

Ohio pre-positioning, tracking emergency resources

By KANTELE FRANKO, Associated Press

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COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Ohio is trying to better prepare for events such as damaging storms and power failures by pre-positioning several large generators around the state, improving tracking of such resources and creating teams of employees who can respond when communities say they need help, even if an emergency isn't statewide, officials said Thursday.

The new approach, slated to be in full swing by spring, aims to make sure the state is ready to quickly respond both before and during emergencies.

In situations that are more localized than would merit

activating the state's emergency center, the state sees room for improvement in getting equipment, people and information to where they're most needed, Department of Public Safety Director John Born said.

"Hopefully we'll have the people right on the ground so when the emergency managers and the local officials realize they have the need, they can just reach out, and the subject-matter experts are right there at their doorstep already," said Maj. Gen. Deborah Ashenhurst, who leads the Ohio National Guard.

The new strategy builds on lessons learned from previous emergencies, said Nancy Dragani, executive director of the Ohio Emergency Management Agency.



Maj. Gen. Deborah Ashenhurst, front right, leader of the Ohio National Guard, talks with Ohio Department of Public Safety Director John Born, front center, during a demonstration Thursday, Dec. 19, 2013, at the department's Emergency Operations Center in Columbus, Ohio. The state is trying to better prepare for events like damaging storms with power failures by pre-positioning several large generators around Ohio, improving tracking of resources, and creating teams who can respond when communities need help. Photo: Kantele Franko, AP

Ohio EMA didn't own large power generators until recently, when it used federal Homeland Security grant money to buy eight of them, Dragani said. They're big enough to be useful if, for example, an area lost electricity and needed to power a lift station that keeps up the flow in the water treatment process.



Also in the equipment category: Officials realized the State Highway Patrol's new fleet of Dodge Charger cars could have trouble in blizzard conditions, so the patrol is deploying at least one all-wheel drive vehicle to each post, Born said.

The changes in information flow are more behind-the-scenes, advantageous to those in charge of emergency response but unlikely to be noticed by most residents.

Ohio EMA has started using a Web-based system to track and map available resources, such as generators, helicopters and water treatment equipment, that are owned by state and local governments and a few nonprofit partners. That makes it much easier to visualize those resources than when the information was provided only in spreadsheets, Dragani said.

The state also plans to create teams of public workers who can be deployed when communities need help. Those employees — likely including state troopers, Ohio National Guard members and representatives from Ohio Homeland Security, EMA and the Department of Transportation — would be equipped to send photos and video back to the emergency operations center to give officials there a clearer picture of what's happening.
