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Developing a Tornado Response Plan to Identify Immediate Actions for Initial Response Units

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Certification Statement

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### Abstract

The problem was the Allen Fire Department (AFD) failed to identify essential actions for initial responding field units following a tornado touchdown that resulted in misallocation of resources, incomplete and inaccurate damage assessments, non-prioritized emergency responses, and potential loss of life. The purpose of this applied research project was to identify and implement a Tornado Response Plan that identifies immediate actions taken by initial responding field units, including community emergency response team (CERT), immediately after a tornado touched down. The purpose of this research project was accomplished by thoroughly evaluating the damage assessment collection process, determining the most effective use of CERT, and creating criteria to prioritize emergency calls during a community-wide disaster. Action research was used to create an Tornado Response Plan by answering four research questions: (a) how should damage assessments be conducted following a community-wide disaster, (b) how should emergency response be balanced with conducting damage assessments, (c) what initial actions taken by the CERT would be the most beneficial to mitigating the emergency, and (d) how should emergency calls be prioritized during a community-wide disaster? A 17-question survey was sent to Texas and Florida Fire Departments and two personnel interviews were conducted with experts in CERT. The results showed a positive correlation between an effective response to large-scale emergencies and departments that established a formal damage assessment process, took measures to balance damage assessments with emergency response, and prioritized emergency calls. The recommended Tornado Response Plan used data obtained from the survey and interviews to create a formal damage assessment process, balance damage assessments with emergency response, identify specific activities for CERT, and established criteria to prioritize emergency calls.

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## Developing a Tornado Response Plan to Identify Immediate Actions for Initial Response Units

Tornadoes are known to strike in any state within the United States at any time, but they are a much more frequent hazard across the mid-west and southern states during the spring and early summer. They are known for their raw power and leaving communities devastated in their wake. The problem is the Allen Fire Department (AFD) failed to identify essential actions for initial responding field units following a tornado touchdown that resulted in misallocation of resources, incomplete and inaccurate damage assessments, non-prioritized emergency response, and potential loss of life.

The City of Allen (COA) depends on the AFD to respond to and mitigate large-scale emergencies. A recent tornado touchdown in the City clearly demonstrated inadequate planning by the AFD and the COA, which significantly affected the ability of initial responding field units to mitigate the emergency and meet the needs of the community. The lack of preparation, training, and communication led to confusion, duplicated assignments, and misallocated resources. This coupled with the inadequate documentation, communications, and coordination directly affected the outcome of this incident.

The purpose of this applied research project (ARP) is to identify and implement a Tornado Response Plan that identifies immediate actions taken by initial responding field units, including the community emergency response team (CERT), immediately after a tornado touchdown. The purpose of this ARP shall be accomplished by thoroughly evaluating the damage assessment collection process, determining the most effective use of CERT, and creating criteria to prioritize emergency calls during a community wide disaster. By addressing these issues, the AFD can overcome their lack of planning and effectively mitigate all hazards and emergencies associated with a tornado touchdown.

The research questions for this ARP are (a) how should damage assessments be conducted following a community-wide disaster, (b) how should emergency response be balanced with conducting damage assessments, (c) what initial actions taken by the CERT would be the most beneficial to mitigating the emergency, and (d) how should emergency calls be prioritized during a community wide disaster? This is an action research project that shall design a plan that will clearly dictate how the AFD will respond during the initial phases following a tornado touchdown in the City.

### Background and Significance

The City of Allen is a compact urban community largely composed of commercial developments, industrial districts, mid-rise office buildings, retail shopping centers (including one of the largest outdoor malls in the Southwest), multi-story hotels, restaurants, and large residential subdivisions. Allen is located 24 miles north of downtown Dallas in Collin County. Allen's residential population totals approximately 90,000 with a transient population averaging between 100,000 to 125,000 (City of Allen, 2008). The land area of Allen is approximately 27.11 square miles, of which only 0.68 is unincorporated (COA). The COA conducted a risk analysis in 2007 and identified tornadoes as the most likely hazard to impact the City, with all other large scale risks being unlikely. Even when armed with this information, the AFD currently has not established any type of tornado response plan.

The AFD currently operates out of four stations, consists of 91 personnel, and provides medical services, fire suppression, specialty rescue, emergency management, and fire prevention to the COA. In addition to emergency response and management, the AFD offers other valued services to the community including the citizen fire academy, public education, CERT training, home and business fire inspections, fire safety education classes, and cardiopulmonary

resuscitation training. The AFD frontline apparatus includes two engines, two ladder trucks, four mobile intensive care units (MICUs), one specialty rescue vehicle, one incident command vehicle, one brush truck, and two heavy rescue trailers. The dispatch, the communications center, for the AFD is shared with the Allen Police Department and public works. On average, three dispatchers work per shift and are responsible for all three entities.

On April 10, 2008, at approximately 0230 hours, an EF-1 tornado with wind speeds of approximately 95 mph touched down on the west side of Allen from the southern city limits to the northern city limits causing severe damage to over 300 homes, damaging gas lines, and disrupting electricity to over 1,000 residents (WFAA, 2008). While the tornado was small on the EF scale, it did cause significant damage to residential and retail areas and infrastructure, mainly high voltage power lines, on the west side of town. Two residential homes under construction were completely destroyed and one occupied single family home was deemed unsafe to occupy. In addition, there were numerous electrical lines down across the west side of town.

Dispatch was inundated with 911 calls moments after the tornado touched down and fire and police resources were overwhelmed within the first few minutes. Dispatch received numerous residential and business fire alarm calls, wire down calls, odor investigations, fire investigations, and emergency medical/trauma calls. In addition, dispatch received several 911 calls for police assistance or investigation (i.e. burglar alarm) and nonemergency calls for public works (i.e. blocked roads). Dispatch struggled to handle the large volume of calls for all three entities causing delays in dispatching the right emergency responding units.

Dispatch attempted to transmit every 911 call in chronological order without any effort to prioritize the emergency calls. This resulted in frontline apparatus being committed to lower priority calls such as to an electrical wire down, while higher priority calls such as a structure fire



or an injured person was held until an apparatus became available to respond. In addition, fire apparatus were assigned multiple fire alarms to investigate simultaneously. The City of Allen Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was activated and functional within the first hour of the tornado touching down. The initial EOC consisted of the Fire Chief, Assistant Fire Chief of Operations, Assistant Fire Chief of Prevention, and the Training Chief. At approximately 0530 hours, liaisons from the police department and community services joined the EOC.

The EOC sent Battalion Chief 1 (BC 1) to the northwest corner of town to set up an area command. BC 1 had one engine, one truck, and one medic under his command. The EOC ordered BC 1 to respond to emergency calls and conduct damage assessments of the target area. BC 1 and the responding crews had no previous training on conducting damage assessments. Due to these factors, they felt damage assessments were a low priority and only responded to emergency calls for the first several hours of the first operational period. There was no attempt to balance emergency response and complete the damage assessments.

Damage assessments were not attempted until the sixth hour of the first operational period. No fire crews conducting damage assessments understood what information the EOC needed. This led to confusion as BC 1 attempted to assimilate the data coming in from the field units. The EOC quickly became frustrated as the data coming in from the field was off basis or incomplete. The Fire Chief eventually left the EOC to conduct his own damage assessments in the target areas.

Approximately six hours into the first operational period, BC 2 established a second area command with minimal resources in the southwest side of town. BC 2 experienced the same problems attempting to complete the damage assessments. No field units understood the term, much less what information was needed.

Initial responding units assigned to complete damage assessments were also responding to emergency calls. This created confusion regarding what areas had been completed and caused significant delays in the damage assessment process. Often units would respond to an emergency call while in the process of completing damage assessments. This led to several city blocks being missed.

The City of Allen has a fully trained and available CERT to assist the fire department during large-scale emergencies. The Operations Division of the AFD had not conducted training with CERT prior to this incident. This left BC 1 and 2 with no means to communicate with CERT members, much less any understanding of the level of training or capabilities of CERT members. CERT members did not carry radios with them as they walked neighborhoods through the affected area. At no time did BC 1 or 2 have any knowledge of CERT members' locations or activities.

The only task CERT members accomplished during this event was to turn off gas lines at residential meters. CERT members walked neighborhoods in an unorganized manner completing this task. Neither BC had any information of which locations CERT members had turned off gas lines. This led to a duplication of efforts by the fire department to ensure all gas lines had been secured.

While the incident of April 10<sup>th</sup> taxed the AFD's resources to their limits, this was a small scale incident for a tornado. Only 300 homes received major damage and no life-threatening injuries were reported. It is quite possible that the AFD could not have offered effective patient care if needed due to MICUs being dispatched to non-medical calls. In addition, all frontline-staffed fire apparatus, including all four MICUs, were operating in the affected areas with no reserve equipment available to respond to other areas of the community if needed. This incident

served as a clear warning that the AFD is not prepared to handle the aftermath of a tornado in the community.

