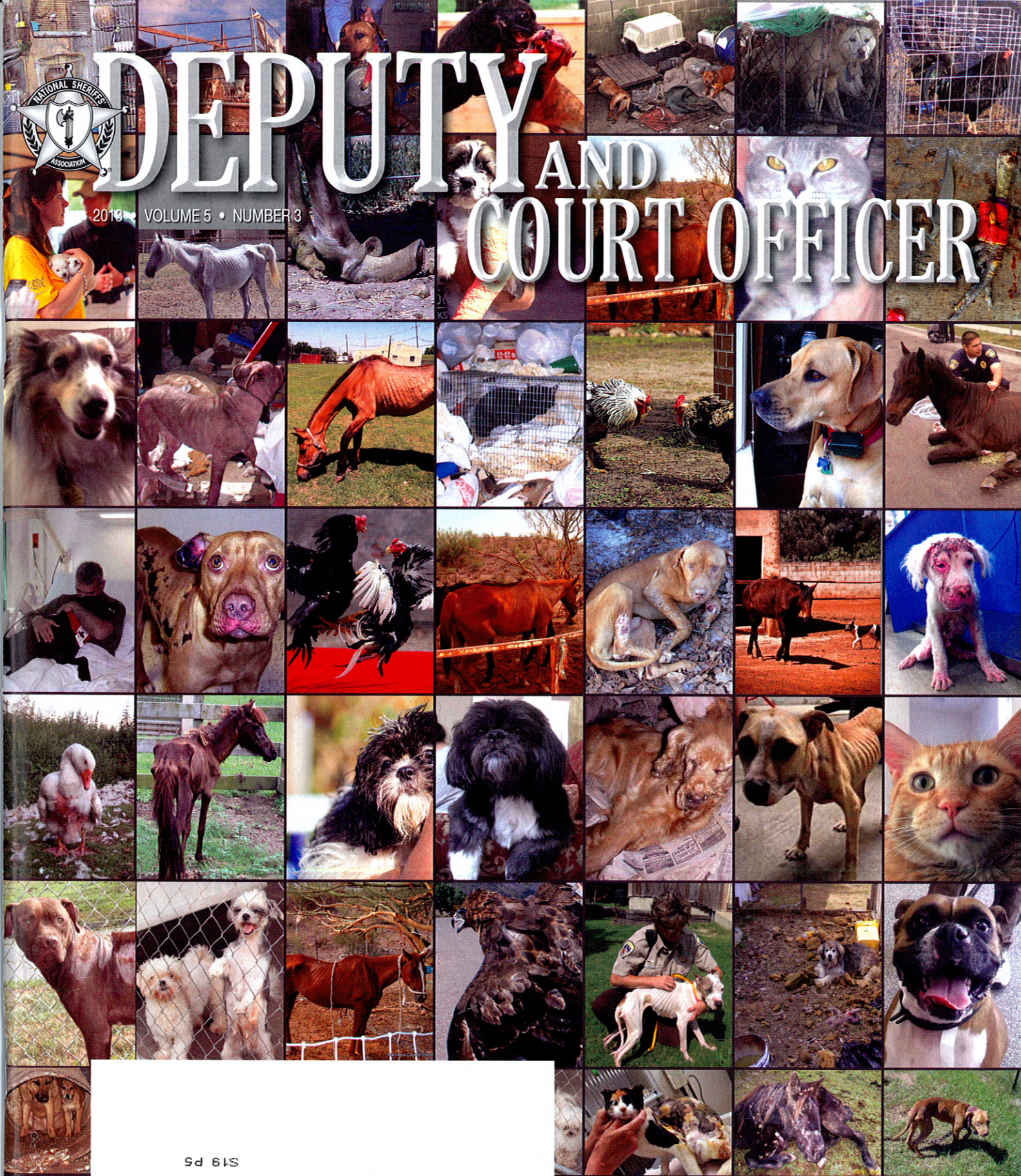


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 KATHLEEN CAREY
 NEWPORT NEWS SHERIFF'S OFFICE
 2501 WASHINGTON AVE FL 2
 NEWPORT NEWS VA 23607-4327

