

After spending the past year doing way more direct management of OEM Comm than I had envisioned a year ago, I've come to the conclusion that a member of OEM needs to be at the top of the organizational chart, with the Unit Leaders and Admin and Ops Chiefs communicating directly with that person - something that's been happening for most of the preceding year.

The decision not to have OEM directly in charge of the group was probably a bad one on my part. At the time, the idea of letting the group continue to manage itself seemed reasonable, because having a leadership that was actually elected rather than self-appointed would reinvigorate the membership and sweep away the apathy and dissatisfaction engendered by the old guard. Another, more selfish reason to let the group run itself was to allow me to step away from a constant involvement, thereby giving me more time to work on other communications projects, like WebEOC. I truly believed that the organization could run itself with the right people in charge.

As competent as those people are, though, the simple truth is that they do not have the time to devote to managing the group on their own. Members have lives outside of OEM Comm – their families, their jobs, their personal interests – and it was naive of me to think that the priorities of the leadership would match those of a County employee paid to be on the job 5 days (sometimes more) per week, 8 hours (sometimes more) per day. With the sudden, heightened degree of activity in OEM Comm, it became clear early on that OEM would need to be considerably more involved than ever before, and that has proven to be the case. I am in direct contact with most of the Unit Leaders and the Admin and Ops Chiefs on a regular basis.

An autonomous OEM Comm with only behind-the-scenes involvement of, rather than direct management by, OEM furthers the perception that OEM Comm is separate and distinct from OEM, a myth that was debunked only after heated discussions in several meetings on the eve of the reorganization. When the dust settled, nearly everyone agreed that the group was indeed a volunteer arm of the Office of Emergency Management and had no independent standing, or need therefor, because the group exists solely at the discretion of OEM, the agency that not only provides equipment and funding for OEM Comm activities, which are pursued on behalf of OEM, but also shoulders liability for the safety and well-being of OEM Comm members participating in those activities.

And so, with the first year of the new OEM Comm organization under our belts, I see no reduction of the role of OEM in the management of OEM Comm. As much as I had hoped not to find myself this deep, I am not unhappy about it, because I think the group has flourished and grown with OEM not being an "absentee landlord". Going forward, I do not see a continued need for a Director, and I'm questioning the need for the Admin and Ops Chiefs as well. I think I'd rather see Admin and Ops committees, comprised of Unit Leaders and members alike. My original vision of Unit Leaders reporting to a single higher authority is not a bad model at all. It will streamline communications within the organization and will make approvals far less cumbersome. With OEM in charge, accountability will be easier to achieve, because it will be someone's paid job (mine) to ensure, and, not that it's necessarily a problem now, there will be fewer instances of taking direction from peers, friends or people with whom one has differences.

Please be prepared to discuss the above and to vote on it at the Leadership Council meeting on June 12. For those who may see this as some kind of power grab, it's not. I act only on the basis of goals and the best way to get there. To me, this is the most logical course, and it's not like I've only just now gotten involved. Quite the contrary!