A Preview of the CIRA Emergency Manager Demographic Survey

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Editor’s Note: An article about this project was included in the online October 2011 IAEM Bulletin. This article shares preliminary findings, and invites IAEM members to participate if they have not already done so.

In late July 2011, the Cooperative Institute for Research in the Atmosphere (CIRA), working with the psychology department at Colorado State University, launched an online demographic survey of emergency managers across the United States. As of this writing, 1,065 emergency managers have taken part. There have been participants from 49 out of the 50 states (Figure 1), with a statistically significant number taking part from every region of the country (Figure 2). Although a full analysis of the data awaits formal completion, there are a number of interesting results already emerging.

Preliminary Findings

It seems that emergency management is still very much a man’s game. The study finds that fully 81% of respondents are male. Also, of the 1,022 respondents who answered the race/ethnicity item, 959 list their race as Caucasian.

Ages run the gamut from less than 26 years old to greater than 55, but 72% of those responding are 46 years of age or older (Figure 3 on Page 19). As in most professional fields, this result probably has to do with the fact that leadership positions go to those with a combination of significant education and/or experience in their field. The survey does have a number of other questions related to both education and experience. These will be cross-correlated when the survey has been completed, so standby for further details on that topic. It should also be noted that – while females represent 19% of the current emergency manager population nationwide – when the data are broken down into older versus younger participants, females emergency managers constitute 17% among those older than 46, but 24% in younger ages. This difference may reflect an influx of females into the emergency response field over the past couple of decades.

Nationwide, 75% of the type-of-emergencies respondents have dealt with over the past 10 years have been weather-related. Thus, NOAA’s National Weather Service (NWS) has probably played an important role in a large percentage of events affecting emergency managers.

Figure 1

Figure 2

1 CIRA is a cooperative venture between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Colorado State University (CSU).
Demographic Survey
(continued from page 18)

managers over the years and
across the country.

One of the most fascinating
findings relates to the education
and experience differences
between the two communities. The
survey shows that 71% of emer-
gency managers come from an
emergency responder experience
background. Furthermore, 78%
report having an undergraduate
degree or higher with more than
50% of those degrees having to do
with emergency response. Most of
the MA/MS degrees relate to
administration, in one form or
another. NWS forecasters, on the
other hand, have spent the majority
of their preparatory years studying,
and working in, the physical
sciences. This difference is
important. What does it mean for
communications between these
two key groups of players, when
one group spends the bulk of their
time utilizing theoretical and
applied science to analyze and
forecast extremely complex situations in
atmospheric science, while the other group
spends their time focusing almost entirely
on preparing for, or responding to, hazard-
ous situations in progress? Further
analysis of survey data should shed further light
on this schism, but there
are clearly places
where communications
between the two can
and do go wrong.

There Is Still Time
to Take the Survey

The survey will be closing in just
a few weeks. We are hoping to get
another couple of hundred particip-
ants before then. We are particu-
larly interested in states that have
had only a few participants (e.g.,
Delaware, New Hampshire, West
Virginia, Maryland, etc.), but would
welcome input from any and all
emergency managers who have
not taken part. The more who
respond, the more we will learn
about this community that plays
such a vital role when things go
wrong. If you are interested, the
survey is being administered by
Qualtrics and can be found at
http://tinyurl.com/emstudy.

ASU Student Chapter
(continued from page 17)

opportunities. We will continue to
seek out and utilize the latest and
greatest technology to give all
participants the best experience
possible. Who knows, one day we
may develop a way to cookout and
share our burgers over the Web.
Until then, we will include every-
one virtually, and choose meeting
times and places that give the
majority the ability to participate
however they choose.

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he IAEM-Global Editorial
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