



*Principles of Emergency  
Management*

September 11, 2007

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## Foreword

In March 2007, Dr. Wayne Blanchard of FEMA's Emergency Management Higher Education Project, at the direction of Dr. Cortez Lawrence, Superintendent of FEMA's Emergency Management Institute, convened a working group of emergency management practitioners and academics to consider principles of emergency management. This project was prompted by the realization that while numerous books, articles and papers referred to "principles of emergency management," nowhere in the vast array of literature on the subject was there an agreed-upon definition of what these principles were.

The group agreed on eight principles that will be used to guide the development of a doctrine of emergency management. This monograph lists these eight principles and provides a brief description of each.

IAEM was well represented in the working group, and the IAEM Board endorsed these principles upon their publication.

## EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

### DEFINITION, VISION, MISSION, PRINCIPLES

#### ***Definition***

Emergency management is the managerial function charged with creating the framework within which communities reduce vulnerability to hazards and cope with disasters.

#### ***Vision***

Emergency management seeks to promote safer, less vulnerable communities with the capacity to cope with hazards and disasters.

#### ***Mission***

Emergency management protects communities by coordinating and integrating all activities necessary to build, sustain, and improve the capability to mitigate against, prepare for, respond to, and recover from threatened or actual natural disasters, acts of terrorism, or other man-made disasters.

#### ***Principles***

Emergency management must be:

1. **Comprehensive** – emergency managers consider and take into account all hazards, all phases, all stakeholders and all impacts relevant to disasters.
2. **Progressive** – emergency managers anticipate future disasters and take preventive and preparatory measures to build disaster-resistant and disaster-resilient communities.
3. **Risk-driven** – emergency managers use sound risk management principles (hazard identification, risk analysis, and impact analysis) in assigning priorities and resources.
4. **Integrated** – emergency managers ensure unity of effort among all levels of government and all elements of a community.
5. **Collaborative** – emergency managers create and sustain broad and sincere relationships among individuals and organizations to encourage trust, advocate a team atmosphere, build consensus, and facilitate communication.
6. **Coordinated** – emergency managers synchronize the activities of all relevant stakeholders to achieve a common purpose.
7. **Flexible** – emergency managers use creative and innovative approaches in solving disaster challenges.
8. **Professional** – emergency managers value a science and knowledge-based approach based on education, training, experience, ethical practice, public stewardship and continuous improvement.

## PRINCIPLES OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

### 1. *Comprehensive*

*Emergency managers consider and take into account all hazards, all phases, all impacts, and all stakeholders relevant to disasters.*

Comprehensive emergency management can be defined as the preparation for and the carrying out of all emergency functions necessary to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies and disasters caused by all hazards, whether natural, technological, or human caused. Comprehensive emergency management consists of four related components: all hazards, all phases, all impacts, and all stakeholders.

**All Hazards:** All hazards within a jurisdiction must be considered as part of a thorough risk assessment and prioritized on the basis of impact and likelihood of occurrence. Treating all hazards the same in terms of planning resource allocation ultimately leads to failure. There are similarities in how one reacts to all disasters. These event-specific actions form the basis for most emergency plans. However, there are also distinct differences between disaster agents that must be addressed in agent or hazard-specific plans and these can only be identified through the risk assessment process.

**All Phases:** The Comprehensive Emergency Management Model<sup>1</sup> on which modern emergency management is based defines four phases of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. *Mitigation* consists of those activities designed to prevent or re-

duce losses from disaster. It is usually considered the initial phase of emergency management, although it may be a component of other phases. *Preparedness* is focused on the development of plans and capabilities for effective disaster response. *Response* is the immediate reaction to a disaster. It may occur as the disaster is anticipated, as well as soon after it begins. *Recovery* consists of those activities that continue beyond the emergency period to restore critical community functions and manage reconstruction.<sup>2</sup> Detailed planning and execution is required for each phase. Further, phases often overlap as there is often no clearly defined boundary where one phase ends and another begins. Successful emergency management coordinates activities in all four phases.

**All Impacts:** Emergencies and disasters cut across a broad spectrum in terms of impact on infrastructure, human services, and the economy. Just as all hazards need to be considered in developing plans and protocols, all impacts or predictable consequences relating to those hazards must also be analyzed and addressed.

