



**Unsinkable** by Jim Schmidt

How can we forget the memorable line from James Cameron’s movie Titanic? ***“I tell you Rose she IS unsinkable, even God himself can’t sink this ship”***. We all know the outcome of that, but do we find ourselves in the same position today? I will be the first to confess that I did earlier this year, and I did it publicly. I was asked to speak about severe weather preparedness and in my normal review of the history of tornadoes I recalled the large loss of life events of the past. I found myself saying, “But with today’s technology and our ability to disseminate warning information we’ve virtually eliminated the chance for big loss of life events like those of the past”. There I was, standing on that dock in 1912 looking up at the most advanced technology of the day and uttering the word “unsinkable”.

Only a few weeks later, I could scarcely believe it when I heard the reports coming in; hundreds killed and in-

jured in Alabama and the southeast, then came Joplin, the largest loss of life from one tornado EVER! Suddenly I found myself standing on the ice littered deck of Titanic at 1 am, thinking “but this can’t happen, we have all the technology, we have all the abilities to”... and we got rid of our lifeboats!

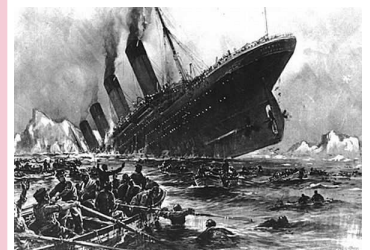
Two weeks ago at the International All Hazards Incident Management Team conference I had the honor of listening to a fascinating presentation by Gordon Graham. Gordon is an astute student of tragedy. Although he spent twenty some years with the California Highway Patrol, his passion is risk management. Gordon quickly got my attention by pointing out my failings, saying it is a mindset that so many of us have developed even though we routinely respond to tragic events. Interestingly it starts out with us saying to ourselves “it can’t happen again because”..... Before long we marvel at what we THINK we know

and we convince ourselves that something (think technology here because it’s usually our fall back) will keep the bad thing from happening again. This is true not only for the emergency responders but for our citizens as well. Most persons have never experienced a Tuscaloosa or a Joplin in their lifetimes. We embrace our new technology and quite frankly are all guilty of thinking that someone or something else has our back. Gradually we begin to get rid of our lifeboats; after all they just clutter up our deck don’t they?

Gordon made many observations from his lifetime of work but one of the most important that all of us should remember is this; ***“things that go wrong in life are predictable and predictable is preventable”***. We know that there will be tornadoes and that they will strike high population areas “someday”. We can’t prevent that, but we CAN prevent the carnage (continued. pg 2)

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## Changes

2011, just arrived yesterday (or did it...) and will be gone tomorrow. Reflecting back on 2011, the word change springs to mind. Mary Engelbreit quipped “If you don’t like something change it; if you can’t change it, change the way you think about it.”

With the every changing times and economy, I’m sure you have heard many say, and perhaps feel the same way, “we are expected to do more with less.” That is not always a negative comment, but one where you can come together as an agency and work with others to improve your capabilities.

Butler County hosted a Training and Exercise Planning Workshop in November. Representatives from cities, fire, EMS, public works, emergency management, health department and hospitals were in attendance. Additional input was provided by a school representative and the Department on Aging. I was thrilled at the willingness and positive attitudes of those in attendance in developing a working calendar. I thought “WOW” this is great as we filled up the calendar. Working together, we can achieve our goals. We can do more with less by helping one another and partnering even more than what we already do.

The disasters across the Country

this year reflect even more so, working together, better. According to the National Weather Service 2011 has been a year of weather extremes. Blizzards, impressive and unprecedented, continuous F4 and F5 tornadoes, widespread flooding, hurricane and wildfires. 12 weather and climate disasters in 2011 caused \$1 billion or more in damages. Everyone that has endured these weather extremes and record setters has and will encounter change.

Who can forget the wildfires, the massive tornadoes of Joplin, Tuscaloosa, and others across the Southeast. I remember watching the television the night of Joplin. Chills riddled my body like the night of Greensburg. 4 days after Greensburg, I was on the ground assisting as a Plans Chief. I still remember those feelings as I drove into town: shock, sadness, disbelief, amazement. Two months after Joplin, my family drove through the area chiseled by the EF5. Those feelings experienced in Greensburg, were relived driving through Joplin. I have enjoyed watching Greensburg rebuild and re-grow their community after a devastating blow to the majority of their city. I think it will be interesting to watch the communities such as Joplin and Tuscaloosa rebuild,

strengthen, and develop while doing more with less. What changes will they make to be flexible with today’s economy?