This ARP and establishing a tornado response plan that address emergency response, damage assessments, and CERT clearly ties to the key concepts and attitudes needed to lead an executive analysis of emergency management. There is a clear link between this ARP and several units of the Executive Analysis of Fire Service Operations in Emergency Management (EAOFSOEM) course, but preciously Unit 6: Damage Assessment (U.S. Department of Homeland Security [DHS], 2009). This ARP will potentially provide a tornado response plan that integrates initial emergency response, damage assessments, EOC, and CERT, and which is in accordance with the content of the EAOFSOEM course (DHS). In addition, this ARP directly links with the United States Fire Administration (USFA) operational objective to respond in a timely manner to emerging issues (U.S. Fire Administration [USFA], 2008). By applying the criteria of this ARP, the AFD will be better equipped to respond and mitigate large-scale emergencies that are a direct result of a tornado.

#### Literature Review

Damage assessments provide a means for emergency responders to evaluate, assimilate, document, and communicate damage to communities following large-scale emergencies. Damage assessments are often called different names such as building triage or windshield surveys, but the premise is the same. According to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), there are two types of damage assessments: immediate and post-incident (DHS, 2009). For the purpose of this research, only immediate damage assessments will be researched.

Damage assessment is the process of assimilating information related to the impact of an event, or series of events, on life and property within a defined area (DHS, 2009). The National

Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1600, *Disaster/Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs* defines damage assessment as a determination of the effects of the disaster on human, physical, economic, and natural resources (National Fire Protection Association [NFPA], 2007). Damage assessments afford emergency responders a means to gather information to direct the decision making process.

One of the first steps in responding to large-scale events is to evaluate the situation in order to provide a situational analysis and drive the decision-making process (Crandall, Parnell, & Spillan, 2009). The information obtained through damage assessments provides key decision makers with intelligence and insight on the event. A situational analysis, including a damage assessment, shall be conducted for successful mitigation and recovery (NFPA, 2007). The operational planning process depends on information on the existing event and incident managers must first understand the scope of the disaster before establishing situational objectives (Anthony, 1994). Damage assessments provide the necessary information to allow the scope of the disaster to be understood and directs the decision making process of incident priorities and resource allocation.

Immediate damage assessment as defined by DHS (2009) is a rapid estimate of damage that occurs in the initial moments following a large-scale event. The immediate damage assessment process is indispensable in understanding the scope of the event and what situations must be given priority (Florida Division of Emergency Management [FDEM], 2009). The damage assessment process arms decision makers with the necessary information to assign resources to the highest priority areas. This minimizes the opportunity for resource misallocation. When the damage assessment process is conducted properly, emergency response is more

effective and resources, both personnel and equipment, are allocated to the highest priority (FDEM).

It is clear the damage assessment process is vital to the successful mitigation of large-scale emergencies. It affords key decision makers with essential information to determine event priorities and effectively assign resources. The damage assessment process requires a formal process to ensure the assimilation of correct information. An informal process of attempting to establish a damage assessment process on scene will only lead to delays in the process and confusion over the information that is required and gathered (DHS, 2009). This is clearly demonstrated by analyzing the damage assessment process deployed by the AFD following the tornado touchdown.

While not all large-scale emergencies or even all tornados will affect communities in the same way, the information and process for damage assessments will only change in scale based upon the size of the event (DHS, 2009). The information and process should remain consistent. According to DHS (2009), damage assessments must address and provide specific information that establishes evaluation criteria that includes, need for emergency actions, life safety threats, possible hazards to emergency response personnel, property damage, access problems, and damage to roadways. In addition, the process of completing the damage assessments must be consistent. According to NFPA 1600, a formal procedure should be in place to conduct damage assessments and identify resources needed to respond and recover from the event (NFPA, 2007).

The damage assessment procedures should specifically outline the information collection process. NFPA 1600 states the procedures should identify resources needed to complete the collection process (NFPA, 2007). The County of Vance, North Carolina, includes detailed damage assessment procedures in their Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) that clearly outlines

information evaluated in the damage assessment process and what resources will be used to conduct damage assessments (County of Vance, 2008). According to their procedure, county damage assessment teams, American Red Cross, and federal agencies conduct damage assessments. The data will be collected in an efficient manner by rapidly evaluating each structure on established criteria (County of Vance). The type of damage assessment used by the County of Vance can be classified as a windshield survey. Windshield surveys are conducted by evaluating damage while driving vehicles through target areas in an expedient manner and are a useful strategy for conducting damage assessments in areas where damage is widespread, such as in a tornado (Strickland, 1998).

The City of Anchorage, Alaska, utilizes a damage assessment process very similar to the County of Vance. The City of Anchorage, Alaska, identifies items to be assessed that include buildings, structures, roadways, and utilities and the type of damage assessment to be conducted, windshield survey and aerial survey, in their damage assessment procedure (The City Anchorage, 2007). Anchorage uses windshield surveys as their primary tool to conduct damage assessments. In addition, the City of Spokane, Washington, relies on the windshield survey as its method of conducting damage assessments as a means to gather detailed information in the most expeditious manner (City of Spokane, 2008). The City of Kent, Washington, uses windshield surveys to conduct drive-by triage of high hazard, high population areas, and to provide a quick overview and assessment that will allow response units to be dispatched to the areas in the greatest need (City of Kent, 2004).

In addition to outlining the method of conducting the damage assessments, procedures should provide the criteria to base the evaluations on and a formal means to document the data. DHS (2009) lists the evaluation criteria that should guide the damage assessment process as need

for emergency actions, life safety threats, possible hazards to emergency response personnel, property damage, access problems, and damage to roadways. The County of Vance damage assessment procedure establishes the evaluation criteria as life safety, emergency security, debris removal, mass care, and restoration of essential services (County of Vance, 2008). This ensures all resources conducting damage assessments evaluate damage based on the same criteria and allows the EOC to gain a clear picture of the disaster and start making decisions based on the information assimilated from the damage assessments.

Similarly, the damage assessment procedure for the City of Anchorage states that a rapid assessment of all buildings, structures, roadways, and utilities will be evaluated for life safety, needed resources, and access (City of Anchorage, 2007). The City of Kent evaluates life safety, safety needs of citizens, resource needs, and building integrity through their windshield surveys (City of Kent, 2004). This information allows key decision makers to determine response effort priorities, response capabilities, and the need for additional resources. The information obtained through damage assessments provides key decision makers with important information to direct response and recovery.

At the same time vital resources are conducting damage assessments following a disaster, dispatch/emergency call centers will be receiving requests for emergency assistance from citizens. If fire and/or police department units are conducting damage assessments, they may also be responsible for emergency response. Resources cannot rapidly and accurately conduct damage assessments while responding to emergency calls (City of Hubbard, 2009). It is important to limit first responders' role in conducting damage assessment, if they will remain responsible for emergency response. As soon as practical, first responders should be relieved of damage assessment duties so they can continue emergency response (Clark County, 2003).

The purpose of a damage assessment is to provide a rapid estimate of damage that occurs in the initial moments following a large-scale event. For this reason, resources conducting damage assessments should not respond to emergency calls. Clark County (2003) clearly instructs resources conducting damage assessments to bypass an apparently urgent situation to continue damage assessment activities. In the damage assessment procedure for Anchorage, Alaska, it specifically states that responders will complete damage assessments as quickly as possible and will not stop to render aid (City of Anchorage, 2007). The County of Vance (2008) and City of Spokane (2008) both include language in their damage assessment procedures that prohibit resources conducting damage assessments from responding to emergency calls.

A method, to help governments balance emergency response and conduct damage assessments simultaneously, is to develop damage assessment teams. The Florida Division of Emergency Management (2009) states that to conduct accurate rapid damage assessments, local governments must have damage assessment teams. It is recommended to identify and form damage assessments teams, preferably prior to the disaster through the EOP or damage assessment procedure that are solely responsible for conducting damage assessments (Planitz, 1999).

Damage assessment teams provide key decision makers with vital information to understand the scope of the disaster, while allowing first responders to continue emergency responses. To conduct accurate damage assessments, local governments must have capable damage assessment teams that are identified and trained in advance of the disaster (FDEM, 2009). This ensures damage assessments are completed rapidly and accurately. Damage assessment teams should be pre-identified and trained in the damage assessment process, documentation, and reporting channels (Planitz, 1999). They will be organized, equipped, and



assigned a location to complete damage assessments and will not participate in emergency response (Fictitious County, 2008). Damage assessment teams afford entities a method to respond to emergency calls and conduct damage assessments simultaneously.

