

AFNORTH hosts hurricane air-response workshop

By Mary McHale , AFNORTH Public Affairs / Published July 21, 2015

TYNDALL AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. -- Representatives from across the crisis-response enterprise in the United States gathered here for a two-day workshop July 14-15 to develop a Multi-State Hurricane Air Coordination Plan.

Hosted by Continental U.S. North American Aerospace Defense Region-1st Air Force (Air Forces Northern), sixty-eight civilian and military participants came from eight Southeast/Gulf Coast States, (North Carolina; South Carolina; Georgia; Florida; Alabama; Mississippi; Louisiana and Texas) Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, and numerous federal agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, United State Transportation Command, United States Northern Command, the National Guard, United State Coast Guard, and Civil Air Patrol.

According to workshop coordinator, Brig. Gen. Greg Nelson, Vice Director, Strategy, Policy, Plans and International Affairs, National Guard Bureau, this hurricane-centric air coordination plan effort is a Chief, National Guard Bureau-led initiative based on two previously-validated plans. The first was a product of lessons learned from Katrina and focused on larger-scale joint-air mobility operations. The other was the CAPSTONE-14 Multi-State Coordination Plan, focused on earthquake response operation in the eight-state New Madrid seismic region.

"The primary goal of this first meeting was to develop the concept of operations for this plan, to be refined, exercised, validated, published and implemented prior to the 2016 hurricane season," Nelson said. "The secondary objective was to have a strong CONOPS that will lead crisis action planning this year if necessary."

Nelson added the plan will "ensure immediate communication, coordination, cooperation, and collaboration of all air operations prior to or immediately following a catastrophic hurricane. It will provide the most rapid identification of available air assets to meet the air transportation needs of life-saving personnel, equipment, and supplies; along with improving flight safety through coordinated air operations and visibility within the disaster area.

Following a series of briefings the morning of the first day, participants then broke into working groups to deep-dive into mission planning, tracking and execution issues.

"This workshop allows us to evaluate best practices from other states to help us better prepare for providing emergency services to the citizens of Mississippi," said Maj. Andrew Birmingham, Mississippi Air National Guard Operations Officer.

Brett Dixon, Texas Task Force 1 Civil Aviation Urban Search and Rescue Coordinator, agreed.

"The main benefit here is to see how others write their plans and execute them," he said. "It's a great opportunity to network and take back ideas to improve our current products."

Nelson also noted the participants' warm reception to the collaborative atmosphere.

"Many of the participants commented on the value of having all the States and Federal organizations in the same room. This provided a first-ever networking opportunity to understand the vast capabilities everyone has to offer during a catastrophic hurricane."

Lt. Gen. William Etter, CONR-1st AF (AFNORTH) Commander, offered his perspective on the

workshop as well.

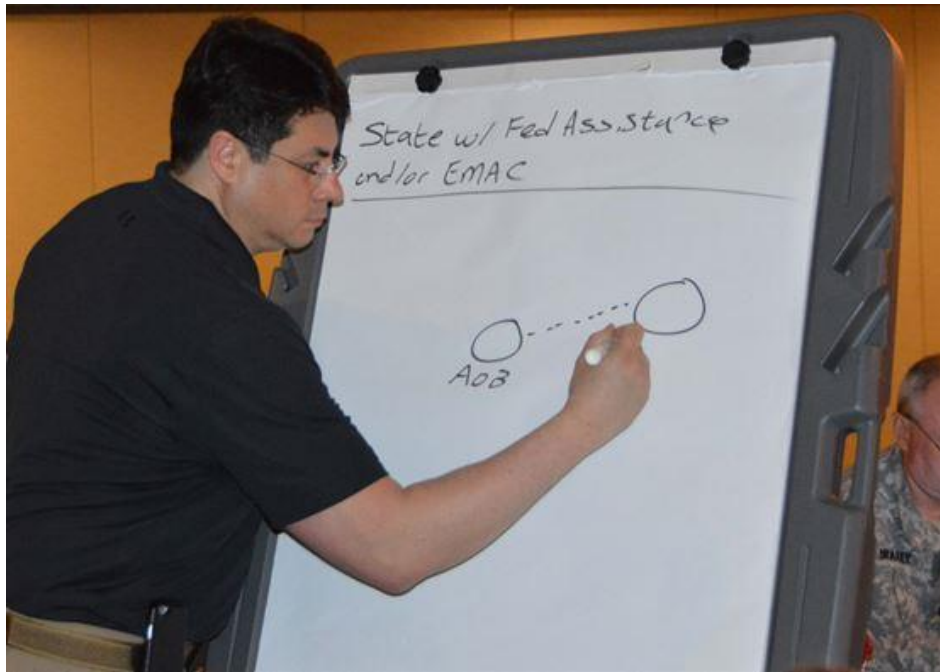
"The worst time to start working on an airspace plan is when you have no cell phone, no email and no electricity," he said.

Robert Sweet , Federal Aviation Administration Systems Operations Security division, said one of the primary challenges during a contingency operation is the introduction of local, state and federal air assets that may be unfamiliar with not only the airspace but also with operating with each other.

"With this workshop, we want to promote flight safety through harmonized, cooperative procedures across the spectrum of disaster-response flight operations," Sweet said. "This workshop provides an optimum platform to develop situational awareness about a common operating picture among and between states when a disaster strikes."



Brig. Gen. Greg Nelson, Vice Director , Strategy, Policy, Plans and International Affairs, National Guard Bureau, talks with Paul Williams, Federal Emergency Management Agency Region IV representative, during a break at the 2015 Multi-State Hurricane Air Coordination Plan Workshop July 14-15 at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla. Nelson coordinated the workshop which brought together representatives from across the federal and state crisis-response enterprise to develop a plan for a common air picture among multiple states during hurricane response. (Air Force Photo Released/Mary McHale)



Robert Sweet, Federal Aviation Administration Systems Operations Security, works on a diagram during the 2015 Multi-State Hurricane Air Coordination Plan Workshop July 14-15 at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla. The workshop brought together representatives from across the federal and state crisis-response enterprise to develop a plan for a common air picture among multiple states during a hurricane response. (Air Force Photo Released/Mary McHale)



Ray Hartbarger, National Guard Bureau Plans and Strategy Division, makes a point during the outbrief of the 2015 Multi-State Hurricane Air Coordination Plan Workshop July 14-15 at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla. The workshop brought together representatives from across the federal and state crisis-response enterprise to develop a plan for a common air picture among multiple states during a hurricane response. (Air Force Photo Released/Mary McHale)



Paul Bartko, Federal Aviation Administration Systems Operations Security, goes over some air plan information with Lt. Gen. William Etter, Commander, Continental U.S. Northern Aerospace Defense Region – 1st Air Force (Air Forces Northern), during an outbrief at the 2015 Multi-State Hurricane Air Coordination Plan Workshop July 14-15 at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla. The workshop brought together representatives from across the federal and state crisis-response enterprise to develop a plan for a common air picture among multiple states during a hurricane response. (Air Force Photo Released/Mary McHale)