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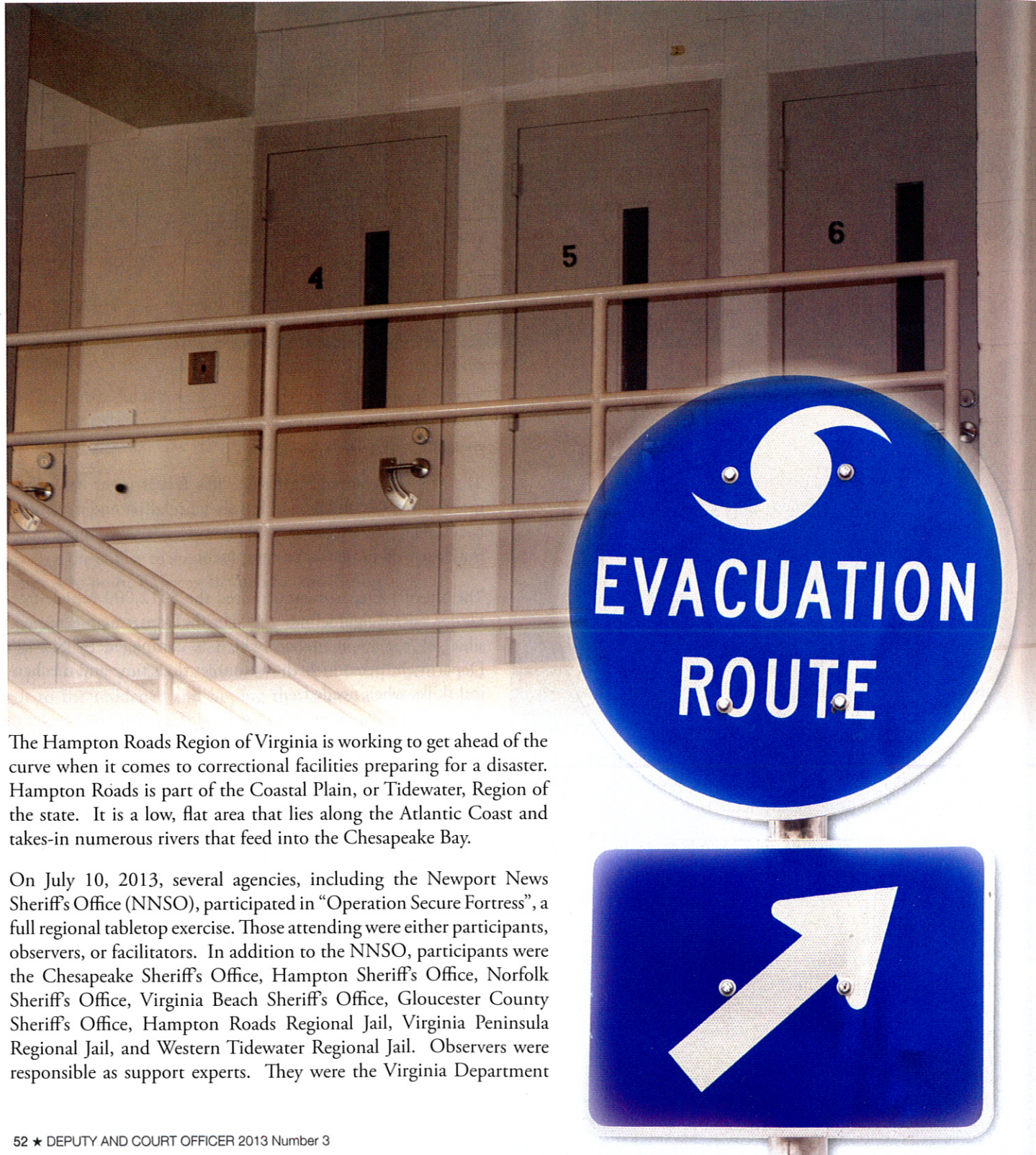
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Readiness Plan for Natural or Manmade Disaster

By Lt. Kathleen Carey, PIO, Newport News,
Virginia Sheriff's Office



The Hampton Roads Region of Virginia is working to get ahead of the curve when it comes to correctional facilities preparing for a disaster. Hampton Roads is part of the Coastal Plain, or Tidewater, Region of the state. It is a low, flat area that lies along the Atlantic Coast and takes-in numerous rivers that feed into the Chesapeake Bay.