Another method to help balance emergency response with conducting damage assessments, without pre-identified formal damage assessment teams, is to assign damage assessments to nonemergency resources. The Florida Division of Emergency Management (2009) recommends including city engineers, public works, and even building inspectors on completing damage assessments. CERT is another viable option when completing damage assessments and frees up emergency response resources. CERT is trained to collect disaster intelligence that will assist professional responders with prioritization and allocation of resources following a disaster (Community Emergency Response Team [CERT], 2009a).

CERT and similarly trained resources augment emergency services and emergency management officials with trained individuals. CERT training is established and overseen by Citizen Corp and FEMA, and includes training on assisting emergency responders in numerous areas including fire hazards, medically assisting victims, organizing other volunteer agencies, conducting damage assessments, removing debris from roadways, and turning off residential gas meters (FEMA, 2003). Communities often supplement their response capabilities after a disaster by recruiting and training citizens as neighborhood, business, and government field teams that, in essence, will be auxiliary responders (CERT, 2009a). “These groups provide immediate assistance to victims in their area, organize spontaneous volunteers who have not had the training, and collect disaster intelligence that will assist professional responders with prioritization and allocation of resources following a disaster” (CERT, p. 1).

CERT training includes numerous functions that assist communities in mitigating emergencies. Sacramento, California, conducted an emergency simulation drill where the community experienced severe flooding and emergency responding resources were quickly overwhelmed (FEMA, 2008). They utilized CERT to perform watercraft rescue and rope rescue, with CERT responsible for rescuing over 100 victims before the drill was terminated (FEMA).

Logan, Utah, assigned their CERT many key activities following a massive landslide that ended up killing three people and destroying several homes (CERT, 2009b). CERT completed several assignments over the six-day event that included being in charge of water and food distribution for emergency personnel, organizing and directing volunteers, and providing security for the command center and shelters (CERT). They were a key component to the successful mitigation by allowing emergency response resources to focus on search and rescue, incident stabilization, and patient care.

CERT is traditionally used to provide support functions for emergency services that include conducting damage assessments. Cobb County, Georgia, trains their CERT to complete damage assessments to allow emergency resources to address life safety and incident stabilization issues (Cobb Emergency Management Agency [CEMA], 2009). Once CERT members complete the damage assessment course, they are assigned and expected to complete damage assessments following severe weather (CEMA).

CERT can be trained to safely and competently complete a variety of assignments. Some organizations, like Sacramento, California, uses CERT for key operational tasks such as search and rescue, while other organizations, like Logan, Utah, use CERT for support operations. Traditionally, CERT is used to provide support functions that afford a certain degree of safety. Gerrish Township, Michigan, trains and assigns their CERT to assist in victim triage and rescue,

traffic control, security, sheltering, and mass feeding (Gerrish Township, 2007). Support functions afford CERT the ability to complete their assignment safely. CERT must be able to complete the assignment safely and not place any member in undue harm (CERT, 2009a).

Due to the amount of risk involved in searching structures following a disaster, such as a tornado, communities such as Gerrish Township (2007) and Cobb County (2009) will not allow their CERT to function in such high risk activities. FEMA sponsored CERT training does include a light search and rescue operations module, but the intent is to provide an understanding of rescue planning and not train CERT in the capacity of search and rescue (CERT, 2009a). Following the guidelines provided by Citizen Corp and FEMA, CERT should not be assigned initial search and rescue activities, if possible. Their training is more directed at support functions that affords emergency services the ability to focus on operational tasks needed to mitigate the disaster.

Community-wide disasters, even on a smaller scale, result in numerous requests for emergency assistance. As was seen in the Allen tornado in 2008, the emergency call center, or dispatch center, were quickly be inundated with 911 calls and requests for emergency assistance. Without any type of formal procedure or training on how to prioritize emergency calls during high volume events, the dispatcher is forced to transmit emergency calls in chronological order in which they are received or make decisions based upon personal judgment. This results in a delay of higher priority calls, while lower priority calls tie up emergency responding resources. For this reason, organizations must have a formal process to prioritize emergency calls to assure maximum utilization of resources (National Volunteer Fire Council [NVFC], 2009).

Organizations have finite number of resources that can respond to emergency calls. Call prioritization helps emergency service organizations use those resources efficiently and

effectively in managing numerous calls simultaneously (City of Arlington, 2009). An emergency dispatcher must handle police, fire, and medical emergency calls, have the necessary training, protocols, experience, and poise to interrogate callers quickly and accurately determine the priority of the emergency, and send the appropriate public safety resources to the scene promptly (Ornato, 2009). A formal emergency call prioritization procedure provides the means to quickly prioritize and send the appropriate resources.

The National Volunteer Fire Council (2009) recommends organizations adopt an emergency call prioritization procedure that standardizes call-taking procedures and call prioritizing that assures requests for emergency service are assigned in order of emergency necessity. A formal emergency call prioritization procedure allows the dispatcher to quickly and consistently sort emergency calls based on the greatest needs. The dispatch center will likely be challenged with an overwhelming number of call requests for medical aid in proportion to the number of initial resources in the aftermath of a tornado (Garlock, 2002). In addition to the request for medical aid, the dispatch center will likely receive numerous requests for assistance with downed trees blocking access or entangled in power lines (Millsap, 1994) and ruptured gas lines (Eichelberger, 1991). An emergency call prioritization procedure ensures resource allocation goes to the area with the greatest needs.

A tornado that touched down in Parkersburg, Iowa, left hundreds of people trapped and in need of help, but the emergency responders also faced downed trees blocking access, downed power lines, and ruptured gas lines (Meyer, 2009). Emergency services clearly had to prioritize the needs of the community in order to determine an appropriate resource allocation. Their initial actions were prioritized on life safety objectives and resources were allocated based on saving the greatest number of lives (Meyer). Emergency calls were prioritized on immediate actions that

could save or help the greatest amount of people. Lower priority hazards, such as downed power lines and ruptured gas lines, were mitigated later into the incident after higher priority needs were addressed (Meyer).

When a tornado touched down in Windsor, Colorado on May 22, 2008, it left a wide path of destruction that resulted in numerous emergency calls for help (Garlock, 2009). With limited emergency resources, Windsor prioritized emergency calls and resources based on life safety. The initial response, including nearly all career and volunteer firefighters, was dispatched to two different schools that received major damage to start search and rescue activities (Garlock). This was the highest priority based on life safety objectives. Emergency calls for gas leaks, even large leaks that created the threat of explosions, were delayed until life safety objectives were completed (Garlock).

A variety of emergency call prioritization programs exist that range from providing standing protocols and training to computer-based programs that prioritize calls based on different software packages. A majority of these programs include a police, fire, and emergency medical service component. While these programs are intended for everyday use and not specifically designed for high volume events, they establish standard protocols for prioritizing emergency calls that can aid dispatchers during high volume events.

The National Academies of Emergency Dispatch has provided emergency dispatch protocols to fire, emergency medical service, and police for over 30 years with many different packages based on the needs of the organization (National Academies of Emergency Dispatch, 2009). Priority Dispatch is another organization that provides a variety of tools from protocol field guides to computer-based prioritization (Priority Dispatch, 2009). These programs provide

dispatchers with an established procedure for prioritizing calls that helps ensure high priority calls or areas receive assistance before lower priority calls.

Priority dispatch and the National Academies of Emergency Dispatch, including medical priority dispatch, fire priority dispatch, and police priority dispatch, prioritize emergency calls according to immediate life safety, and incident stabilization objectives (Priority Dispatch, 2008). This follows closely with standard fire-ground incident priorities of life safety, incident stabilization, and property conservation (Angle, Gala, Harlow, Lombardo, & Maciuba, 2001). Placing life safety as the highest priority places resources in the best location to save the most lives.

#### Procedures

A survey of the paid fire departments within the state of Texas was conducted. A list of all paid, professional fire departments in Texas registered with the Texas Fire Chiefs Association was obtained in the 2009 *Texas Fire Chief Membership Directory Issue* (Texas Fire Chiefs Association, 2009). The contact name for each department was listed in alphabetic order according to their last name. This list was utilized in identifying the fire departments selected for the survey. A survey was sent out utilizing the internet software “Survey Monkey.com” to 56 paid fire departments within the state of Texas (Appendix B).

Each department identified to receive a survey was selected by using the systematic sampling method, where the first department on the list was selected and then every third department from that point forward was selected. This provided the researcher with 56 departments. Of the 56 departments who were originally sent a survey, 24 (Appendix C) responded for a response rate of 43%. The survey was sent out on October 8, 2009, and the

researcher selected December 15, 2009, as the cutoff date for responses. The researcher selected December 15, 2009, to provide adequate time to compile the data obtained from the survey.

