



PHOTO BY MARTY PASTULA

Laura Phillips

General Manager, Bay Area Urban Area Security Initiative

Laura Phillips is the general manager of the 12-county Bay Area Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) leading its Approval Authority, which provides policy direction and is the final authority on projects, funding, events, public information and much more. The San Francisco Bay Area is one of seven Tier 1 (highest risk) UASI districts among the 60 nationwide. Phillips has nearly 30 years of experience in emergency management and public safety and was the executive director of San Francisco's Department of Emergency Management before becoming UASI general manager.

In a recent interview with *Emergency Management* magazine, Phillips was asked about the Bay Area's unique needs and the relationships among the California UASIs.

What makes the Bay Area UASI unique?

What makes it different from some of the other UASIs is the diversity within the Bay Area. If you look at it from a physical or geographical perspective, we've got the landscape, mountain ranges, ocean and valleys — quite a bit of different topography that we're dealing with.

Then you look at the densities; San Francisco is very dense. Then [there are] areas where there's hardly anybody, like parts of the North Bay. So when you're pulling people together, that can be a great challenge.

What collaboration goes on between other UASIs in the area and how important is that?

I was talking about it with the rest of the Tier 1 UASIs, and they asked us why we [collaborate]. Around most of the country, the UASIs are competing for funding against each other. Even within a state, they're competing. We sought an opportunity to be peer reviewed. The goal was to turn in the best application from all the California UASIs. We wrote our applications, then exchanged them and shared information. There's a little bit of risk in there if we're up against Los Angeles or San Diego, but we learned a lot. [We'd question each other]. "Laura, we don't really understand this part of the application." You can be sure that a peer reviewer who might be in Iowa reading ours isn't going to get it either. So [being clear on the application] was the first goal.

There was probably a fiscal reason that drove the first collaboration as well. We found that [the U.S. Department of Homeland Security] would give you extra points and funding if you reached outside of your border. We did that with a joint-investment justification between Sacramento and the Bay Area on interoperable communications. We did another one with Los Angeles on regional mutual-aid projects, and they did a lot of the heavy lifting in terms of the training and imple-

menting it. We kind of put together the structure, but it's a great collaboration there. We have quite a few on the horizon like interconnecting all the fusion centers and CopLink connections. The state bought all the licenses for us, and we're rolling it out across the state.

You mentioned interconnecting all of the fusion centers; is that different as well?

It is. I think they are talking about it in New Jersey. One of the unique things is that in most parts of the country, the state would probably organize something like that. As you know, there are problems at the state level here and there hasn't

been a lot of interest probably, or maybe they've got other distractions about merging. We feel it's a priority to see where there are patterns and share information across regions. People are very mobile within the Bay Area [and] the state, so if there's a threat and you can see a pattern between Disneyland and the [Transamerica] Pyramid building in San Francisco, we want to know about those things.

Have UASIs evolved over the years to prepare for both natural and man-made hazards?

Yes and no because with each grant cycle there are specific guidelines and sometimes there

"The homeland security program requires a governance structure that has certain components. Ours is a little unique in terms of the collaboration and how decisions are made. In a lot of places in the country, a smaller body makes all the decisions."



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