

Oregon State Defense Force (ORSDF) SB 1000

Imagine for a moment that the CSZ has ruptured... a massive 9.3 earthquake has devastated the Northern California coast, the Oregon coast and the Washington coast. Significant damage has made its way all the way to the foothills of the Cascade mountains. The coastal areas of all three states have been reduced to pockets of survivors isolated from each other by destroyed roadways along the coast. Most, if not all, of these pockets are now isolated from any assistance from further inside the states by impassable or destroyed arterial roadways away from the coast.

As we emerge from the initial shock of the utter and complete destruction, we start looking to our emergency management entities to start getting help out to assist as many as can be helped, and save as many lives as are possible in the face of such devastation. Professional and volunteer organizations and groups start to mobilize as many of their members as can be freed from their own devastation. Calls for support and assistance start going out to neighboring states within hours of the last shaking of the initial quake. What initially emerges is a patchwork of groups with little initial coordination, simply trying to help as many people as they can get to. Eventually, as more and more volunteers arise, a level of organization appears. Initially, as they acquire sufficient manning, emergency operations centers (EOC) in the western part of the states become active and within as reasonable a time as possible, fully functional. As information starts to arrive, a picture starts to emerge of the level of devastation. Within a hopefully reasonable amount of time, professional emergency services are able to mobilize and start responding to the direst needs. Unfortunately, these emergency services are going to be completely overwhelmed for longer than would seem reasonably acceptable. That will have to become the norm in an incident of this magnitude.

As the emergency operations centers develop a picture of the incident, they forward it through whatever means are available to the Emergency Coordination Center (ECC) in Salem. The ECC will be completely overwhelmed for some time to come, and may very well have to be increasingly selective of the information it receives. Eventually, the ECC and the Joint Operations Center (JOC) of the Oregon Military Department (OMD) will become adequately manned to provide the support the EOCs are looking for. Few, if any, of the local EOCs will be able to activate and deploy sufficient equipment and/or personnel for the task at hand. The need to augment the local resources with state resources will become apparent very early in the disaster. As most of the normal venues of communications will be destroyed or rendered untenable within moments of the earthquake, HAM radio operators (HAMs) will become an immediate and indispensable resource. For a considerable time, HAMs will likely be the only source of communications and information.

Now the need for military assets emerges. Some of the needs will be self-evident, but there will be many that must be determined as information emerges. As this information emerges, it must be consolidated and forwarded to the ECC. Unless a specific need

has been determined, that need will have to be determined some time after it has reached the ECC and been forwarded to the JOC. The possibility for hours to have passed between the initial determination for such a need to the need being satisfied through a formal request, mobilization and deployment is very real. In a disaster of this magnitude, it is highly likely that many lives could be lost in the time it takes to get the military assets on scene.

Now imagine the repercussions if you found out that there had once existed an organization within the state that had trained and practiced to provide a venue whereby the military assets could potentially have been available and reached their destination significantly quicker. Would you consider that an acceptable solution in a disaster?

Mission at disbanding:

The mission of the ORSDF was intended to have been to serve as Liaison Officers (LO) to each units' respective EOC. The plan was that each LO team would consist of at least one radio operator (RO), one recorder and, if sufficient personnel were available, as single LO. The LO would be in close contact/proximity to the Incident Commander (IC) and would provide incident status information to the JOC. In addition, should the incident need them and the IC determine that the request was appropriate, the LO could provide information to the JOC on military asset requests that would be forthcoming. The JOC could then monitor the incident and determine, if military assets were being requested, the best location from which to draw the assets and which assets would be appropriate based on their situational awareness. The concept was that, as it could take hours for an asset request to clear through the EOC and ECC in Salem, the assets could be mobilized and potentially staged awaiting the formal request to clear. This could save, in some cases, the hours that would be consumed by the mobilization process prior to the arrival of the formal request and potentially countless lives.

Reason for disbanding:

I do not know. The stated reason was an unexpected liability to the state that the military department was ill suited to bear based on a single accident of an ORSDF member while traveling to a Semi-Annual Training event at Camp Rilea. This wound up being a severe injury that required significant medical treatment.

Experience and participation:

The ORSDF had numerous not insignificant success and exposure by its members. Members provided communications services during the Vernonia floods, short notice and remote communications during such national exercises as Vital Connections in addition to other state and local exercises and drills. In all cases, the ORSDF was recognized for their ability to provide professional level and accurate communications services. In a training session provided at the JOC, members of the ORSDF received specific recognition for their ability to closely integrate with military members in a

disaster simulation. There were other successes that received recognition and praise from professionals within the emergency management community.

Questions of interest:

1. What was the real driving reason behind the disbanding of the ORSDF?
2. Will this bill provide a structure that will adequately replace the liaison function the ORSDF was intended to provide?
3. Will the State Police have an adequate need and/or purpose for such an organization?
4. Will the various state sheriffs have a need and/or purpose for such an organization as they already have significant communications infrastructure through ARES/RACES?

Moving forward:

The original mission was a very viable mission. Many members of the ORSDF spent countless hours training, practicing and drilling for the operation. A significant number of the former members of the ORSDF were extremely well qualified HAM radio operators, some with actual emergency communications and support experience. Some of the former members attended extensive and numerous training courses and sessions to further their training well beyond the basic requirements for their positions. The ORSDF had at least two fully qualified and endorsed Communications Section Leaders (COML), not an insignificant distinction for an organization of this type.

If the ORSDF is to succeed in its mission, the following should be considerations in its reestablishment:

1. The command structure should be completely reestablished. It should consist ONLY of qualified personnel for the mission and personnel that have a complete buy in and belief in the mission.
2. Greater support must be given by the OMD. This support is essential to the success of the ORSDF.
3. Greater integration with the host unit in the various armories must be achieved. Some of the previous members achieved some level of integration, while others did not. This cannot be the case moving forward. Each hosting armory must be made aware of the mission of the unit being hosted, and should be encouraged to utilize the capabilities of the unit whenever practicable.
4. An introduction of the mission must be provided to each of the EOC's that will be served by ORSDF teams. This must be done in the form of a formal introduction by the OMD. This will encourage the emergency managers to more closely integrate the LO teams into their activities.
5. The OMD should be more involved in the training sessions and activities of the units of the ORSDF. This does not have to be financial support as facilities support is adequate, when a large scale training event is planned.