The same survey was sent to Florida Fire Departments through the Florida Fire Chiefs Association (FFCA). The researcher contacted the FFCA website administrator and requested the website administrator send the survey to all fire departments within the FFCA. A total of 67 surveys were completed and returned. The response rate is unknown due to the uncertainty of the total number of surveys sent out by the FFCA website administrator. The website administrator was contacted on October 8, 2009, and requested and agreed to send out the survey on this date. The researcher selected December 15, 2009, as the cut off date for responses to provide adequate time to compile the data obtained from the survey.

The researcher created a 17-question survey utilizing the software “Survey Monkey.com”. The survey consisted of nine yes/no questions, four multiple answer questions, two short answer/essay questions, and two rating questions. The multiple answer questions allowed for more than one answer and were used to identify specific criteria. The essay questions allowed the responder to explain answers that were specific to their departments. One rating question utilized a four-point Likert scale for responses and the other rating question asked participants to rank items according to their department’s priorities.

The purpose of the survey was to evaluate several key components of damage assessment and emergency call prioritization processes, CERT assignments utilized by other fire departments, and identify which components are associated with departments that consistently rate these specific processes as good to excellent. Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the data collected from the surveys. Frequencies of each question provided percentages for comparison among questions. The survey was limited to paid Texas Fire Departments due to

similarities with the AFD including, state government agencies, terrain and type of natural disasters. Florida Fire Departments were selected based on frequency of natural disasters.

The limitations of this survey include delivery issues, misunderstandings, and return issues. There is no guarantee that email address listed in *Texas Fire Chief* or registered with the FFCA is correct. It is possible the email address changed or the contact information is no longer valid for their listed department. The possibility of misunderstanding survey questions or bias could affect and limit the accuracy of the survey. It is assumed that the selected contacts have an ample understanding or access to their department emergency operations plan.

In addition to the survey, two personal interviews with key individuals in organizing and managing the Allen CERT were conducted. Each interview occurred separately on October 13, 2009, in the AFD Conference Room. Each interview was tape-recorded for accuracy in transcribing all responses. Dave Campbell is a CERT instructor and one of the individuals who founded the Allen CERT. He currently co-instructs one CERT course annually and manages the Allen CERT. In addition, he is a CERT team leader with direct supervision of 20 CERT members. Mr. Campbell is an expert in CERT training and understating CERT capabilities and limitations.

The second personal interviewee, Joey Harold, is also responsible for managing and organizing the Allen CERT. He is responsible for co-instructing one CERT course annually. Mr. Harold is a CERT team leader with direct supervision of 20 CERT members. He is an expert in CERT training and understanding CERT capabilities and limitations.

## Results

Due to the amount of area and severity of damage caused by tornados, the damage assessment process is one of the most beneficial tasks to complete in the quickest amount of



time. For this reason, a large majority of organizations implement a formal damage assessment policy, or at a minimum, train their employees on how to conduct damage assessments. Of the 91 fire departments surveyed, 85 (93.4%) departments indicate they maintain a formal damage assessment policy or receive minimum training on the damage assessment process. Fifty-seven (62.6%) of the 91 fire departments indicated they maintain a formal damage assessment policy. Of the 34 fire departments that do not establish a formal damage assessment policy, 28 departments indicate they have receive minimal training on damage assessments and potentially could be assigned to conduct damage assessments.

Table 1 shows the ratings breakdown of the 57 departments who establish a formal damage assessment policy along the following four categories: effectiveness on completing damage assessments, reporting damage assessment information to proper individual/department, completing damage assessments in a timely manner, and responding to emergency calls during a large-scale emergency. Assigning values to each rating allows an average rating to be determined using the weighted mean. The following values were assigned to each rating: 1-Poor, 2-Fair, 3-Good, 4-Excellent.

Table 1: Ratings of Departments with a Formal Damage Assessment Policy

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Rating Average
Effectiveness on conducting damage assessments	10	16	22	9	2.53
Reporting damage assessments to proper individual/section	8	15	24	10	2.63
Completing damage assessments in a timely manner	8	16	24	9	2.60
Responding to emergency calls during a large scale emergency	6	15	26	10	2.70

Table 2 shows the breakdown of ratings along the same four categories for the 28 departments that do not establish a formal policy, but provide their employees some type of damage assessment training. The research indicates that the departments with an established damage assessment policy rate higher in the four surveyed categories compared to departments that do not establish a formal policy. The rating average for departments with a formal damage assessment policy in the four categories of effectiveness on conducting damage assessments, reporting damage assessment information to the proper individual, completing damage assessments in a timely manner, and responding to emergency calls during a large-scale emergency is 2.53, 2.63, 2.60, and 2.70, respectively. The rating average of the departments without a formal policy in the same four categories is 2.21, 2.32, 2.36, and 2.18, respectively. The rating average for departments with a formal damage assessment policy is consistently higher in all four categories than departments without a formal policy.

Table 2: Ratings of Departments with No Formal Damage Assessment Policy

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Rating Average
Effectiveness on conducting damage assessments	8	10	6	4	2.21
Reporting damage assessments to proper individual/section	6	11	7	4	2.32
Completing damage assessments in a timely manner	6	10	8	4	2.36
Responding to emergency calls during a large scale emergency	8	11	5	4	2.18

The data collected through the survey shows that 66 (77.6%) departments rely on front-line apparatus to complete damage assessments. Twenty-nine (34.1%) departments use fire chiefs of any rank to conduct damage assessments. Twenty-eight (32.9%) use community led

and trained resources such as CERT. (It is important to note that not all departments maintain a CERT, or similar resource. Of the 91 surveyed departments, 62 (70.5%) maintain such a resource.) Nineteen (22.4%) departments rely on reserve apparatus staffed with recalled employees to complete damage assessments. The remaining responses, 46 (54.1%), included a wide variety of resources: police units, building engineers, fire inspectors, human resource personnel, lifeguards, and other city personnel to complete damage assessments. The question allowed the participant to select more than one answer in case their department used multiple resources to conduct damage assessments. Table 3 shows the breakdown of the most common responses.

Table 3: Resources Used to Complete Damage Assessments

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Frontline Apparatus (i.e. engine, truck)	77.6%	66
Reserve Apparatus	22.4%	19
Community Response Teams (i.e. CERT)	32.9%	28
Chiefs (any rank)	34.1%	29

Table 4 shows the ratings breakdown for resources used to complete damage assessments along the same four categories. The rating average in all four categories for front-line apparatus is 2.72, 2.76, 2.76, and 2.33, respectively. The rating average for responding to emergency calls during large-scale emergencies is significantly lower than the other three categories. The rating average in all four categories for reserve apparatus is 2.42, 2.76, 2.38, and 2.54, respectively. The rating average is significantly lower in the effectiveness on completing damage assessments and completing the damage assessments in a timely manner, but higher in the ability to respond to emergency calls. The rating average in the same categories for CERT or a similar resource is 2.51, 2.44, 2.40, and 2.68, respectively. The rating average is lower in the effectiveness, timeliness, and proper communications, but has the highest rating average of all other resources

for the ability of the department to respond to emergency calls. The rating average for chiefs of any rank is 2.44, 2.76, 2.33, and 2.54, respectively.

Table 4: The Rating Average of Resources Used to Complete Damage Assessments

	<b>Frontline Apparatus</b>	<b>Reserve Apparatus</b>	<b>CERT</b>	<b>Chiefs</b>
Effectiveness on conducting damage assessments	2.72	2.42	2.51	2.44
Reporting damage assessments to proper individual/section	2.76	2.76	2.44	2.76
Completing damage assessments in a timely manner	2.76	2.38	2.40	2.33
Responding to emergency calls during a large scale emergency	2.33	2.54	2.68	2.54

Of the 91 departments surveyed, 52 (60.5%) establish predetermined travel routes, districts, or grids for damage assessment resources to travel. Of the same 91 departments, 53 (60.9%) departments utilize a standardized form for the completion of damage assessments. Forty-eight (52.7%) of the departments maintain a formal procedure for damage assessments, establish predetermined travel routes, and utilize a standardized form. Of the 57 departments that maintain a formal policy on damage assessments, only nine (15.8%) do not establish predetermined travel routes and utilize a standardized form. Table 5 shows a comparison breakdown of the rating average for departments who establish predetermined travel routes and utilize standardized forms compared to those who do not for the following three categories: effectiveness on completing damage assessments, reporting damage assessment information to proper individual/department, and completing damage assessments in a timely manner. The researcher identified these three categories as the most relevant to the predetermined travel route and standardized form questions.

