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UPDATE

The Changing Face of America



the U.S. today than there were people in the country in 1910. In fact, the minority population in the U.S. is larger than the total population of all but 11 countries.

Non-Hispanic White

The non-Hispanic, single-race white population represents 66% of the total population, accounting for less than a fifth (18%) of the nation's total population growth. In 2006, this group was older than the population as a whole; about

21% was younger than 18, compared with 25% of the total population.

Hispanic

Hispanics are the largest and fastest-growing minority group, making up 14.8% of the total population. Hispanics accounted for almost half (1.4 million) of the national population growth from 2005 to 2006.

Black and Other Races

The black population increased by 1.3%, or 522,000, between 2005 and 2006, to reach a total of 40.2 million. Blacks make up the second largest minority group, followed by Asian (14.9 million), Native American and Alaska natives (4.5 million), and native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders (1 million).

Majority-Minority

A recent population trend involves states, cities, and counties becoming majority-minority, meaning there are more minorities living in a certain area than non-minority whites. For instance, four states and the District of Columbia are majority-minority. Hawaii leads the nation, with a 75% minority population in 2006, followed by the District of Columbia (68%), New Mexico (57%), California (57%), and Texas (52%). No other state had a minority population exceeding 42% of the total. In a further sign of America's growing diversity, nonwhites now make up a majority in almost one-third of the most populous counties in the country and in nearly one in ten of all 3,100 counties.

Continued on page 2

Diversity Issues Facing Emergency Services

There is no question the "face of America" is changing as the population becomes more diverse. Leaders of emergency service organizations (ESOs) are encouraged to take proactive steps to better educate themselves, as well as their employees and volunteers, about diversity issues.

As our population becomes increasingly diverse, ESOs are impacted in two basic ways. First, ESO leaders are obligated to foster a work environment free from discrimination and harassment and comply with applicable employment laws. Employees and volunteers must receive education about the role of diversity, teamwork, and non-discrimination in the workplace. Second, ESO members are challenged to understand cultural diversity to better serve citizens in the community.

This article analyzes the changing face of America and reviews a number of applicable legal principles. Moreover, tips are provided for strengthening ESO teamwork and diversity. Understanding and embracing differences in race, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, and ability is essential for the ESO in the 21st century.

U.S. Population Statistics

About one in every three United States residents is part of a minority group (any group other than "single-race, non-Hispanic white"), according to a 2007 U.S. Census Bureau report. The minority population has reached 100.7 million, meaning there are more minorities in

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The Changing Face of America: Diversity Issues Facing Emergency Services

Continued from page 1

Education for Supervisors on Employment Laws

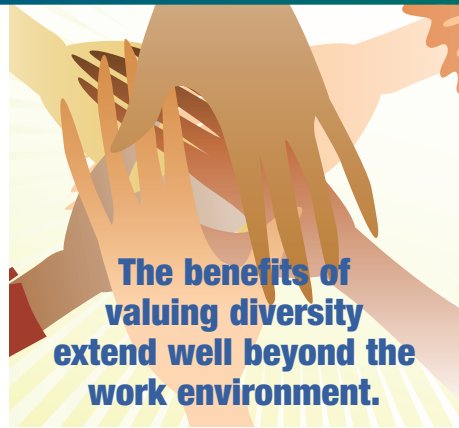
ESO leaders are responsible for fair administration of work rules and ensuring key employment laws are followed. Compared to a typical 9-to-5 private industry business, ESOs present unique challenges regarding equal opportunity and non-discrimination compliance. For instance, in a workforce mainly comprised of white males, education should focus on gender, race, and national origin discrimination, as well as sexual harassment prevention.

ESO leaders should clearly communicate through policy and training their zero-tolerance policy for unlawful discrimination and harassment. Behaviors or words may constitute harassment if they create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment, unreasonably interfere with work performance, or negatively affect an individual's employment or membership opportunities. Train those with supervisory authority on how to identify and respond effectively to harassment even in the absence of a complaint.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

The EEOC is the federal agency created as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. A primary purpose of the EEOC is to eliminate discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, or age in hiring, promoting, firing, compensation, testing, training, apprenticeship, and all other terms and conditions of employment. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 applies to employers with 15 or more employees.

ESO administrators should also consult with retained labor and employment counsel to learn more about local civil rights laws, ordinances, and enforcement agencies. Local laws may apply to organizations with fewer than 15 employees. Currently there are more than 100 state and local Fair Employment Practices Agencies, which enforce state and local laws. The EEOC has cooperative relationships with all but a few of these agencies.



National Origin or Religion

Events in recent years pertaining to the war on terror and immigration have put a spotlight on work-related discrimination and harassment based on national origin and religion. It is unlawful to discriminate against any employee, volunteer or applicant because of the individual's national origin or religion. No one can be denied equal employment opportunity because of birthplace, ancestry, culture, religion, or linguistic characteristics common to a specific ethnic group. Equal employment opportunity cannot be denied because of:

- Marriage or association with persons of a national origin group
- Membership or association with specific ethnic promotion group
- Attendance or participation in schools, churches, temples, or mosques generally associated with a national origin group
- A surname associated with a national origin group.

Race or Color

It is unlawful to discriminate against any ESO member or applicant because of his/her race or color in regard to hiring, membership, termination, promotion, compensation, job training, or any other term, condition or privilege of employment. It is illegal to make employment or membership decisions based on stereotypes and assumptions about abilities, traits, or the performance of individuals of certain racial groups. Federal and state laws also prohibit both intentional discrimination and neutral job policies that disproportionately exclude minorities and that are not job-related.

Gender

With more women choosing emergency services as a career, ESO leaders are

encouraged to promote gender diversity within the work environment. As with discrimination based on other legally protected grounds, it is unlawful to discriminate against any employee, volunteer, or applicant because of his/her sex in regard to hiring, training, promotion, termination, and working conditions. Moreover, ESO leaders must be aware of what constitutes unlawful sexual harassment and discrimination based on pregnancy.

Diversity Task Force

Deliberate change in an organization takes place from the top down. Top management must set the example for non-discrimination and awareness of cultural diversity. Consider instituting a diversity task force, consisting of ESO members with and without supervisory authority. This committee could call upon outside resources, such as community leaders, educators, and legal counsel to help develop strategies for heightening awareness for diversity issues. An ESO's task force could help tackle the following issues:

- Defining diversity in the emergency services context
- Understanding organizational, personal, and professional benefits of diversity
- Discussing how ESOs presently respond to internal and external diversity
- Understanding potential barriers faced by diverse groups in accessing emergency services or joining their ranks
- Implementing diversity strategies within ESOs and related challenges
- Examining the implications for ESOs that fail to address diversity and non-discrimination

Conclusion

The trend is clearly moving toward a greater inclusiveness in emergency services as the rate of change in the composition of the workforce is accelerating. The benefits of valuing diversity extend well beyond strengthening personnel relations within the work environment. Public relations also improve when an ESO can demonstrate to the communities it serves that diversity is respected and prioritized.

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