On July 10, 2013, several agencies, including the Newport News Sheriff's Office (NNSO), participated in "Operation Secure Fortress", a full regional tabletop exercise. Those attending were either participants, observers, or facilitators. In addition to the NNSO, participants were the Chesapeake Sheriff's Office, Hampton Sheriff's Office, Norfolk Sheriff's Office, Virginia Beach Sheriff's Office, Gloucester County Sheriff's Office, Hampton Roads Regional Jail, Virginia Peninsula Regional Jail, and Western Tidewater Regional Jail. Observers were responsible as support experts. They were the Virginia Department

of Transportation, Virginia State Police, Virginia Dominion Power, Verizon Wireless Service, Cox Communications, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Marshals, Virginia Department of Emergency Management, Commonwealth's Attorney, and the Commonwealth's Medical Examiner. CRA Inc., a national security consulting agency out of Alexandria, Virginia, functioned as the facilitator.

The purpose of the exercise was to evaluate and enhance the preparedness capabilities of the local and regional jail facilities for responding to events that would result in the decision to shelter-in-place or to evacuate inmates, whether fully, partially, or vertically.

The exercise was based around a scenario dubbed "Sandtrina". It was selected as an event that would mimic the devastation from Superstorm Sandy in 2012 along with the impacts of Hurricane Katrina in 2007. Up until that time, it was a widely accepted belief that jail emergencies would stem from riots or hostage situations. What happened in New Orleans opened eyes. Prisoners were either evacuated to bridge overpasses surrounded by water on all sides or left to break out of jail. This was a stark reminder to jails and other correctional facilities that they are responsible for the safety of an incarcerated population that cannot protect itself in an emergency situation.

Donna Brehm with CRA, Inc. said, "The goal is to be prepared for a big event that never happens. If ready for that, you will be prepared to handle the smaller events that are likely to occur."

The point of "Operation Secure Fortress" and faux "Sandtrina" was to learn in an open, low-stress, low-fault environment. When bringing issues forward, varying points of view are to be expected. "It stimulates thinking and consideration of potential legal, ethical, and safety situations," Brehm emphasized.

While the exercise was developed around a natural disaster, preparedness responses would apply to manmade disasters. For example, a structure fire, noxious gas, a broken pipe, or a bomb threat.

Col. Eileen Sprinkle, NNSO Chief Deputy, was a founding member of the Hampton Roads Inmate Evacuation Committee. She called this an "all hazard approach" that started with planning for a full evacuation. Initial communications led to most area facilities to lean toward the shelter-in-place option. That said, relationships have been developed with Amtrak, CSX and Norfolk Southern; so if a full evacuation were necessary, rail cars and train tracks could be considered. Sprinkle said no contractual agreements have been signed, but "we are pleased to be in negotiations and talks about an 'out of the box approach'."

Prior to open discussion during the table top exercise, brief educational sessions were presented.

Weather Issues and Terminology

Patricia Chappell is from the Hurricane Planner-Preparedness Division of the Virginia Department of Emergency Management. She made clear the difference between flood zones and storm surge zones, the latter being the most worthy of concern. Storm surge causes nine out of ten hurricane-related deaths. It is an offshore rise of water associated with weather systems. High winds push on the water's surface carrying water onto land sometimes well above sea level.

With the regional name of "Tidewater", we are no strangers to flooding. Hurricane Isabel of 2003 and Tropical Storm Ernesto of 2006 were the most recent destructive storms to hit Tidewater/Hampton Roads. Regional correctional facilities were left virtually unaffected. While grateful, agencies should not lull themselves into thinking they have endured the worst of it. We have seen the "storm of the century" become more of a yearly occurrence. Diligence to improving upon current disaster plans can only help to mitigate damages from future incidents.

Chappell said a ten-foot surge would be enough to easily flood low-lying areas of Hampton Roads and trigger a wide-scale evacuation of the general public. Would a jail's emergency plan mesh with a state's plan to evacuate civilians?

The Virginia Department of Transportation, for example, has protocol for lane reversals of Interstates and local surface streets to better handle a large volume of traffic. If they were to enact such a plan, how would that impact a jail trying to acquire resources like food, water, and medicine? How would personnel get to work? The effects of emergencies that are out of a jail's control can be minimized through good preparation.

Severe weather can disrupt normal communications, utilities, and clean water supplies. Chappell encouraged developing alternative methods of delivering drinking water to inmates, staff, and other essential personnel who may be forced to shelter-in-place. Proper supply of food, medicine, and water applies to both inmates and personnel. There should be a stock to last over a designated period of time.