Table 5: Rating Average Comparison

	Predetermined Travel Routes	No Predetermined Travel Routes	Standardized Form	No Standardized Form
Effectiveness on conducting damage assessments	2.61	2.38	2.58	2.34
Reporting damage assessments to proper individual/section	2.64	2.61	2.64	2.60
Completing damage assessments in a timely manner	2.70	2.26	2.62	2.33

The research indicates that departments who establish predetermined travel routes and utilize standardized forms for damage assessments consistently rate higher in the three categories. The rating average for departments that establish predetermined travel routes for the three categories is 2.61, 2.64, and 2.70, respectively. The same ratings for departments that do not establish predetermined travel routes are 2.38, 2.61, and 2.26, respectively. All ratings are significantly higher. The same holds true for departments that utilize standardized forms. Their ratings are 2.58, 2.64, and 2.62, respectively. Compared to departments that do not rely on standardized forms, which rate at 2.34, 2.60, and 2.33, respectively.

During large-scale disasters, responding emergency resources will be overwhelmed with efforts to mitigate all hazards, respond to emergency calls, and conduct damage assessments. For this reason, a majority of departments surveyed take measures to balance the damage assessment process with emergency response. Fifty-five (60.4%) departments take some form of action to ensure the damage assessment process and response to emergency calls occurs simultaneously. While 55 departments take measures to balance damage assessments and emergency response, only 29 departments (31.4%) assign resources to conduct damage assessments only without

potentially responding to emergency calls. The other 62 (68.6%) departments potentially have damage assessment resources respond to emergency calls.

Table 6 shows a rating average comparison breakdown between departments that take measures to balance the damage assessment process with emergency response compared to departments that take no action, and departments that have designated damage assessment resources that do not additionally respond to emergency calls compared to departments that assign resources to complete damage assessments and respond to emergency calls. The comparison uses the rating average for the following three categories: effectiveness of conducting damage assessments, completing damage assessments in a timely manner, and responding to emergency calls during a large-scale emergency. The researcher identified these three categories as the most relevant to balancing damage assessments and responding to emergency calls.

Table 6: Comparison Breakdown for Balancing Damage Assessment and Emergency Response

	<b>Balance Damage Assessments and Emergency Response</b>	<b>Do Not Balance Damage Assessments and Emergency Response</b>	<b>Damage Assessments Only</b>	<b>Damage Assessments and Emergency Response</b>
Effectiveness on conducting damage assessments	2.58	2.36	2.70	2.40
Completing damage assessments in a timely manner	2.73	2.41	2.79	2.44
Responding to emergency calls during a large scale emergency	2.84	2.47	3.03	2.56

It is worth noting that departments that take measures to balance the damage assessment process with emergency response rate higher in all three categories. There is a significant difference in the responding to emergency calls during a large-scale emergency category between the two groups. The rating average for those who take measures to balance is 2.84

compared to a rating average of 2.47 for those who take no action. The departments that assign resources only to conduct damage assessments also rate higher in all three categories compared to departments that use resources to conduct damage assessments and respond to emergency calls.

The 55 departments who take measures to balance damage assessments and emergency response provided a wide variety of responses on the measures taken. Table 7 provides a list of the most common responses with their rating average for the same three categories. The departments that address life safety emergencies before starting the damage assessment process rate higher in responding to emergency calls category, but lower in the effectiveness and timeliness of their damage assessment process. Departments that use nonemergency response resources to conduct damage assessments rate consistently high in all three categories.

Table 7: Rating Average Comparison for Measures Taken to Balance Damage Assessments

Measures Taken to Balance Damage Assessment and Emergency Response:	Response Count	Effectiveness of Damage Assessments	Damage Assessments in a Timely Manner	Responding to Emergency Calls
Address life safety emergencies before damage assessments	10	2.51	2.66	2.90
District resources conduct damage assessments, second in resources respond to emergency calls	9	2.57	2.78	2.85
Conduct damage assessments until needed for emergency response	10	2.53	2.64	2.81
Damage assessment first, then emergency response	11	2.66	2.81	2.77
Use nonemergency responding resources to conduct damage assessments	8	2.61	2.79	2.87
Other	7	2.47	2.73	2.74

In order to improve mitigation efforts and increase the number of resources available during large-scale disasters, many organizations develop community led resources, such as CERT. Mr. Campbell, a CERT instructor and team leader, stated, “CERT is designed to assist and work side-by-side with the fire department” (D. Campbell, personal communication,

October, 13, 2009). Mr. Campbell identified several tasks CERT was capable of completing within the first few hours following the aftermath of a tornado. According to Mr. Campbell, CERT is trained to control traffic, barricade roads, turn off natural gas lines, conduct search and rescue, and perform first aid. Mr. Campbell stated, “CERT is fully capable of completing damage assessments and communicating all assimilated information to the proper individual without fire department assistance” (D. Campbell, personal communication, October, 13, 2009).

Joey Harold, a CERT instructor and team leader, stated, “CERT members are trained to work in small groups of three or four, with one individual acting as company officer. Each small group will work under a team leader who will usually manage five or six small groups” (J. Harold, personal communication, October, 13, 2009). According to Mr. Harold, the small groups communicate directly with the team leader and then the team leader is responsible for gathering all information from the small groups and forwarding it to the correct individual. Mr. Harold also indicated that CERT is trained for a variety of functions including: traffic control, barricading roads, turning off natural gas lines, completing damage assessments, and first aid (J. Harold, personal communication, October, 13, 2009).

Of the 91 surveyed departments, 62 (70.5%) maintain a CERT or similar resource. Of these 62 departments, 28 departments utilize their CERT to complete damage assessments as their first priority during a large-scale incident. Twenty-three departments first priority for CERT is search and rescue and twenty departments use CERT for patient triage. Eleven departments use CERT to shut off utilities such as gas and water. Of the departments surveyed, that have used CERT or a similar resource during a large-scale emergency, 90.9% find CERT helpful in successfully mitigating emergencies.



In an effort to utilize resources in the most effective manner, a large majority of organizations prioritize emergency calls during a large-scale emergency. Of the 91 departments surveyed, 83 (92.1%) prioritize emergency calls. A small majority of departments use a commercial program, such as Priority Dispatch or Emergency Medical Dispatch, to prioritize emergency calls. Forty-seven (56.6%) departments purchase a commercial program. Thirty-six (43.3%) departments prioritize emergency calls on established internal criteria. There is minimal difference in the rating average between the two groups in the prioritizing emergency calls during a large-scale emergency category. Commercial programs have a rating average of 3.12 in this category, while those relying on internal criteria have a rating of 3.10.

The departments that use internal criteria to prioritize emergency calls identify structure fires, mass causality incidents (trauma or medical), rescue, and injured person calls as high priority calls. Mass causality incidents rated the highest with 63 departments selecting this as their top priority. A structure fire call rates second highest with 31 selections as a top priority. The same departments identify missing person, odor investigation, fire alarm, wire down, and hazardous material incidents as low priority calls.

### Discussion

Previous research and the collected data validates the necessity to conduct the damage assessment process following a large-scale disaster in order to provide key decision-makers with vital information that enables the establishment of accurate priorities and resource allocation. One of the first steps in responding to large-scale disasters is to evaluate the situation to gather as much information as possible in the shortest timeframe in order to drive the decision-making process (Crandall, Parnell, & Spillan, 2009). The results of the survey demonstrate that the damage assessment process is widely accepted among fire departments as a means to assimilate

information with over 93% departments indicating they maintain a damage assessment policy and/or conduct damage assessment training. The damage assessment process is indispensable in understanding the scope of the event, establishing priorities, and resource allocation (Florida Division of Emergency Management, 2009). The research validates the importance of the damage assessment process with an overwhelming majority of departments preparing their organization and training their personnel on the damage assessment process.

NFPA 1600 states a formal damage assessment procedure should be in place and specifically identifies needed resources, and outlines the information collection process (NFPA, 2007). Previous research clearly demonstrates the importance of damage assessments and the need for a formal damage assessment process. The damage assessment process requires a formal process to ensure the assimilation of desired information based upon established evaluation criteria that includes: need for emergency actions, life safety threats, possible hazards to emergency response personnel, property damage, access problems, and damage to roadways (DHS, 2009). An informal process of conducting damage assessments will only lead to delays and confusion over the information to gather (DHS). A formal process ensures the desired information is collected, documented, and communicated consistently.

The collected research concurs with the importance of establishing a formal damage assessment policy. The departments with a formal damage assessment policy consistently rated their departments higher in their effectiveness on conducting damage assessments, reporting damage assessment information to the correct location, completing damage assessments in a timely manner, and responding to emergency calls during a large scale-scale emergency over departments that do not maintain a formal policy. The rating average is significantly higher in all four categories for departments with a formal policy, with the biggest difference being in their

ability to respond to emergency calls during the event. Departments with a formal policy are more prepared and better trained when the event occurs. They are not left making snap decisions that lead to confusion and misallocation of resources. The formal process ensures all participants understand what information to collect, document, and communicate consistently. Conducting damage assessments properly ensures a more effective emergency response in both personnel and equipment (Florida Division of Emergency Management, 2009). The formal policy establishes consistency and a higher level of understanding. For this reason, departments with a formal policy are more effective at conducting damage assessments, communicating the information correctly, completing the process in a timely manner, and responding to emergency calls during the event.

