

## **Alex Gryska, Ontario Mine Rescue**

### **Elliot Lake Commission of Inquiry**

#### **Context**

A province-wide disaster management system should be established to address situations which are beyond capability of local emergency response capacity. This may include catastrophic situations such as flooding, major fires, collapsed structures, inundations, earthquakes etc. which involves the rescue and recovery of people.

#### **Roundtable 1: Issues relating to the conduct and management of an emergency response:**

##### **1. IMS related Issues**

Currently there are numerous organisations that have responsibility for municipal and industrial emergency response and depending on the situation; diverse and appropriate resources need to be deployed. Consideration should be given to ensure timely response to a situation and may require air transportation and broad support.

Where life is at stake, it is critical to take action quickly ensuring the safety of responders.

There are various emergency response organisations that are typically close to the unfolding incident and they can conduct the initial assessment. Standardized disaster management training should be developed and delivered to those individuals who potentially are first on the scene and may need to make the decision regarding deployment of additional resources.

Part of the provincial plan should include establishing and maintaining a comprehensive data base of available resources, inventory and location of specialized rescue equipment, expertise etc.

##### **2. Organisations of Search and Rescue Teams**

Situations which exceed the capacity or capability of local responders need to fall under the control of a Provincial Government ministry/department. Depending on the seriousness of the situation, the premier may need to intervene to ensure adequate resources are deployed. When a major disaster occurs, good decisions must be made quickly and these may require rapid deployment of resources, men and materials. In many jurisdictions this will include police involvement and or military escort to ensure there are no unnecessary delays.

##### **3. Decentralized Emergency Management**

Larger cities will typically be better prepared to deal with catastrophic situations (more equipment, expertise and resources) than smaller communities. Media relations are a critical component of an emergency response plan and ultimately the responsibility of central incident command. The media will formulate their own news if they are not able to connect with those directly involved.

#### **4. Clarity and relevant legislation**

Authority of the Ministry of Labour during management of a disaster should be addressed as a training issue when inspectors are recruited. Clarity regarding their role and responsibility during an emergency needs to be clearly identified. They may not have in-depth knowledge of technical rescue procedures to make the best decisions or provide best direction. Knowing what you know and don't know is essential.

Typically during a mining emergency, an inspector may be on site however s/he will not typically provide direction. Their investigation will normally be initiated after the emergency response has been completed.

#### **5. Directory of Vital Services:**

This is absolutely essential. The Mine Rescue Program of Workplace Safety North maintains a province-wide data base of available mine rescue equipment, quantities, listing of rescue responders including their expertise, key contacts with telephone numbers, emergency responder rosters with contact numbers etc.

Our mining network is very extensive and all mining operations have mutual aid agreements with their neighbouring operations. They are prepared to assist one another with provision of men, rescue equipment and supplies etc. where necessary. Agreements are required to be registered with the WSIB and this can become an issue in the event of an injury of an emergency responder at a neighbouring operation.

### **Roundtable 2: Issues relating to the entities that may respond to an emergency:**

#### **1. What should be the future of the Province's urban search and rescue resources?**

Heavy rescue teams are valuable however Mine Rescue (and other emergency organisations) also have a network of highly trained rescuers strategically located within communities across the province that might be useful during an emergency. I believe there is value in the following areas:

- Cross- jurisdictional training and
- Response to catastrophic incidents.

Many foreign jurisdictions have agreements with complimentary organisations that include deployment of federal assets (military, air support and other resources) during a major incident. Cargo air transportation and technical expertise would be invaluable during a major catastrophic event.

Consideration should be given to partner up with the Ministry of Natural Resources which has aircraft strategically located across the province that could be used to transport rescuers and equipment.

## **2. Deployment of search and rescue assets**

Training incident commanders in effective use of resources, knowing your limitations, expertise and resourcing are all essential components of an effective training program. Training in complex problem solving/decision making is essential to exercising good judgement during an emergency situation. Typically the Ontario mining industry doesn't have many emergency responses therefore we rely on extensive training and evaluation relating to situational command. We also we also orchestrate comprehensive realistic simulations. Mining is potentially a very unforgiving environment where an incident can easily escalate in to a catastrophic event therefore mine operators put significant resources into establishing effective emergency response capability.

Cross jurisdictional training is extremely valuable in increasing consistency and improving rescue skills. We conduct these on a regular basis to ensure our rescue teams are well prepared to respond to any foreseeable situation. This includes comprehensive evaluation followed by team debriefing.

Mine rescue information is shared across Canada and around the world in order to learn and improve local response capability.

## **3. Jurisdiction/Command and Control**

Cross jurisdictional teams are a necessity if a disaster is to be managed effectively. Incident command, during an event in the mining industry, falls on the shoulders of the most senior management person from the organisation (or their delegate). However and most importantly, they rely on the advice of experts (incident command advisors) to provide them with information and advice to ensure good decisions are made.

Mining is a prominent industry where the media tends to profile it particularly when things go wrong. Incident commanders need to know the limitation of their expertise otherwise consequences can be tragic. Since our establishment OMR has responded to hundreds of incidents with no serious incident to responders. Since 1929 approximately 10000 mine rescue

volunteers have been involved in mine rescue and currently there are approximately 875 active mine rescuers.

#### **4. Consistency in Response**

Cross jurisdictional training is invaluable and essential to improvement of potential responders involved in disasters. All should use competency based training fully supported with standardized leader's guides/participant manuals.

Written communication should be assessed along with looking into types of communication used by different organisations. Industry specific jargon is common however typically it is quickly overcome with cross jurisdictional training.

Also all events should include preparation of comprehensive follow-up incident reports that address shortcomings, recommendations and opportunities for improvements. They should also identify areas of excellence.

#### **5. Role of Engineers**

The role of professionals including engineers is absolutely essential to ensure the safety of responders. They are used to assess high risk situations and provide advice to mine rescue teams/incident commanders.

Ensuring the specialists have the appropriate expertise (competency in the area of concern) is more important than who their employer is. Having the correct expertise at hand is impossible to predict. There are many provincial government-employed engineers working in communities across the province who could be part of the resource network. They would probably require training in disaster management and emergency response.

#### **6. Equipment and Expertise**

In catastrophic situations it is rare that all the necessary rescue equipment, expertise, heavy equipment is readily available. Taking advantage of the knowledge of the broader emergency response network and knowing the limitations of your own organisation is vital. Successful rescues invariably are a result of working collectively with other like organisations.