

## **GROWTH OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT & HOMELAND SECURITY**

Basically over the last 30 years the Office of Emergency Management & Homeland Security (OEMHS) as mandated by federal, state and local law has evolved from civil defense, which had the primary responsibility for the protection of the civil population in the event of war.

Civil Defense came to be early on in World War I, but it was after the United States entered World War II, Civil Defense in Connecticut became very active, as neighborhoods around the state were divided into sectors for communication and identification. Air wardens in each sector had responsibility for marshaling volunteers to warn the civilian population during any potential air raid attacks on the United States, a chief concern after the air attacks on Pearl Harbor and the German bombings over London.

In 1950 the Connecticut Office of Civil Defense was set up to rapidly develop a civil preparedness program for the State to prepare for anything from an atom bomb to sabotage. The following years, the City of Bridgeport like most Connecticut towns trained civil defense volunteers to assist in times of crisis.

In 1979, Emergency Management's growth occurred when five federal agencies were merged together to create the Federal Emergency Management Agency. This evolved to not only for the safety of the civil population during war but branched out into saving lives and protecting property during all types of hazards, including natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, winter storms, and other weather related hazards. This also included acts caused by human beings such as terrorism, civil disorder, and explosions.

In the 1980's, the City of Bridgeport experienced many emergencies where the Civil Preparedness forces took action, events such as Hurricane Gloria and the L'Ambiance Plaza project collapse proved that the City of Bridgeport had teams prepared to respond if called upon. Major chemical accidents spearheaded another growth in emergency planning with the creation by the Environmental Protection Agency of the SARA title III laws. These laws being the Superfund Amendment and Reauthorization Act of 1986 and Title III of the Clean Air Act Amendment of 1990 require the reporting of extremely hazardous chemicals or chemicals that exceed the 10,000 lb threshold limit by corporations, businesses, etc; that carries or stores such chemicals. It also requires for the reporting of any spills or air quality emissions that may cause immediate danger to life and health.

In 1994, the City of Bridgeport decided to enhance the emergency management program by ensuring a continued approach to preparedness and commitment towards excellence is established and carried out daily. New plans, exercises and drills along with extensive training amongst all disciplines and agencies were the new focus. That focus is continued today ensuring that the City of Bridgeport is the best prepared no matter what the hazard.

Finally, the most recent growth and one that is critical to our Nation, has been the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security formed in 2002. This concept is to protect the United States by preparing for, responding to and preventing domestic emergencies such as terrorism. Combined with emergency management the overall strategy is to create a unified system for the protection of all communities for all types of hazards. Thus the main goal of any Office of Emergency Management & Homeland Security is to tie all of these areas into a Comprehensive Emergency Management & Homeland Security Plan and Program. The outcome by combining all into one entity is it ensures that all offices on a federal, state, regional and local level work together in carrying out the oath of saving lives and protecting property. Hopefully one day we can create a disaster resistant community, and with your help that goal can someday be a reality.

Help us achieve this goal by taking these steps: Make a kit, Create a Plan, Stay Informed and Get Involved!