**All Stakeholders:** This component is closely related to the emergency management principles of coordination and collaboration. Effective emergency management requires close working relationships among all levels of government, the private sector, and the general public.

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<sup>1</sup> National Governors' Association. *1978 Emergency Preparedness Project: Final Report*. Washington, DC: NGA, 1978.

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<sup>2</sup> William L. Waugh, Jr. *Living with Hazards, Dealing with Disasters: An Introduction to Emergency Management*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000.

## 2. Progressive

*Emergency managers anticipate future disasters and take preventive and preparatory measures to build disaster-resistant and disaster-resilient communities.*

Research and data from natural and social scientists indicates that disasters are becoming more frequent, intense, dynamic, and complex. The number of federally declared disasters has risen dramatically over recent decades. Monetary losses are rising at exponential rates because more property is being put at risk. The location of communities and the construction of buildings and infrastructure have not considered potential hazards. Environmental mismanagement and a failure to develop and enforce sound building codes are producing more disasters. There is an increased risk of terrorist attacks using weapons of mass destruction

Emergency management must give greater attention to prevention and mitigation activities. Traditionally, emergency managers have confined their activities to developing emergency response plans and coordinating the initial response to disasters. Given the escalating risks facing communities, however, emergency managers must become more progressive and strategic in their thinking. The role of the emergency manager can no longer be that of a technician but must evolve to that of a manager and senior policy advisor who oversees a community-wide program to address all hazards and all phases of the emergency management cycle.

Emergency managers must understand how to assess hazards and reduce vulnerability, seek the support of public officials, and support the passage of laws and the enforcement of ordinances that reduce vulnerability. Collaborative efforts between experts and organizations in the public, private and

non-profit sectors are needed to promote disaster prevention and preparedness. Efforts such as land-use planning, environmental management, building code enforcement, planning, training, and exercises are required and must emphasize vulnerability reduction and capacity building, not just compliance. Emergency management is progressive and not just reactive in orientation.

## 3. Risk-driven

*Emergency managers use sound risk management principles (hazard identification, risk analysis, and impact analysis) in assigning priorities and resources.*

Emergency managers are responsible for using available resources effectively and efficiently to manage risk. That means that the setting of policy and programmatic priorities should be based upon measured levels of risk to lives, property, and the environment. NFPA 1600 states that emergency management programs “shall identify hazards, monitor those hazards, the likelihood of their occurrence, and the vulnerability of people, property, the environment, and the entity [program] itself to those hazards.”<sup>3</sup> The Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) standard echoes this requirement for public sector emergency management programs.

Effective risk management is based upon (1) the identification of the natural and man-made hazards that may have significant effect on the community or organization; (2) the analysis of those hazards based on the vulnerability of the community to determine the nature of the risks they pose; and (3) an impact analysis to determine the potential effect they may have on specific communities, organizations, and other entities. Mitigation

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<sup>3</sup> *NFPA 1600 Standard on Disaster/Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs, 2007 Edition*, National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA. Section 5.3

strategies, emergency operations plans, continuity of operations plans, and pre- and post-disaster recovery plans should be based upon the specific risks identified and resources should be allocated appropriately to address those risks.

Communities across the United States have very different risks. It is the responsibility of emergency managers to address the risks specific to their communities. Budgets, human resource management decisions, plans, public education programs, training and exercising, and other efforts necessarily should focus on the hazards that pose the greatest risks first. An all-hazards focus ensures that plans are adaptable to a variety of disaster types and that, by addressing the hazards that pose the greatest risk, the community will be better prepared for lesser risks as well.

#### **4. Integrated**

*Emergency managers ensure unity of effort among all levels of government and all elements of a community.*

In the early 1980's, emergency managers adopted the Integrated Emergency Management System (IEMS), an all-hazards approach to the direction, control and coordination of disasters regardless of their location, size and complexity. IEMS integrates *partnerships* that include all stakeholders in the community's decision-making processes. IEMS is intended to create an organizational culture that is critical to achieving unity of effort between government, key community partners, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector.

Unity of effort is dependent on both vertical and horizontal integration. This means that at the local level, emergency programs must be integrated with other activities of government. For example, department

emergency plans must be synchronized with and support the overall emergency operations plan for the community. In addition, plans at all levels of local government must ultimately be integrated with and support the community's vision and be consistent with its values.

