

An Interview with Michel C. Doré PhD, CEM, CGU, President, National Emergency Medical System Transformation Committee

By: Holly McInroy, CBCP, CEM, CRM

Today we sit down with Michel C. Doré to learn about his experiences in Emergency Management. Michel was nominated to be an IAEM Canada Emergency Management Feature by Paula Gibson, President of IAEM Canada. Paula nominated Michel because he was among the three Canadians to receive his Certified Emergency Manager (CEM) designation in the first CEM class globally 26 years ago. Michel is also the co-founder of CRHnet and many other initiatives.

Michel currently lives in Montreal, Quebec with his wife. Together they have five beautiful children. Back in the '80s Michel completed his Officer's training program at Valcartier Battle School before becoming a Paramedic through the Pre-hospital Emergency Care Program, obtaining both his Nursing degree and his Masters in Public Health from the *Université de Montréal*. In the early 2000s, Michel continued his education to obtain his Doctorate (Ph.D) from the University of North Texas, focusing on the Sociology of Complex Organizations - Emergency Management. While Michel's education history is extensive, so is his career. His employment history ranges from being a Medical Support Officer with the Department of National Defence, to Emergency Medical Technician, and from University professor to Assistant Deputy Minister with both provincial and federal governments . Since July 2019 he is appointed as President (Assistant Deputy Minister) of the National Emergency Medical System Transformation Committee with the *Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec*.

Don't get the wrong idea, Michel is not all business. While he's won over 14 awards, he also dives (and is a rescue diver), holds a private pilot's license and volunteer as Search and Rescue navigator with CASARA/SERABEC, is a skydiver, and an Amateur Radio operator. He's also found the time to do some extracurricular and volunteering activities. Including but not limited to being a first-aid instructor trainer and acting as a Saint-John Ambulance volunteer commissioner. He was a member of the International Research Committee on Disaster, has been the Emergency Measures Coordinator for the City of Boucherville, and has held multiple positions (the co-founder, VP, and President) on the Disaster Recovery Information Exchange - Montreal. He was also a member of the Board of Directors - Climate

Change Consortium Ouranos, the Co-founder/Co-Chair/ President of Canadian Risk and Hazard Network, and was one of the Co-founder, Emergency Management NGO Council of Canada.

I'm sure we can all agree that Michel is an ideal candidate to be a Canadian Feature for Emergency Management with his extensive experience, robust knowledge base, and all his contributions to the Emergency Management domain. Let's get started.

IAEM (HM): While we've already discussed some of your background in our introduction, in your own words tell us about yourself.

MCD: I was born in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, an hour south of Montreal and have lived here most of my life. The exception is when my family and I moved to Dallas, Texas so I could start the doctorate program. As a young boy, I joined the Army cadets where I started taking Saint-John Ambulance first aid class. That led me to the paramedic program, then a nursing degree, a masters in community health and finally a doctoral degree in sociology of complex organisation. Both my masters and doctorate research focused on disasters.

IAEM (HM): What do you consider to be your greatest accomplishment?

MCD: I would say my 34 year relationship with my wife, Lise, who is also an Emergency Manager, and our five, now grown up, children.

IAEM (HM): How long have you been working in the field of Emergency Management and what initially interested you in this field?

MCD: I have been working in Emergency Management for the past 34 years.

I initially got interested in the field while being a paramedic (ambulance attendant then) and an officer in the military reserve (51st Field Ambulance). I developed an interest in mass casualty training and preparedness. At the time, I had an 8 month assignment as a Medical Attendant at the Montreal International Airport and the adrenaline from the emergency landings is most likely what triggered my enthusiasm for the domain.

IAEM (HM): After all these years, how and why do you continue to enjoy working in the field of Emergency Management?

MCD: I felt and continue to feel this career path provides the greatest opportunity to bring relief and assistance to people during their worst life experiences. I feel this is a call more than a job per se. It demands a lot (efforts, dedication, commitments) but it also provides a great sense of meaning to life.

IAEM (HM): What are some of the challenges you've experienced while working in this field and what are some of the lessons you've learned over the course of your career?

MCD: This career path is a marathon, not a sprint. One has to save energy for the next hour, the next day, and the next year. There is great risk to burning ourselves out as Emergency Management professionals. Despite the urge to run, to work and over-work, we have to maintain a high level of discipline to lead my example (e.g. respecting 12 hour shifts, take a day off during extended operations). Most importantly we need to stop preparing for the last disaster as the next disaster to come might just be different.

IAEM (HM): What emergency activation (disaster) do you remember most from your career and why?

MCD: There are many that stand out and all for different reasons. But the one that stands out in my mind is the 1998 Ice Storm.

During the 1998 Ice Storm, I shared (on a 12 hour rotating shift) the Emergency Management (EM) Coordinator's position with the Montreal Urban Community (29 municipalities, 1.8 M population). This one event had so many cascading effects, it reminded me how Murphy's Law can make our life much more complicated (i.e. ice, cold, extended power failure up to 55 days, road closures, drinking water shortage, fuel shortage, etc.).

IAEM (HM): How have building relationships and contacts supported you throughout your career, in emergency response and/or other activities?

MCD: It isn't who you know that helps, it is much more who knows you. Pre-disaster relationships, credibility, trust, and convergent interests make up for everything emergency plans fail to include. Therefore, Emergency Managers should always save time in their busy agenda to build and maintain internal and external relationships.