Of course personnel scheduling is an essential piece of a jail's emergency plan. How many hours ahead of the storm do they need to arrive? What kind of sleeping quarters will be provided for staff having to stay overnight, or a period of nights? Also, do not forget to encourage your essential personnel to have an emergency plan in place for their own families. Studies and experience have shown that only a certain percentage of staff will show for work. Often worry about their personal issues determine their professional prioritizing. Human nature dictates the better prepared they are at home, the better the chance they will come to work.

Legal Issues

Lori Galbraith, Deputy Commonwealth's Attorney, City of Chesapeake, brought to light legal considerations.

A storm like "Sandtrina" would be forecasted and monitored ahead of time. The National Hurricane Center tracks storms as they develop in the tropics. The National Weather Service provides information about conditions, watches, and warnings. This allows jails to prepare in advance of arrival. Galbraith suggested, "Have a process in place to maybe release inmates early so that if an evacuation is needed, you have fewer inmates to transport. What kind of actions can you take to reduce your daily population?"

There is certain to be a legal process required to release lower risk security inmates or those inmates close to their designated release dates. Galbraith questioned what legal position is your jail in, if, when sheltering-in-place "you have inmates who have a release date during the height of the emergency event?" Do you imprison them too long? Do you release them into an unsafe environment?

Dialogue about such options may raise more questions than provide answers. But now is the time to address issues as opposed to when the storm is looming.

Fatality Management

A fatality does not need to be directly related to the emergency to pose a problem for the facility. For example, someone could suffer a fatal heart attack. What do you do with the dead body?

Dr. Babatunde Stokes, Assistant Chief Medical Examiner in the Tidewater District, discussed everything from a mass fatality incident which could overwhelm local jurisdictions to smaller scale incidents. No matter the case size, you need to have a method to store and preserve the remains. Without proper storage, bodies will decompose more quickly and with sufficient time cause health concerns for the living.

The jail's kitchen refrigerator may be the most immediate thought as a solution; however, Dr. Stokes warned decomposing bodies would compromise the food source and could forever condemn that area for future food storage even long after the passage of the emergency event. A contaminated area may be irreparable.

There is a lot to consider by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) in the management of remains. Jails can assist by properly treating the body:

1. Identify each body separately. If the name is known, seal and label the body, and the body bag. If the name is not known, mark the body, and the body bag with a unique identifier.
2. Clothing and personal effects should not be separated from the body. They may be the only clue to confirming

a person's identity. They may also represent evidence in case of a crime.

3. Storage and transport of remains can be made in cooperation of hospitals, if an option, until an OCME incident morgue is ready. Bodies must be kept cooled.
4. The OCME will determine the site of any incident morgue other than the district medical examiner's office. Preplanning should be conducted by jails for a suitable staging area and incident morgue, with the final decision being made by the OCME.

Like with the legal issues education session, the medical examiner's session posed numerous questions.

1. Are there tests/samples to be taken soon after death for a cause of death investigation?
2. In the event of a staff member dies during a catastrophic event, what tests/samples can be taken to preserve a state's "Line of Duty" death benefits for the family?
3. In the event of an inmate death, what can be done to protect the jail from litigation?
4. What are notification requirements and are they different during an emergency?

Once these educational sessions concluded, each participating agency was reminded of the scenario and provided guidance on what kinds of resources they needed to plan for. Participants not only discussed amongst themselves, but they got up from their tables and moved to talk with other jail personnel within the region. Subject matter experts roamed the training area, listened in on conversations, and provided possible avenues of response to identified issues and gaps.

Positive ideas and possible solutions were shared regionally. Gaps in service identified by one facility may possibly be filled by another. For example, jails with extra bed space for inmates made themselves available to accept a certain number from facilities that could be more negatively affected by storm surge waters.

The consensus at the conclusion of the training exercise was that, although daunting, the task of shelter-in-place, evacuation/full/partial/or vertical, is manageable. With such strong regional cooperation, the area is now in a position to ask for federal hazard mitigation grants. These grants would help pay for the hardening of structures in advance of a catastrophic event. Things like the purchase of a generator, or relocating a generator vertically to clear it from flood waters, the purchase of water buffalos to ensure clean drinking water, retrofitting structures and facilities to minimize damages from high winds, earthquake, flood, wildfire, or other natural hazards.

Jail facilities throughout the Hampton Roads/Tidewater region, including the Newport News Sheriff's Office, can serve as a center of excellence and provide guidance to other areas just starting the heavy lifting in their long term and on-going preparedness plans. 🌟