Butler County dealt with more wildfires this drought ridden year than any other natural disaster. Cities had to ration water and farmers and ranchers had to make changes to their program due to the lack of water. With the drought and heat, we watched lakes and ponds dry up and yards die. If only we could have figured out how to channel all the flooding water from NE Kansas to the rest of the State. How about earthquakes! We felt a couple of Oklahoma’s right here in Butler County! Did you change your insurance policy and add earthquake coverage? More changes will be made in 2012. The weather outlook is anyone’s guess: tornadoes in February, ongoing drought, floods: take your pick depending on who you choose to listen too.

2011 zipped past in the blink of an eye and 2012 will be here SOON. Change is certain. We must be flexible and adaptable to whatever 2012 throws our way. Make new friends, enhance your program and determine how you can better yourself, community, and/or department while doing more with less. Are you ready and prepared for 2012?

## Unsinkable (continued)

that took place in 2011 from happening again. For me the takeaway is new technology is only one of my tools in the box, I can’t throw the others away and I can never, never become complacent. I shudder

when I think of those poor souls standing there on that deck in the dead of night, freezing cold wondering “how could this happen” realizing the technology they bet on, failed them. For me I’ll pay

attention to the wisdom of Gordon Graham. I’ll embrace technology as a force multiplier but I’ll keep the lifeboats just where they are because I know nothing in this world is “unsinkable”.



## LEPC and Holly Frontier Team Up

In November 2010, the Butler County LEPC hosted a Basic HazMat IQ class through a Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness Grant (HMEPG). The class was so well received that another grant was applied for this year, except this time to host a Basic and Advanced HazMat IQ Class. Holly Frontier came on board with the training and teamed up with the LEPC. Thanks to Holly Frontier, Butler County is able to host 2 Basic and

2 Advanced HazMat IQ classes! The first set of classes were conducted on December 14th and 15th. Carlos Rodriguez with Wichita Fire taught Day 1. Chris Waier from Lansing Michigan taught Day 2, Advanced! The classes were excellent and instructors done a phenomenal job. In addition to the educational aspect, there was enough humor to keep the classes fun. 27 attended the Basic class and 19 participated in the Advanced class.

A few seats remain open for the January 18 Basic and January 19 Advanced class. On January 4th, registration will be opened up to responders outside of Butler County. If you are interested, contact our office at (316) 733-9796 to register.



### BUTLER COUNTY



Another busy year is wrapping up for Butler County CERT. Two wonderful CERT classes were conducted for residents of Butler County. The second class concluded the first weekend of October. 11 citizens completed the class

## CERT

and 6 joined the team.

CERT has logged an impressive year and looks to log over 670 more hours in 2011 than in 2010. Currently, and the year is not over with yet, over

**"The ultimate expression of generosity is not in giving of what you have, but in giving of who you are." ~ Johnetta B. Cole**

5,550 volunteer hours have been recorded. Way to go CERT!!!



## Emergency Management Changes

A few changes are on the forefront for our office. At the end of October, we no longer shared office space with the Butler County Health Department. For those of you who have been to our office during weather events and small scale EOC Operations, you know how crowded we were all huddled

around a corner in Jim's office! The front room will now become our weather operations and situational awareness monitoring room. We will all have room to breathe, move around and allow for better visualization of the large picture. Once these changes start,



our office will become secure and doors will remain locked. However, you can still reach us with a buzzer and we will be happy to let you in! Even though the doors will be locked, you are always welcome to stop by!



*From our family to yours, may each and everyone of you have a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Safe New Year.*

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## **It's beginning to look a lot like.....**

Christmas? I like Christmas and white snow. In fact each year, I wish for a white Christmas. However, the warmth of the sun and 60 degree days in December is quite pleasant and enjoyable as well. Children are ridden with glee and many have visited Santa Claus. What some may not know is that Santa Claus has not always been the image that he is today. He too has changed!

*Jolly old Saint Nicholas.....*

Did you know he used to be green and used to not be “fat and jolly” at all? According to [WhyCenter.com](http://WhyCenter.com)

Santa was depicted as an old man by an unknown artist around 1890. Coca-Cola then adopted him to represent their brand on their winter product. It was around that time the red color came to be. Red was the color of choice for churches and many felt that color was based on his title of “Saint Nicholas.” You can find more information on [www.whycenter.com/](http://www.whycenter.com/)



[why-does-santa-wear-red/](http://www.whycenter.com/why-does-santa-wear-red/).

*Lean your ear this way! Don't you tell a single soul what I'm going to say; Christmas Eve is coming soon; Now, you dear old man, Whisper what you'll bring to me; Tell me if you can....”*

No matter what his image and color are or how he'll change, I will know him as Santa Claus. He will have a seat for many a children to set to reveal their Christmas wishes!