IAEM (HM): Who are the key stakeholders you find you need to build relationships with in order to succeed in your profession?

MCD: All! Including elected officials, media representatives, volunteer groups, academics and more importantly with the population.

IAEM (HM): Which of the four pillars in emergency management do you feel is the most important and why (planning, preparedness, mitigation, response & recovery)?

MCD: Despite the ongoing popularity of these pillars, and as science has demonstrated over the years, this characterisation does not serve well in emergency management. If I remain convinced that we should all (not only emergency managers) do everything we can to prevent disasters from happening, as suggested by the Sendai Framework, we should keep developing and maintaining a strong and effective response capacity to meet the victims' needs in a timely manner. Therefore, no one pillar is more important. They all play a significant role as we should emphasize the significant importance of governance, communication, empowerment and program evaluation.

IAEM (HM): What is one piece of advice that you would offer young professionals entering the world of Emergency Management?

MCD: Since disaster, to the contrary of accidents, do not usually recur the same ways at the same locations, please don't overlook what past events have taught us. Some materials might not be available on the internet (old disaster reports) but they would certainly help us learn and potentially educate us enough to avoid the, unfortunate repetition of the same mistakes others have made.

Another piece of advice I'd like to communicate, is to keep your critical thinking skills. Question, validate, challenge the "we always did it this way" remarks. If we keep doing the same thing over and over, that is not a path towards improvement. Einstein said repeating the same thing and expecting different results is the first sign of insanity.

IAEM (HM): What do you know now that you wish you knew when you were starting in the Emergency Management field?

MCD: As in many other fields, Science outruns Traditions. I wish many other emergency managers would start looking into this.

IAEM (HM): What and how do you collaborate best with other Emergency Managers?

MCD: We do need to collaborate and exchange good practices with other emergency managers. However, it is even more important to collaborate with others, who in many cases don't realise are key players and partners in emergency management. I find we need to listen to the local community and/or organisational challenges, and find the motivation to inject an emergency management dimension into it. I find this to be more effective and efficient since they implemented emergency management actions as part of their own issues and priorities. This might be a little more complex to support and monitor, but surprisingly, it may be far easier than to try over and over to convince the community and organizations to implement something they don't understand or consider a priority.

IAEM (HM): In your experience, what is the key to developing a good team?

MCD: Two ears, one mouth. Listen twice as much as you might want to speak.

Collectively develop a vision that people wish to achieve. Lead rather than command.

IAEM (HM): How has technology and social media changed the ability to respond to emergencies?

MCD: Technology and social media has helped and hindered the domain. Technology carries a lot of capabilities. However certain emergency managers seem to rely too heavily on these and overlook the basics. Disasters are social constructs. We have to deal with disaster collectively. We should utilise technology to support emergency management processes and avoid becoming ourselves the servant of technologies (outputs) especially when the use of such technology fails to demonstrate evidence-based effectiveness on expected outcomes.

IAEM (HM): If someone wanted to volunteer or learn more about Emergency Management, where would you direct them or what guidance would you provide?

MCD: Find your own passion/interest within the field and then look for the organisation that allows you to pursue that passion, making it useful to society. This opens up unlimited opportunities.

IAEM (HM): What does your day-to-day activities and routine look like?

MCD: There is no routine in Emergency Management. Just an ongoing challenge to balance out the administrative context and requirements (process oriented) with the needs, expectations and opportunities of disaster response (result oriented).

IAEM (HM): Do you consider Business Continuity (BC) to be a big part of Emergency Management (EM)?

MCD: Some might argue the emergency management is part of business continuity. This becomes a semantic game. If for instance the private sector feel appealed by business continuity so be it. Once they have started looking into business continuity, they rapidly realize they can't go very far if they have not included emergency management procedures in their overall risk management process. The same applies to the public sector who is usually motivated to develop emergency management to support their constituents. However, it doesn't need to be a big disaster before the public organisations realize they have to look into their own business continuity if they wish to sustain their emergency response.

IAEM (HM): How do you work with local businesses to support their business continuity plans or the development of the business continuity program?

MCD: Listen to their concerns. They might just be different than the ones we try to impose upon them. The first thing they need is honest, transparent and timely information. Most of them have the capacity to adapt if they ever have a fair chance to know what (risks) to expect and the limitations (capabilities) public agencies will have to meet everyone's needs.

IAEM (HM): Being in Emergency Management you must have seen a lot. In your own words please identify and describe what you believe to be the most important thing that needs to change in this field, to improve the Emergency Management Industry?

MCD: Get rid of "roles and responsibilities". This builds silos and 'turfs', leading to competition. Replace them with "contributions". This would help everyone realize we are only one part of the solution. We might be four agencies providing a certain service but by definition, disasters' needs, exceed our own capabilities and we should learn better ways to collaborate then to impose on others the very constraints that limit our own capability.

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank Michel for his time and efforts in the interview process, being part of our IAEM Canada Emergency Management Features, and the contributions he has made to Emergency Management throughout his career, volunteerism, and educational development.

If you have any comments or would like to recommend someone as an Emergency Management/ Business Continuity Feature, please contact IAEMCdnComms@gmail.com.



Michel C. Dore, 2019