



Partners in Prevention

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Partner Spotlight – Gary Johnston

Gary Johnston is the Chief Resilience Officer for the County of San Diego, Office of Emergency Services (OES). He joined the OES team in September 2018. As the Chief Resilience Officer, he works closely with County and external partners to engage key stakeholders, build consensus, and implement recommendations to build the County's overall resilience.

Q: How did you get interested in disaster safety?

As a second generation and 30-year veteran of the Marine Corps, “service” has been a way of life. During my military service, I have been in the midst of “disaster” having served multiple combat tours overseas as well as multiple contingency operations both at home and abroad. As the former Deputy Commander of Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, CA, the Marine Corps largest expeditionary installation, I served closely with local emergency services organizations especially in the responding to and recovering from natural disasters – principally wildland fires and floods. Shortly following my retirement from the Marine Corps, the opportunity presented itself to serve in the Emergency Services field – a great mission and similar culture to that which I was accustomed.

Q: Can you tell us about specific projects or programs you are working on in the risk reduction and resilience field?

As the San Diego County Chief Resilience Officer, I have been leading the development of a County Resilience Program – essentially developing a “how to” achieve greater community resilience. The principal component of the resilience program is the Resilience Review Process. This five-step process identifies capability, capacity, and resource gaps in the County’s approach to proactively reducing risks associated with acute shocks and chronic stressors that distress the community physically, socially, and economically. From the local government perspective, the program builds resilience into the County staff’s DNA, allowing us to accomplish more for the public good.

Q: What do you think are the driving forces that are advancing the cause of resilience today, especially after last year’s hurricane and wildfire disasters?

The growing frequency of acute shocks from natural disasters and chronic stressors from social challenges, combined with the complexity and interdependence of society, threaten the prosperity of our communities and way of life – we need to do something about it. I also believe that the Rockefeller Foundation (100 Resilient Cities) generated enthusiasm and great momentum by supporting a select 100 major international cities and partnered with them to develop comprehensive resilience strategies. This initiative also promoted the idea/necessity for the Chief Resilience Officer position to manage strategy implementation. This Resilience initiative has spread to other levels of government as well as the private sector.

Q: How can the FLASH Partnership support your efforts?

FLASH has already provided great assistance to me in my efforts to develop a County resilience program. From the annual National Disaster Resilience Conference that brings together a diverse group of professionals that share common goals and mission, to their incredible and informative website, to their networking and

collaboration activities, FLASH and its leadership have provided professional advice and product that has enhanced my planning efforts and professional development.

Q: Do you have any other comments or additional words of wisdom to offer our readers?

Expect *resiliency* to have a different meaning by many of those looking to achieve greater levels of it. I strongly recommend that any organization that is working towards becoming more resilient define and codify the definition of the word. This will ensure that those within the organization are working off a common definition or frame of reference. In so doing, you can achieve unity of effort and purpose in achieving greater levels of resiliency.