The AFD's response to the 2008 tornado clearly showed a lack of preparation and any formal damage assessment policy. The AFD failed to consistently complete damage assessments and struggled to respond to emergency calls during the event. The lack of preparation and formal policies led to confusion with damage assessments. Most responding personnel had never heard of damage assessments before the event, which left resources completing the damage assessments guessing as to what information was needed. A formal damage assessment policy will reduce the amount of confusion and ensure all resources understand what information to collect and communicate.

As part of the damage assessment process, departments such as the County of Vance (2008), Anchorage, Alaska, (2007), and the City of Spokane (2008) establish a predetermined approach to conducting damage assessments. The County Vance conducts damage assessments by driving vehicles through the target zones in a predetermined manner (County of Vance, 2008). Both Anchorage (2007) and Spokane (2008) follow similar guidelines to provide a quick

assessment of high priority targets. The research supports this type of approach to conducting damage assessments. Over 60% of departments use some sort of predetermined travel routes based on established criteria. The departments that establish predetermined travel routes rate significantly higher in their effectiveness on conducting damage assessments and completing them in a timely manner. The data shows departments who establish predetermined travel routes are more effective and timely in the damage assessment process. These departments know the high priority targets to evaluate first. They understand their role, which allows them to conduct damage assessments based on priorities and complete them in a timely manner. By outlining predetermined travel routes based on established criteria, departments gain a valuable understanding of the scope of the event, and what situations must be given priority.

The data collected also shows departments who document damage assessment information on a standardized form were more effective at completing damage assessments and completing them in a timely manner compared to departments who did not use a standardized form. The data shows that over 60% of the departments use a standardized form. By having all their resources collect information in a standardized manner, departments improve the overall process by ensuring the information collected is consistent. DHS (09) and NFPA 1600 (2007) both strongly recommend using a standardized form for completing damage assessments. DHS (09) even goes a far to provide templates to use for the process. When all resources use the same form, there is a consistent understanding of what information is needed and how to communicate the information. This not only improves the quality and consistency of information collected, it also speeds up the process. It is highly likely that departments that utilize standardized forms receive additional training on what criteria and information is required.

The data collected and previous research clearly shows that departments need a formal damage assessment policy that includes predetermined travel routes based on established priorities and a standardized form. Departments that establish a formal damage assessment process are better prepared, equipped, and trained to conduct damage assessments in a timely and consistent manner. The results validate that departments with a formal policy are more effective at conducting damage assessments.

While completing the damage assessment process is important, departments must still respond to emergency calls. Previous research demonstrates the need for departments to balance the damage assessment process with emergency response. Emergency responders' role in conducting damage assessments should be limited and as soon as practical, first responders should be relieved of damage assessment duties so they can continue emergency response (Clark County, 2003). The data collected supports the idea of taking action to balance the damage assessment process. Over 60% of departments take measures to ensure the damage assessment process and responding to emergency calls occurs simultaneously. These departments rated higher on their effectiveness and timeliness on conducting damage assessments and responding to emergency calls during the event compared to departments that take no such measures. It is highly probable that their high rating in their ability to respond to emergency calls directly results from the measures taken to balance their damage assessment process. This allows resources to focus either on damage assessments or on emergency response.

The purpose of damage assessments is to provide a rapid estimate of damage that occurs in the initial moment following a large-scale event. This cannot occur if resources are attempting to complete damage assessments and respond to emergency calls simultaneously. Clark County (2003), Anchorage, Alaska, (2007), the County of Vance (2008), and City of Spokane (2008) all

include language in their damage assessment procedures that prohibit resources conducting damage assessments from responding to emergency calls. The research shows that departments who take the measure to limit resources from conducting damage assessments and responding to emergency calls during the event rate significantly higher in their effectiveness and timeliness on conducting damage assessments and responding to emergency calls during the event. The damage assessment process quickly becomes convoluted and confusing when resources are routinely interrupted from the damage assessment process to respond to emergency calls. This delays the process, reduces the amount of accurate information available to key decision makers, and decreases the effectiveness of the overall process. The damage assessment process improves in overall effectiveness, timeliness, and consistency when resources only complete damage assessments and are not responsible for emergency response.

In an effort to balance damage assessments and emergency response, organizations often use different resources to conduct damage assessments. The Florida Division of Emergency Management (2009) and Planitz (1999) both strongly recommend departments develop nonemergency responding resources to conduct damage assessments. However, the data shows that over 77% of departments rely on front-line apparatus, to some degree, to complete damage assessments. These departments rated very high in their effectiveness, timeliness, and reporting damage assessment information to the correct location. However, these departments rated extremely low in their ability to respond to emergency calls during the event. The likely conclusion is that front-line apparatus are tied up completing damage assessments and have limited availability for emergency response. The high ratings in their effectiveness, timeliness, and reporting can likely be associated with a higher level of training and preparation.

Previous research, Florida Division of Emergency Management (2009), Planitz (1999), Fictitious County (2008), Clark County (2003), Anchorage, Alaska, (2007), the County of Vance (2008), and City of Spokane (2008) all recommend using nonemergency resources for the damage assessment process, or at least limiting the role first responders play in the damage assessment process. However, the data collected shows most departments rely on front-line apparatus to conduct damage assessments. The data shows a wide variety of answers regarding measures departments take to balance the damage assessment process with emergency response while using front-line apparatus in some format to conduct damage assessments.

Departments that collect damage assessments first and then respond to emergency calls rated the highest in their effectiveness and timeliness on conducting damage assessments, but rated relatively low compared to the other answers given in their ability to respond to emergency calls during the event. Front-line apparatus provide an immediate resource to conduct damage assessments and they are highly trained professionals. This explains the high rating in their effectiveness, but using them for damage assessments limits their ability for emergency response. Using them for both only leads to confusion and delays. Departments that address life safety emergencies before damage assessments rated high compared to the other responses in their ability to respond to emergency calls, but rated low on their overall effectiveness and timeliness on the damage assessment process. The damage assessment process is delayed while life safety emergencies are mitigated. Consequently, this delays necessary information to key decision-makers decreasing the effectiveness of damage assessments.

Departments that use nonemergency responding resources such as CERT or damage assessment teams received the highest rating consistently among all categories. They received the highest rating of all responses for their ability to respond to emergency calls during the event

and average ratings for the other three categories. Since no front-line apparatus are involved in the damage assessment process, they can completely commit to responding to emergency calls. This logically explains the high ratings in this category. Since CERT is a trained and committed collection of individuals, it is reasonable to conclude their overall effectiveness and timeliness conducting damage assessments should be adequate.

CERT is a highly trained resource that augments emergency services and emergency management officials. CERT receives specialized training and possesses the capabilities to complete a variety of assignments to assist with the mitigation of large-scale disasters (FEMA, 2003). Sacramento, California, (FEMA, 2008) and Logan, Utah, (CERT, 2009b) both relied on CERT to perform a variety of activities including rescue, first aid, removing debris, organizing, and providing security. Communities often use CERT to supplement their response capabilities for a wide variety of tasks, including disaster intelligence (CERT, 2009a).

The data collected supports previous research that CERT is a valuable resource that can complete a variety of tasks. The research shows departments that use CERT to conduct damage assessments are highly efficient at responding to emergency calls during the event. Mr. Campbell, in his personal interview, strongly emphasized that CERT is designed and trained to work with fire departments and they possess the training necessary to complete or assist with a variety of activities (D. Campbell, personal communication, October, 13, 2009). A few of the activities that Mr. Campbell and Mr. Harold, in their personal interviews, listed for CERT to complete include removing debris from roadways, turning off residential gas lines, barricade roads, and conducting damage assessments (D. Campbell and J. Harold, personal communication, October, 13, 2009). This information concurs with CERT activities listed by FEMA (FEMA, 2003). In addition, Mr. Harold explained how the CERT could be divided into



smaller groups with all communications following through a team leader (J. Harold, personal communication, October, 13, 2009). This will allow CERT to complete multiple assignments simultaneously with minimal communications with the incident commander or EOC.

