includes the capacity to access the downtown emergency preparedness radio network, which links numerous businesses and nonprofit groups in a crisis. The radios are being stored in two kits (*pictured to right*) to support incidents where Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons are deployed.



The radios were only received the day before the Vigilant Guard exercise and were not extensively tested. Several issues were discovered during the course of exercise, such as the primary radio channel not working from the State EOC, diagnosed as a signal issue from underground location of the State EOC. Fortunately a secondary channel was put into service. State EOC liaisons identified the need for better training and documentation to successfully operate the radios, as no materials were developed prior to the exercise. Draft radio procedure materials have been developed and are under review.

### **Regular Training Sessions**

Maintaining currency in the State EOC environment was a concern noted by Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons. The number of active and passive tasks required for the position led to the request for regular training sessions, as often as quarterly or at least semi-annually.

The proposed training sessions would likely include a significant component of WebEOC training, supplemented by other topics and the review of enhanced procedures. These ongoing training sessions would require coordination on Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division support, as they maintain the State EOC and administer WebEOC.

The Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division did allow Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons to observe at a May 2009 nuclear power plant exercise. Hopefully the Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons role will be included in future State EOC exercises, which will likely prove to be valuable training opportunities.

### **Challenges in Exercise Design and Conduct**

The Safeguard Iowa Partnership’s intended role in the Vigilant Guard exercise did not meet all the planned objectives. The Vigilant Guard exercise was exceedingly large and complicated. Safeguard Iowa’s role is a supporting and coordination entity and usually responds to actions of other response

participants. The objective not met was related to mismatched timelines, not failures in performance of the Safeguard Iowa or other exercise participants.

The goal of testing communication to the private sector was accomplished, though not to the desired level. Regular and sustained communications were not maintained to the incident command level at hazardous materials site. This was a result of several reasons:

- The start of the exercise was delayed at the hazardous materials site by severe weather
- The later start pushed back the activation of the Polk County EOC and complicated the communication
- Safeguard Iowa did not have a Polk County EOC liaison

One additional element that limited communication and information sharing was the exercise design. The exercise was designed so the Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons would receive a sustained pace of one exercise message per 45 minutes. Even with the delay, many of these messages were delivered by phone or e-mail to the State EOC over the course of the two days. However, many messages intended for Safeguard Iowa were assigned to other State EOC positions by the Operations Officers answering the telephones or receiving messages by e-mail or WebEOC. Some messages were phrased in a manner that may have left doubt if they were requests or just statements, which also contributed to confusion.

Key information intended to go to the nine Des Moines-area Safeguard Iowa partners playing in the exercise was lost in process, which limited the real-time situational information intended to drive individual partners' decision-making. These issues contributed to a slow exercise start throughout the first day. The lack of information did not meet the expectations of the nine Safeguard Iowa participants. Real-time information sharing did not begin until the second day of the exercise.

Fortunately, as the exercise continued into the second day, more messages were handled by Safeguard Iowa. This included opportunities to find resources for both private and public responses to a crisis. This role, connecting resources to those needing assistance, is a key resource management mission identified for the Safeguard Iowa EOC liaisons.

Future exercises may be better tailored to the Safeguard Iowa role. The breadth of the Vigilant Guard exercise was very wide and when key events slowed or became distorted, the downstream effects were different than intended. Valuable situational training occurred as part of Vigilant Guard for many participating partners, including some that do not normally work together.

Safeguard Iowa was able to validate and develop the EOC liaison concept in concert with thousands of other responders. The investment in time and effort moved Safeguard Iowa further in preparing for future disasters.