

Emergency preparedness budget approved by commission

Written by By Terry Bowman Sun Correspondent
Friday, 02 October 2015 03:59



McKinley County Board of Commissioners gave the Office of Emergency Management the green light to receive the Hazardous Material Emergency Preparedness Grant that will help them to prepare for large scale disasters.

The \$95,200 HMEP grant enables the OEM to conduct and prepare for a hazardous materials disaster in the city of Gallup and around McKinley County.

“This grant allows us to conduct hazardous materials exercises and prepare for a hazardous disaster in the city and around the county,” Dimas said.

The HMEP grant is from the Department of Homeland Security and is split 80/20; 80 percent coming from the Federal Government and 20 percent tapped from county, local funds.

“We usually get around \$75,000 - \$80,000 from this grant. This year we are fortunate to get \$90,000,” he said. “This is the highest we’ve gotten and we’re fortunate to keep this going” he said.

According to Dimas, there are four processes that the OEM and its partners usually go through in order to use the grant for training purposes.

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The first is a “table top” plan, where the OEM and partners will discuss the emergency plans for the city in case there is a potential hazardous risk.

“We gather with our partners to conduct these exercises, it’s more of a ‘what if’ situation, we discuss how to approach this situation,” Dimas said.

The second is a full-scale “mock” exercise that Dimas said is the most crucial process for their training and will allow for crews to get suited up and act like there is a full-scale hazardous emergency. This part of the process requires boots on the ground, for emergency response teams and real actors who are portrayed as citizens caught up in the staged disaster.

The third is a hazardous training course for OEM and emergency response crews who will attend the training and observe the full-scale exercise mistakes and procedures to improve the emergency response time and decide what more needs to be done.

The fourth and final process will be a conference in which the Local Emergency Planning Committee will be sent to a conference to gain further knowledge and training for hazardous materials safety.

“Our partner this year is the Gallup Fire Department. We will conduct these exercises with them closely,” Dimas said.

In the previous years, Dimas said that the OEM partners vary from year-to-year. Last year the OEM partnered with New Mexico State Police and used the railroads in Gallup as their full-scale practice location.

The exercises run for about four months and will take place between October and January of this year.

With the budget approved, Dimas said that his team could prepare to sit down with the GFD and

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begin planning for their mock exercises in the next few months.