The potential tasks list by Mr. Campbell and Mr. Harold would significantly improve the AFD's ability to mitigate a large-scale disaster. During the 2008 tornado that struck the City of Allen, the AFD struggled to respond to emergency calls and conduct damage assessments. Critical resources remained unavailable to respond to high priority emergency calls due to being committed to lower priority calls such as downed electrical wires. If CERT acquires the equipment and training to respond to low priority calls such as downed electrical wires and fire alarms and has the ability to conduct damage assessments, the AFD will be effective at completing the damage assessment process and responding to emergency calls during the event. With CERT's ability to complete multiple tasks simultaneously and communicate directly with the EOC, the incident commander can delegate low priority calls and the damage assessment process to the EOC. This will allow the incident commander to focus on high priority emergencies.

A contributing factor to the AFD's poor response following the 2008 tornado was the inability to prioritize emergency calls based on established criteria. Previous research shows the importance of prioritizing emergency calls for high call volume events. Departments must have a formal process to prioritize emergency calls to assure maximum utilization of resources where higher priority calls are not delayed while resources are tied up responding to lower priority calls (NVFC, 2009). Call prioritization allows for the efficient and effective allocation of resources in working multiple calls simultaneously (City of Arlington, 2009) and allows dispatches to handle police, fire, and medical emergency calls promptly (Ornato, 2009). The research indicates that

over 92% of departments prioritize emergency calls. Prioritization affords them the ability to maximize resource allocation to calls or areas of the greatest needs. This improves the departments' ability to respond to emergency calls during the event.

The research shows that departments that prioritize emergency calls are very effective at responding to emergency calls during the event. A minimal difference in the ability to respond during the event existed between departments that purchased a commercial program to prioritize compared to departments that prioritize based on established internal criteria. While a small majority of departments use a commercial program, the overall effectiveness in the ability to respond is not impacted. The research shows that it does not matter which method, commercial product or internal criteria, is used. The key component is to prioritize emergency calls.

Past research shows that emergency calls were prioritized on life safety objectives where resource allocation could be based on saving the greatest number of lives (Meyer, 2009). The data collected indicates that a majority of departments agree with assigning resources to areas of the greatest concern for life safety. Departments ranked emergency calls with more than one victim (medical or trauma), rescues, and injured person as the highest priority. In addition, these same departments ranked odor investigations, fire alarms, and electrical wires down as low priority calls. Emergency calls for gas leaks and other low priority calls should be delayed until life safety objectives are completed (Garlock, 2009).

The lack of any effort by the AFD to prioritize emergency calls during the 2008 tornado significantly hampered their ability to respond to high priority calls. Attempting to transmit all emergency calls in chronological order of when the call was received led to high priority calls holding, while resources responded to low priority calls. Call prioritization, either through a commercial product or based on internal criteria, would have allowed the AFD to respond to

high priority calls first and hold low priority calls until resources became available. Luckily the COA did not experience any loss of life during this event, but it is highly unlikely the AFD could have responded appropriately since all emergency resources were committed to low priority calls.

### Recommendations

From previous research and the data collected, it is clear the AFD is poorly prepared to address the immediate needs of the community following a tornado touchdown. It is the intent of this research to create a plan that guides the AFD through the immediate actions required by initial field responding units, CERT, and the dispatch center following a tornado (Appendix A). It is understood that numerous factors such as the size and strength of the tornado and time of day of the touchdown will affect the AFD's response. For this reason, the procedure will remain flexible and allow discretion, but by incorporating the plan, the AFD will improve their ability to respond and meet the needs of the community after such an event.

The lack of any formal damage assessment procedures that outlines travel routes, high priority structures, information required, or documentation leads to confusion, which not only delays the process but also makes it completely inadequate. In addition, attempting to use resources to complete damage assessments and respond to emergency calls leads to confusion and delays the process. Combining these factors with not attempting to prioritize emergency calls leaves the AFD incapable to respond adequately in the aftermath of a tornado.

The results of this research have lead the researcher to recommend the AFD implement and fully support a Tornado Response Plan for immediate actions following a tornado touchdown. This will allow the AFD to prepare, respond, and mitigate in an effective manner. The Tornado Response Plan will include a formal damage assessment procedure, identify

resources responsible for conducting damage assessments and high priority structures or areas to evaluate, a standardized form for damage assessment documentation, assign CERT to specific tasks, and criteria to prioritize emergency calls. It is understood that the AFD cannot purchase a commercial program that prioritizes emergency calls without going through the purchasing and budgetary processes. For this reason, only internal criteria for prioritization of emergency calls will be recommended. In addition, it is not the intent of this Tornado Response Plan to replace any aspect or be added to the emergency operations plan, but to act as a subsidiary guide to emergency response personnel.

Based on the research, the following items are recommended:

- Establish a damage assessment procedure that identifies high priority structures and areas that include: schools, day cares, hospitals, apartments, nursing homes, and medical facilities. Travel routes will be dictated based on these high priority structures and the time of day of the event.
- Only use the district engine/truck and MICU where a majority of the damage occurred to conduct damage assessments. They will only be responsible for conducting damage assessments on the high priority structures and areas listed above. All other front-line apparatus will be used to respond to emergency calls.
- Establish a standardized form for damage assessments.
- Divide CERT into two teams. One team will conduct damage assessments on non-high priority structures and areas. The other team will respond to low priority calls such as electrical wires down, ruptured gas lines, blocking traffic, and debris removal.

- Prioritize emergency calls based on life safety objectives. High priority calls include any call with multiple victims, rescue, injured persons, medical emergencies with life threatening conditions, and structure fires. Assign low priority calls to CERT if possible. Low priority calls include electrical wires down, ruptured gas lines, blocking traffic, and debris removal.
- Place a copy of the Tornado Response Plan in all apparatus.

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## Appendix A

**Tornado Response Plan****Purpose:**

The purpose of this Tornado Response Plan is to establish a list of activities that must take place following a tornado touchdown in the City of Allen (COA).

**A: Damage Assessments****Procedure:**

Each fire station shall report the status of their facilities, personnel, and equipment to the Battalion Chief immediately following the event.

The Windshield Triage Survey is used to do drive-by triage of high hazard, high population areas and to provide a quick overview and assessment of the COA area that will be used to correctly dispatch response units to the areas in the greatest needs.

The district engine/truck and MICU that received the most significant damage will start the Windshield Survey, evaluating high priority structures and areas first. The Battalion Chief will be responsible for assigning the apparatus to conduct the Windshield Surveys. All other apparatus will remain available to respond to emergency calls.

The engine/truck conducting Windshield Surveys will evaluate all schools, daycares, and apartments. The MICU will evaluate all hospitals, nursing homes, and medical facilities that maintain patients. Both engine/truck and MICU will be responsible for evaluation large businesses. It must be realized that the damage will be spread throughout a large area covering multiple response districts. The engine/truck and MICU conducting Windshield Surveys will be responsible for these high priority areas for the entire that received damage. The time of day of the event must be considered when evaluating high priority structures and areas.

All Windshield Survey data shall be recorded on worksheet DA-1 (please see Addendum A).

The engine/truck and MICU conducting Windshield Surveys will communicate their findings to the EOC via cell phone if possible. If not possible, communication can occur via radio on a non-tactical channel.

The CERT will be divided into two teams. One team shall conduct Windshield Surveys for all non-high priority structures and areas that were not evaluated by an engine/truck or MICU conducting Windshield Surveys. All Windshield Survey data shall be recorded on worksheet DA-1. The CERT will communicate Windshield Survey data to the EOC via to the most appropriate means.

All resources completing Windshield Surveys will complete the evaluation as quickly as possible and will not stop to render aid until the survey is completed unless there is an obvious and immediate threat to life or to mitigate a significant hazard.

## **B: Emergency Call Prioritization**

### **Procedure:**

It is understood that the dispatch center will be overwhelmed with emergency calls and requests for help following the event. For this reason, all emergency calls will be prioritized based on established criteria, in an effort to maximize resource allocation. Resources completing Windshield Surveys will not respond to emergency calls.

The CERT will be divided into two teams with one team completing damage assessments and the other team responding to low priority calls.

Emergency calls will be prioritized based on the following objectives: life safety and incident stabilization. Life safety calls will receive the highest priority. Not until all life safety calls have been mitigated will incident stabilization calls be addressed, unless multiple resources are available.

The following are high priority calls.

- Multiple victims
- Rescue (i.e. trapped victim)
- Injured person
- Medical emergency with an EMD code of Echo or Delta
- Structure fire
- High occupancy building collapse

The following are low priority calls and can be mitigated, controlled, or investigated by CERT.

- Down electrical line
- Natural gas leak at meter or in a structure
- Fire alarm
- Debris removal

While a structure fire is a high priority call, it will not receive a first alarm response. One engine/truck will respond to investigate. If found to be a working fire a defensive strategy is to be implemented with the intent to protect exposures. Only enter the structure if a known victim is inside.

