



A whole-of-government approach: Members of 16 departments and agencies meet in the DFAIT Robertson Room as part of the Government of Canada's Standing Interdepartmental Task Force on Natural Disasters Abroad to respond to the evolving emergency in Japan.

DFAIT is responsible for coordinating Canada's response to international emergencies, Dubeau says. START leads in natural disasters, CED is responsible for emergencies involving assistance to Canadians and public health, and the Security and Intelligence Bureau steps in where mission security and personal safety are concerned. Within DFAIT, emergency management also closely involves the Geographic Groups, International Platform, Communications Bureaus, International Trade staff, Human Resources and more.

Other government departments join in "from the get-go," Dubeau says, with a formal structure set out in an incident command system, which is portrayed in a series of magnets, labelled with names and functions, stuck to the wall of his office. Partners include DND, CIDA, PCO, Public Safety Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Passport Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency, to name just a handful, as well as players such as Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, when needed.

A WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT EFFORT

The partnership runs the gamut from emergency planning to response. At the time of the Japan earthquake and tsunami, three contingency planning assistance teams (CPATs) made up of DFAIT and DND staff were rapidly making their way through 15 missions in the Middle East and North Africa to assess their preparedness in case of civil unrest. In response to the earthquake, DFAIT provided 25,000 blankets, at the request of the Government of Japan, for use in evacuation shelters. Radiation

survey meters and dosimeters (which measure a person's exposure to radiation) were also provided to deal with the nuclear emergency.

Patrick Hébert, Deputy Director of IRH, says that key departmental players in emergency management stay in constant contact. "We don't want to exchange business cards at the first task force meeting," explains Hébert, who was involved in the response to the 2004 Asian tsunami and the Pakistan earthquake in 2005, as part of the Interdepartmental Strategic Support Team (ISST). The team, which is led by DFAIT and includes representatives of CIDA and DND, can be deployed to disaster zones to assess needs and options for possible Canadian responses.

Col. Bob Chamberlain, Director of Peacekeeping Policy at DND, says the ISSTs and CPATs are examples of the evolution of interdepartmental collaboration in international emergencies, which is especially reinforced by the whole-of-government effort in Afghanistan.

"The tools in the Government of Canada toolbox continue to get sharper, so we are able to respond more quickly, in more places, as we gain collective experience," says Chamberlain, who sits on the interdepartmental task force when emergencies arise. The events of the Arab Spring, he says, such as the assisted departure of Canadians from Libya to Malta, "really did demand the collaboration and strengths of each department." But, he adds, they also showed that there needs to be a "playbook," with plans, exercises and processes to deal with emergencies such as political crises. "There's still a lot to be learned."