Similarly, private sector continuity plans should take into account the community's emergency operations plan. Businesses are demanding greater interface with government to understand how to react to events that threaten business survival. Additionally, businesses can provide significant resources during disasters and thus may be a critical component of the community's emergency operations plan. In addition, given the high percentage of critical infrastructure owned by the private sector, failure to include businesses in emergency programs could have grave consequences for the community.

The local emergency management program must also be synchronized with higher-level plans and programs. This is most noticeable in the dependence of local government on county, state and federal resources during a disaster. If plans have not been synchronized and integrated, resources may be delayed.

Emergency management must be integrated into daily decisions, not just during times of disasters. While protecting the population is a primary responsibility of government, it cannot be accomplished without building partnerships among disciplines and across all sectors, including the private sector and the media.

#### **5. Collaborative**

*Emergency managers create and sustain broad and sincere relationships among individuals and organizations to encourage trust,*

*advocate a team atmosphere, build consensus, and facilitate communication.*

There is a difference between the terms “collaboration” and “coordination,” and current usage often makes it difficult to distinguish between these words. Coordination refers to a process designed to ensure that functions, roles and responsibilities are identified and tasks accomplished; collaboration must be viewed as an attitude or an organizational culture that characterizes the degree of unity and cooperation that exists within a community. In essence, collaboration creates the environment in which coordination can function effectively.

In disaster situations, the one factor that is consistently credited with improving the performance of a community is the degree to which there is an open and cooperative relationship among those individuals and agencies involved. Shortly after Hurricane Katrina, *Governing* magazine correspondent, Jonathan Walters wrote: “Most important to the strength of the intergovernmental chain are solid relationships among those who might be called upon to work together in times of high stress. ‘You don’t want to meet someone for the first time while you’re standing around in the rubble,’ says Jarrod Bernstein, a spokesman for the New York Office of Emergency Management.”<sup>4</sup> It is this kind of culture and relationship that collaboration is intended to establish.

A commitment to collaboration makes other essential roles and functions possible. Comfort and Cahill acknowledge the essential nature of collaboration within the emergency management function: “In environments of high uncertainty, this quality of inter-personal trust is essential for collective action. Building that trust in a multi-organizational operating environment is a

complex process, perhaps the most difficult task involved in creating an integrated emergency management system.”<sup>5</sup> Thomas Drabek<sup>6</sup> suggests that collaboration involves three elements:

1. We must commit to ensuring that we have done everything possible to identify all potential players in a disaster event and work to involve them in every aspect of planning and preparedness for a disaster event.
2. Having achieved this broad involvement, we must constantly work to maintain and sustain the real, human contact necessary to make the system work in a disaster event.
3. Finally, our involvement of all of our “partners” must be based on a sincere desire to listen to and incorporate their concerns and ideas into our planning and preparedness efforts. This element is probably the most critical because it is this sincere interest that engenders trust, cooperation and understanding and allows us to truly have a “team” approach to protecting our communities in times of disaster.

This principle can perhaps best be encapsulated by remembering: “If we shake hands before a disaster, we won’t have to point fingers afterwards.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Louise K. Comfort and Anthony G. Cahill. *Managing Disaster, Strategies and Policy Perspectives*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas E. Drabek. *Strategies for Coordinating Disaster Responses*. Boulder, CO: Program on Environment and Behavior, Monograph 61, University of Colorado, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Michael D. Selves. Oral testimony before the United States House Subcommittee on Emergency Management of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, April 26, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Walters. GOVEXEC.com, December 1, 2005.



## **6. Coordinated**

*Emergency managers synchronize the activities of all relevant stakeholders to achieve a common purpose.*

Emergency managers are seldom in a position to direct the activities of the many agencies and organizations involved in the emergency management program. In most cases, the people in charge of these organizations are senior to the emergency manager, have direct line authority from the senior official, or are autonomous. Each stakeholder brings to the planning process their own authorities, legal mandates, culture and operating missions. The principle of coordination requires that the emergency manager gain agreement among these disparate agencies as to a common purpose and then ensure that their independent activities help to achieve this common purpose.