Resources will be limited following the event. Only a MICU will be dispatched to medical emergency calls and injured person calls where the victim is readily accessible. Treat all patients as “load and go”, provide hospitals with a very minimum patient report draft, and return to services immediately.

**Addendum A  
Worksheet DA-1**

Geographical Street Block	Roads Passable < 1' Not Passable (NP) Destroyed > 4'	Residential -Single Family Destroyed > 50% Major 25% - 50% Minor < 25%	Residential - Multi Family Destroyed > 50% Major 25% - 50% Minor < 25%	Schools Destroyed > 50% Major 25% - 50% Minor < 25%	Business Destroyed > 50% Major 25% - 50% Minor < 25%
	<b>NP:</b>	<b>Minor:</b>	<b>Minor:</b>	<b>Minor:</b>	<b>Minor:</b>
	<b>Flooded:</b>	<b>Major:</b>	<b>Major:</b>	<b>Major:</b>	<b>Major:</b>
	<b>Destroyed:</b>	<b>Destroyed:</b>	<b>Destroyed:</b>	<b>Destroyed:</b>	<b>Destroyed:</b>

Appendix B

**Fire Department Survey**

**1. Name of your department**

**2. Does your organization have a formal procedure/policy for conducting damage assessments?**

- Yes
- No

**3. What resource(s) does your organization use to complete damage assessments?**

- Frontline Apparatus (i.e. engine, truck)
- Reserve Apparatus
- Community Response Teams (i.e. CERT)
- Chiefs
- Other (please specify)

**4. Do resources completing damage assessments have a predetermined route, district, or grid?**

- Yes
- No

**5. Who do the resources completing damage assessments report to?**

- Incident Command
- EOC
- Dispatch
- Other (please specify)

**6. Are damage assessments completed on a standardized form?**

- Yes
- No

**7. Does your organization take any measures to balance completing damage assessments with emergency response?**

- Yes

No

**8. Are the resources assigned to completing damage assessments only responsible for completing damage assessments? (i.e. no emergency response)**

Yes

No

**9. Are resources assigned to emergency response also responsible for completing damage assessments?**

Yes

No

**10. If your department attempts to balance damage assessments and emergency response, please briefly explain what actions are taken.**

**11. Does your department or community have a CERT or similar resource?**

Yes

No

**12. What is CERT's (or similar resource) first priority during a large scale disaster?**

Damage Assessments

Triage

Treatment

Search & Rescue

Shut off Utilities (gas, water)

Victim Extrication

**13. Do you find CERT (or similar) resource helpful in successful mitigating emergencies?**

Yes

No

Never Used Them

**14. Does your department prioritize emergency calls during a large scale emergency?**

Yes

No

15.

Does your department use a government or commercial program to prioritize emergency calls or are emergency calls prioritized based on established internal criteria?

Emergency Medical Dispatch

Established Internal Criteria

Other Government or commercial Program

16. If your department prioritizes emergency calls based on internal criteria, please rank the following priorities from highest to lowest.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Medical Call - 1 Victim	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 11	<input type="radio"/> 12
trauma Call - 1 Victim	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 11	<input type="radio"/> 12
Structure Fire - known working fire	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 11	<input type="radio"/> 12
Medical Call - more than one victim	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 11	<input type="radio"/> 12
trauma Call - more than one victim	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 11	<input type="radio"/> 12
Wire Down	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 11	<input type="radio"/> 12
Hazmat	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 11	<input type="radio"/> 12
Missing Person	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 11	<input type="radio"/> 12
Rescue	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 11	<input type="radio"/> 12
Fire Alarm	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 11	<input type="radio"/> 12
Oder Investigation	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 11	<input type="radio"/> 12
Motor Vehicle Collision	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 11	<input type="radio"/> 12

**17. Please rank your department in the following category**

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
<b>Effectiveness on conducting damage assessments</b>	<input type="radio"/> Poor	<input type="radio"/> Fair	<input type="radio"/> Good	<input type="radio"/> Excellent
<b>Training on conducting damage assessments</b>	<input type="radio"/> Poor	<input type="radio"/> Fair	<input type="radio"/> Good	<input type="radio"/> Excellent
<b>Reporting damage assessments to proper individual/section</b>	<input type="radio"/> Poor	<input type="radio"/> Fair	<input type="radio"/> Good	<input type="radio"/> Excellent
<b>Completing damage assessments in a timely manner</b>	<input type="radio"/> Poor	<input type="radio"/> Fair	<input type="radio"/> Good	<input type="radio"/> Excellent
<b>responding to emergency calls during a large scale emergency</b>	<input type="radio"/> Poor	<input type="radio"/> Fair	<input type="radio"/> Good	<input type="radio"/> Excellent
<b>Utilizing CERT or similar resource to mitigate hazards</b>	<input type="radio"/> Poor	<input type="radio"/> Fair	<input type="radio"/> Good	<input type="radio"/> Excellent
<b>Prioritizing emergency calls during a large scale emergency</b>	<input type="radio"/> Poor	<input type="radio"/> Fair	<input type="radio"/> Good	<input type="radio"/> Excellent



## Appendix C

**Surveyed Fire Department List**

The following 24 fire departments in the State of Texas participated in the survey:

Addison	Arlington	Bedford
Carrollton	College Station	Coppell
Denton	Eules	Farmers Branch
Flower Mound	Fort Worth	Frisco
Grand Prairie	Highland Park	Irving
Keller	Lewisville	Lubbock
McKinney	North Richland Hills	Plano
Richardson	Sherman	Stephenville

## Appendix D

**CERT – Personal Interview**

Conducted on October 13, 2009 with

Dave Campbell, CERT Instructor

1. How long and in what capacity have you been involved with CERT?

“I was a member to the first CERT class taught at Allen. I had been an active member of the CFA for a couple of years and was looking for a way to become more involved with the fire department and the community. Once we finished the class, I immediately took a leadership role and helped order equipment and set up training. I worked with Chief Gillis to write CERT SOPs (never were adopted) and went to some training in McKinney that allowed me to become a CERT instructor. I have been the lead instructor ever since.”

2. What role do you believe CERT should play in helping the fire department respond following a tornado touchdown?

“CERT is designed to assist and work side by side with the fire department. Unfortunately, we have not had much training working with the fire department, so CERT is often overlooked, but we should be able to assist in many ways.”

3. What activities could CERT complete in such an event?

“CERT is trained to complete a wide variety of tasks. We teach each CERT class a basic technique on fire suppression, a class of first aid and CPR, conduct search and rescue, shoring, traffic control, to barricade roads, how to turn off gas meters and few other things that I cannot think of right now.”

4. Could CERT conduct damage assessments and relay all assimilated information to the correct individual?

“CERT is fully capable of completing damage assessment and communicating all assimilated information the proper individual without fire assistance. I have no doubts we could do this with no problems. This seems like a good function for us. The communications will not be a problem either we are use to working in small groups and relying information to a team leader. We would have to do some training on the process, but we could do it.”

5. How quickly can CERT be activated and ready to respond?

“Good question, I hope very quickly, but that all depends on the time of day. We should be able to get a good group, say at least ten to fifteen members to Central and be ready to go twenty minutes after the page goes out. It will likely take at least an hour before we can get all members there.”

## Appendix E

### **CERT – Personal Interview**

Conducted on October 13, 2009 with

Joey Harold, CERT Instructor

1. How long and in what capacity have you been involved with CERT?

“I was in the second or third CERT class taught at Allen. Like Dave, I went through the CFA and loved it. I wanted something more. CERT was the logical choice. I spoke to Dave when I finished about becoming a CERT instructor and he told me what to do. I took the necessary classes and started helping Dave instruct the next year.”

2. What role do you believe CERT should play in helping the fire department respond following a tornado touchdown?

“To do what is ever is needed. I think we could really help. I know in the tornado in 07 or 08 we helped turn off gas lines and walked neighborhoods. We could help in bigger ways to, if needed.”

3. What activities could CERT complete in such an event?

“Like I said, we turned off gas lines and walked neighborhoods when the previous tornado struck Allen. We have a wide variety of training. Ideally, we could turn off gas lines, control traffic, debris removal, first aid and complete damage assessments. ”

4. Could CERT conduct damage assessments and relay all assimilated information to the correct individual?

“I do not see why not. It is something we now include in our training. The aspect of it seems fairly simply and communications should not be a problem. CERT members are trained to work in small groups of three or four with one individual acting as company officer. Each small group will work under a team leader that will usually manage five or six small groups. Each team leader then could talk with correct individual.”

5. How quickly can CERT be activated and ready to respond?

“I have no earthly idea. I would think that we could get the ball rolling within fifteen to thirty minutes. It will take a lot longer for all members to respond. I know my team will have some folks ready to roll in a matter of minutes.”