

**Together We Can
Better Serving the University and Surrounding Community**

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Abstract

While many universities operate with a large amount of independence from their surrounding cities and communities, the value and advantages to be gained in forming strong relationships with these entities often goes unfulfilled. This proposal examines the advantages to be gained in forming agreements with municipalities to more fully and better serve the college and the community in which it rests. The University of Georgia's Hazard Assessment Response Team (HART) entered an agreement via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the surrounding community of Athens/Clarke County (ACC) to respond jointly with ACC emergency personnel in the event of a wide range of emergencies. Examples of response situations can involve hazardous chemical spills, biological, bomb and radioactive threats, weather emergencies and incidents involving weapons of mass destruction.

The objectives of this memorandum of understanding were set as follows:

- *To fill gaps in manpower and expertise suffered individually by both units in the course of forming one cohesive team.*
- *To enable this team to receive homeland security grant money that would not be available had they remained two diversified groups.*
- *To increase communication and effectiveness in the event of an emergency by creating a single incident command structure to which all personnel reported.*
- *To add the team members necessary to sustain emergency response longer than 72 hours, giving sufficient time for help from surrounding counties to arrive.*

Introduction of the Organization

Chartered by the Georgia General Assembly of 1785, the University of Georgia has the distinction of being the first state chartered university and the birthplace of the American system of public higher education. Its main campus, located in Athens, Georgia, consists of 368 buildings on 614 acres, with total acreage of 42,064 residing on 31 counties in the state of Georgia. UGA's total enrollment is 32,941, with 7,958 of those students enrolled in graduate and professional programs. UGA operates on a 1.1 billion dollar budget and is supported by a workforce of 10,148. A land and sea grant University, UGA has traditionally been recognized as a leader in the environmental, agricultural, veterinary, business law and education disciplines, but is also emerging as a leader in the molecular biology, genetics and biochemistry fields as well. In its "Best College Buys" edition, "Money" magazine listed UGA as one of nine "unbeatable deals" nationwide. "Money" also ranked UGA as the ninth best buy in the nation among public universities for in-state students, sixth overall in the southeastern U.S. and 27th in the nation out of some 1100 institutions evaluated. "US News and World Report" magazine ranks UGA 18th on its 2002 list of top 50 public universities. "Kiplinger's" magazine ranks UGA 15th on its list of 100 public universities that provide the "best bang for the buck." The "Wall Street Journal" includes UGA among 16 "hot schools" that are drawing increased attention from students and families because of cost, safety and academic quality advantages.

Additionally in 2003, the University of Georgia has joined three of America's leading universities- Harvard, Yale and Brown – as the only schools in the nation with recipients of four of the most prestigious scholarships awarded to American undergraduate students. Students at the four universities have won Rhodes, Marshall, Goldwater and Truman

scholarships. No other schools have recipients of all four of the highly selective and competitive awards this year.

Statement of the Problem/Initiative

In many ways, the University of Georgia operates in the same manner as a city or municipality. Energy production, housing, public transportation and waste collection are

but a few necessary operations that UGA conducts. Add to this a multitude of exotic chemicals, biological agents and radiological sources used for research and teaching, high profile speakers on controversial subjects and sporting events holding in excess of 92,000 spectators, and it becomes obvious that a solid emergency operations plan is not an option, but an absolute necessity. The potential consequences for calamity are so high, that UGA formed a 40-person disaster team comprised of key officials from a variety of disciplines that meet in the event of an emergency. UGA's Environmental Safety Division has developed numerous site specific emergency operations plans that include Sanford stadium, science buildings and animal care facilities. Located in the city of Athens, Georgia (population just over 101,000), UGA was a considerable distance from most hazardous materials response teams. In fact, several emergencies requiring the deployment of such a team had an unacceptable response time in excess of three hours. UGA's Environmental Safety Division responded by forming the Hazard Assessment Response Team (HART), taking advantage of environmental health and safety professionals already employed by the Environmental Safety Division. While the internal HAZMAT team was extremely effective at what it was designed to accomplish, it was still extremely limited in the scope and scale of emergencies it could respond to. Emergency response is not an inexpensive endeavor and to do the job safely and effectively requires a large infusion of resources. Working with a budget already slashed by state government, the Environmental Safety Division was forced to investigate alternative sources of funding. Federal grant money had become available through the Department of Justice but UGA's HAZMAT team lacked the sufficient number of members to qualify for this type of grant.

Design

It was obvious that the most efficient method of obtaining additional funding was to increase membership of qualified individuals on the HAZMAT team. The idea of teaming up with Athens/Clarke County (ACC) Fire Department seemed like a natural partnership. Athens/Clarke County would be responding to emergencies as well as the UGA team and are supported by a much larger number of employees. If some of the Athens/Clarke County personnel could be trained in the operations of a HAZMAT team, UGA and ACC could merge into one team with sufficient members to receive the additional federal funds. UGA's Environmental Safety Division began work on creating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to be entered into by the Athens/Clarke County government and UGA. The terms of the MOU had to be negotiated and agreed to by all affected parties, including UGA officials, Athens/Clarke County government and Georgia's Board of Regents.

