

Establishing Instructor Standards in Emergency Management and Homeland Security

The various fields that encompass public safety are built on standards. Standards provide us with consistencies in practice. They provide us with a basis for qualifications. They protect us from liabilities, and they define the progress of our professions. Law Enforcement has standards for basic training – defining what knowledge and skills are necessary for police officers. The same can be said for firefighting and emergency medical technicians. Likewise, throughout the nation there are stringent requirements for those who teach our public safety professionals. Certification titles such as a Fire Instructor, Criminal Justice General Topics Instructor, or EMS Instructor Coordinator are commonly seen in our related professions. But what of Emergency Management and Homeland Security? How is it that these professions have few consistent standards for baseline instructor qualifications?

The evolution of EM/HS from Civil Defense as an amalgamation of other public safety professions has stunted our professional growth. Despite numerous college degree programs and global recognition of the need for our abilities, EM/HS still struggles with firmly establishing itself as a profession. The lack of a consistent model of instructor standards is an example of this. Without nationally recognized standards that define what it means to be a highly qualified instructor, we run the risk of losing credibility in the profession. Professional development is the cornerstone of professions that value the transmission of knowledge from veterans to novices entering the field. While EM/HS is seen as a collaborative profession, it still needs to build its own identity.

Many State Training Officers, in defining standards for instructors of EM/HS courses, defer to the qualification standards of our public safety brethren; accepting fire, police, and EMS instructor credentials as instructors of EM/HS training programs. While this has served us in the past, I am left questioning the wisdom of this approach for our future. FEMA/EMI has made an attempt at defining a standard for Emergency Management instructors by designing the *Master Trainer Program*. The *Master Trainer Program* is an intensive, high quality program that does much to develop instructional standards. Until recently, much of the program focused on instructional design, however, it is currently being broadened to include an emphasis on instructional delivery and the management of a training program. The program consists of several week-long resident courses and is viewed as too burdensome for an entity attempting to develop a whole cadre of instructors, as most instructor development programs for our public safety peers are 40-80 hours in length. Still, it provides an excellent and in-depth professional development opportunity for EM/HS instructors and training managers. The new *Basic Instructor Certificate* is more accessible than the traditional *Master Trainer Program*, but still may not be convenient or effective for cadre development as it requires three full weeks of travel.

The Center for Domestic Preparedness (CDP) conducts an excellent overview course titled *Instructor Training Certification* (PER-266). This course is part of the new *Master Trainer Program Basic Instructor Certificate* but can also be taken as a stand-alone course. The traditional focus of the course is for responders who will be delivering chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive (CBRNE) training courses. While the content of the 40-hour course is comprehensive and provides an excellent baseline for new instructors; it is, however, a CDP resident course and is rarely delivered outside of the CDP campus.

FEMA/EMI offers a course titled *Basic Instructional Skills* (IS-265). The IS designation of the course numbering indicates that this course is an 'independent study' course. As such, this course is a basic-level course that provides scant knowledge of delivering training. This course used to be a state-delivered course,

which was an excellent option for instructor cadre development. In its current form, however, it is woefully inadequate for those purposes.

Beyond basic instructor qualification, there is the matter of qualifying instructors in specific courses. There are a number of Homeland Security training programs designed for national audiences which conclude with a 'Train the Trainer' module and then provided all participants with a certificate of completion for that course, thus 'certifying' participants as instructors of that program or a version thereof. This is a mistake that has unintended consequences for our profession. I recall attending such as course delivered by a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Grants and Training partner entity. The course itself provided an excellent learning experience through rigorous classroom instruction and hands-on exercises. A large number of my fellow classmates (including myself) had no other background in the subject matter of the five-day course and of those that did, few had significant background as instructors. At the end of the course and after a very brief (less than an hour) overview of adult educational methodologies, we were provided with a 'Trainer Certification' and instructor guide thereby "certifying" us to teach the course to others. While I consider myself a talented and capable instructor, I in no way feel qualified to deliver a course on that subject matter to others in my field or outside of our profession.

Courses created by entities such as FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI) for field delivery identify instructor qualifications in their plans of instruction and instructor guides. **Most require that the individual have some measure of experience in the subject matter and, on occasion, it is encouraged that the instructor actually have experience as an instructor – but it is usually stated that generally.** These liberal baselines are no fault of FEMA's, as FEMA produces many courses specifically designed for delivery under the auspices of the State Training Officer (STO) of each state, thus it should be the responsibility of the STO (who is usually severely overworked, underfunded, and understaffed) to develop an instructor qualification system for the courses under their purview. Designing such a system is a complex consideration of policy, procedure, implementation, administration, tracking, and the 'grandfathering' of existing instructors into the system.

The National Integration Center (NIC), which steers the implementation of the National Incident Management System (NIMS), has provided excellent guidance on instructor qualifications for Incident Command System (ICS) courses which at least requires instructor candidates to have attended the courses themselves, to have actual experience in the Incident Command System, and to have completed some type of instructor development program; relative to identifying candidates for both unit-level and course lead instructors. This is an exemplary model for states to follow for all EM/HS training program instructor standards – largely due to the significant state and local input to these guidelines. Several states have implemented similar guidelines and have had great success.

Regardless of what model and methodologies are used to define instructor standards, the profession needs to ensure that we put our best foot forward. On a consistent basis, the training programs of State and local EM/HS agencies are the largest and most visible feature of these agencies to the public safety agencies they work with and even to the general public. It is an absolute MUST that we have the highest quality courses delivered by the best instructors we can find and train.