In essence, the principle of coordination requires that the emergency manager think strategically, that he or she see the “big picture” and how each stakeholder fits into that mosaic. This type of thinking is the basis for the strategic program plan required under the National Preparedness Standard (NFPA 1600) and the Emergency Management Accreditation Program. In developing the strategic plan, the emergency manager facilitates the identification of agreed-upon goals and then persuades stakeholders to accept responsibility for specific performance objectives. The strategic plan then becomes a mechanism for assessing program progress and accomplishments.

This same process can be used on a smaller scale to develop a specific plan, such as a community recovery plan; it is also an inherent component of tactical and operational response. The principle of coordination is applicable to all four phases of the comprehensive emergency management cycle

and is essential for successful planning and operational activities related to the emergency management program. Application of the principle of coordination provides the emergency manager with the management tools that produce the results necessary to achieve a common purpose.

## **7. Flexible**

*Emergency managers use creative and innovative approaches in solving disaster challenges.*

Due to their diverse and varied responsibilities, emergency managers constitute one of the most flexible organizational elements of government. Laws, policies and operating procedures that allow little flexibility in the performance of duties drive more traditional branches of government. Emergency managers are instead encouraged to develop creative solutions to solve problems and achieve goals.

A principal role of the emergency manager is the assessment of vulnerability and risk and the development of corresponding strategies that could be used to reduce or eliminate risk. However, there can more than one potential mitigation strategy for any given risk. The emergency manager must have the flexibility to choose not only the most efficient course of action but the one that would have the most chance of being implemented.

In the preparedness phase, the emergency manager uses many resources to create and maintain a well-organized community response structure. One such resource is the development of a risk-based community emergency operations plan. While most policies and procedures in government are specific and designed to offer little room for interpretation, the emergency operations plan is designed to be flexible and applicable to all

community emergency operations. It is based on the consequences of the event, not the promulgating action.

The most dramatic phase of emergency management is response. In this phase the emergency manager coordinates activities to ensure overall objectives are being met. The emergency manager must be flexible enough to suggest variations in tactics or procedures and adapt quickly to a rapidly changing and frequently unclear situation. The emphasis is on creative problem solving based on the event and not on rigid adherence to pre-existing plans.

As part of the community team that will determine recovery priorities the emergency manager must be capable of dealing with the political, economic and social pressures in making these decisions. It is natural to focus on short-term efforts in disaster recovery. However, the emergency manager cannot lose sight of the long-term needs of the community, and it is this aspect of recovery that often must be driven by the emergency manager.

Flexibility is a key trait of emergency management, and success in the emergency management field is dependent upon it. Being able to provide alternate solutions to stakeholders and then having the flexibility to implement these solutions is a formula for success in emergency management.

### **8. Professional**

*Emergency managers value a science and knowledge-based approach based on education, training, experience, ethical practice, public stewardship and continuous improvement.*

Professionalism in the context of the principles of emergency management pertains not to the personal attributes of the emer-

gency manager but to a commitment to emergency management as a profession. A profession, as opposed to a discipline or a vocation, has certain characteristics, among which are:

**Code of ethics** – while no single code of ethics has yet been agreed upon for the profession, the Code of Ethics of the International Association of Emergency Managers, with its emphasis on respect, commitment and professionalism, is generally accepted as the standard for emergency managers.

**Professional associations** – emergency managers seeking to advance the profession of emergency management are members of professional organizations such as the National Emergency Manager's Association (NEMA) and the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM). They also participate in appropriate state, local and professional associations.

**Board certification** – emergency managers seek to earn professional certification through such programs as the Certified Emergency Manager® program of IAEM. Professional certification demonstrates the achievement of a minimum level of expertise and encourages continued professional development through periodic recertification.

**Specialised body of knowledge** – the knowledge base for emergency managers consists of three principal areas. The first is the study of historical disasters, particularly as it pertains to the community for which the emergency manager is responsible. Secondly, the emergency manager must have a working familiarity with social science literature pertaining to disaster issues. Third, the emergency manager must be well versed in emergency management practices, standards and guidelines.

**Standards and best practices** – the principal standards used in emergency management are NFPA 1600 and the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) standards. These two standards provide the overarching context for the use of other standards and best practices.