Implementation

The implementation of getting the MOU in place was the lengthiest and time consuming process undertaken. Once the terms of the MOU had been settled and deemed satisfactory by officials of UGA and ACC Fire, the next step was that of passing all legal requirements of both groups. Environmental Safety Division worked closely with UGA attorneys to re-script some wording so that it would not compromise state laws. Ample time was allowed for this process as it took one full year to clear all legal hurdles. Once this task was accomplished, UGA officials planned several meetings with Georgia's Board of Regents. The end result was an MOU meeting with approval from UGA's legal

department and receiving sign off and approval from the Board of Regents as well as Athens/Clarke County officials and mayor. The legal aspect of the MOU was the most challenging but given the potential hazards of operating a HAZMAT team, and a multi-force team at that, avoidance was not a prudent option. UGA's Environmental Safety Division also worked to better equip the fire department to serve the emergency responders in the event one of UGA's 1500 laboratories required a response to a chemical spill, fire or other circumstance requiring immediate action. ESD compiled floor plans from university buildings, consolidating them all onto one CD to aid in the fire department's response efforts on the UGA campus. ESD distributed laptop computers, along with these floor plan CDs, to battalion chiefs of the fire department to eliminate the need for firemen to wait until UGA personnel arrive on the scene. The fire chiefs now had the necessary information needed for safe entries, water hookups, sprinklers, etc at their fingertips even before reaching their destination.

Benefits

With the MOU approved, signed and in place, it took little time for the advantages of this new agreement to surface. The new HAZMAT team had sufficient numbers to apply for grant money. In December of 2001, officials from UGA and Athens/Clarke County Emergency Services jointly completed necessary paperwork requesting funds from the Georgia Emergency Management Association (GEMA), the result of which was the awarding of **\$100,000** for the purchase of equipment to be utilized by the newly combined hazmat response team formed by the MOU.

Another benefit was an increase in the most vital component in a large-scale emergency, communication. The new system creates a single chain of command to eliminate the possibility of two teams working on the same incident with contrary objectives. There is now specific call down and activation lists for officials from both entities, serving to eliminate confusion and reduce response time.

Members of the combined hazmat team come from significantly different backgrounds and everyday working conditions. Whereas a fireman may be more accustomed to responding to calls in a residential or manufacturing environment, ESD personnel are more familiar with university labs and buildings and the unique challenges they present when responding to a call. The more diversified team increases the probability that an individual on the team has some experience with a particular situation and will result in an overall group that is more effective at stabilizing dangerous situations quickly. There have been recorded hazardous materials accidents at other universities in which outside HAZMAT teams have responded. Due to the responder's unfamiliarity with research labs, a considerable amount of research was unnecessarily lost in the clean up. By having an in-house response team manned with ESD personnel, it allows UGA to salvage a large amount of valuable research, which would, in all probability, be discarded by outside emergency response personnel. Lessons learned from other universities in which research was lost during response and cleanup efforts involving outside crews, convinced UGA officials that an in-house response team was a wise investment. Having internal members on the HAZMAT team provides a multitude of benefits. For example, UGA's football stadium holds in excess of 92,000 at full capacity with countless others in the general

vicinity during games. To have an in house team that is familiar with stadium layout and trained in all aspects of weapons of mass destruction in attendance and on call at every football game will be of the greatest importance should the unthinkable occur.

Team effort goes to work:

In September 2003, members of the consolidated HAZMAT team were called upon to respond to a situation in which 6,000 gallons of waste fuel had been released and made its way to a major river running through Clarke County. This was the largest spill of its type in Clarke County and members worked side by side in stabilizing the situation with equipment purchased through grant money. The response was prompt, with the single chain of command working as planned. Team members worked together to build an underflow dam, effectively halting the movement of waste fuel down-river until it could be properly removed and disposed of. The response was a success that was the result of two teams coming together as one, as they have merged to train together, hold monthly drills together and respond to emergencies, both at UGA and in surrounding communities as one cohesive force of people working together toward a common goal.

Considering that the HAZMAT team is composed of two smaller groups, the overlap in abilities is advantageous. UGA personnel are all environmental health and safety professionals that boast tremendous experience and expert accreditations such as Certified Hazardous Materials Manager (CHMM), Certified Environmental Trainer (CET) and Certified Emergency Manager (CEM) that fill the holes where firemen's training ends. With the team's expanded response capabilities, members have backed up

public safety personnel in bomb threats, assisted local hospitals in decontamination and training issues and given demonstrations at emergency management conventions. In entering this Memorandum of Understanding, UGA's Environmental Safety Division provides a true benefit to the public in keeping with UGA's oath of service to the surrounding community and state of Georgia.

Retrospect

The University of Georgia's Environmental Safety Division is charged with the duty of protecting the university along with its students, employees and visitors as well as serving the surrounding community and state in which UGA lies. The funding problem demanded a non-conventional approach and UGA met the challenge by forming a relationship with the municipal authorities, which later led to the creation and activation of the MOU. Although a legal document, this MOU symbolizes the synergistic relationship that exists between both parties that not only increases the effectiveness of UGA's Environmental Safety Division, but also broadens the scope at which the division may apply its abilities and thereby better serve the university's mission. This unique kinship is one of a kind and exists as a model of cooperation that can be employed in a wide range of disciplines by other universities and cities. *Together we did* work to provide better service to the University of Georgia, its surrounding community and the state of Georgia.

