



2016 National Issues Brief

Creating a Disaster Resilient Nation

The President is judged by the nation's response to crisis, and measured by the decisions and actions made in preparation and recovery from them. We advocate for a political and strategic atmosphere of boldness, innovation, creativity and assertiveness that exemplifies our proudest responses to some of our most tragic events.

NEMA represents the voice and consensus policy positions of the directors of the emergency management agencies of all 50 states, the U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia. We believe that the emerging threat landscape is best addressed by a forward-looking and future-thinking policy approach that focuses on optimistic and realistic outcomes.

This election cycle and the subsequent ascent of new leaders at all levels of government create new opportunities to shift from reaction to pro-action; assert innovation in dealing with the challenges we face; invest in ways that reduce future disaster costs while creating resilience; and continue to build our national capabilities for the future.

We offer the following points as an opening to jointly design the future of national preparedness efforts.

CHALLENGES WE FACE

Emerging Threats – At all levels, government today must be prepared to deal with an ever changing and increasingly complex set of challenges that test traditional approaches to disaster and emergency preparedness and response.

Over the past two years, emergency managers have been called on to assist with the planning and response to the Ebola virus, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, unaccompanied minors crossing borders, water emergencies, and the Zika Virus Disease to name a few. Emergency management assesses the risk or hazard; provides situational awareness for informed decision-making by leaders; ensures a coordinated response between all entities including government, nonprofit and faith-based organizations, as well as the private sector; facilitates mutual aid; provides critical information to the public; and implements disaster assistance programs. Capability, experience and flexibility are

critical in dealing with emerging issues and the unknown.

The growing demand on natural resources, changing demographics, emerging technologies, and the inter-dependencies of our infrastructure and systems create vulnerabilities that differ from those of the past. The threats facing our nation are evolving in such a way that demand purposeful action and a more forward-thinking approach in our national preparedness efforts.

Climate Adaptation – Communities across the nation are facing the impacts of increasingly severe weather and the trend is expected to continue. A changing climate, regardless of the reasons for the change, increases the loss of life and property. Widespread droughts, rapidly moving wildfires, severe and sustained coastal or riverine flooding, more powerful hurricanes,

and record-breaking snowfall may become even more common. These disasters may exceed the current planning factors used to ensure that the appropriate response and recovery assets are in place. The next administration should consider the growing scale of these situations and facilitate partnerships with NOAA and the National Weather Service, research center and academic institutions, the private sector, the insurance industry, and emergency management to continually reevaluate the potential impact to the nation, and our readiness for them, and to put in place the recommended solutions to ensure that we are not caught unaware. Smart decision-making and investments that support disaster resilience are the keys to preventing the costly toll of future disasters.

Cybersecurity – We are witnessing a more diverse array of threats than at any time in history. The skill, speed, and adaptability of the threats are challenging our defense in ways we have not seen before. The emerging threat landscape for the nation is characterized both by standing threats, as well as dynamic and fluid ones ushered in by advancements in technology.

Information systems are now the backbone of national and economic security in the United States. Our success as a nation depends upon this critical infrastructure functioning reliably at all times. The threat to this infrastructure by those with malicious intent to exploit vulnerabilities, steal information and money, and to disrupt, destroy, or threaten the delivery of essential services are unlike any other threat. As information technology becomes increasingly integrated with physical infrastructure operations, there is increased risk for wide scale or high-consequence events that could cause harm or disrupt services upon which our economy and the daily lives of millions of Americans depend.¹ Long term power outages, loss of water, and disruption in the movement of goods, services and people due to impacted transportation systems are a few of the potential consequences of a successful cyber-attack. Cyber security threats exploit the risks associated with the increased complexity and connectivity of these systems which only places our nation's security, economy and public safety at greater risk.

This risk affects both the private and public sector. As a nation we need to map out a comprehensive collaborative strategy that delivers timely, cost effective, and actionable responses. This in turn will protect critical assets, and improve our national security by defending our information infrastructure and help us better prepare to respond to potential disruptions that would have cascading effects on the country. Collaboration, employee cybersecurity training, enterprise defense-in-depth, and real-time information sharing and processing of indicators of compromise and attack are essential elements of a robust cybersecurity posture for all governments.

Countering Terrorism – In the years since 9/11, we have greatly enhanced our information sharing and intelligence capacity through the fusion centers located throughout the country. Greater investment is still needed to standardize information collection, including sharing tactics, techniques, and procedures. Terrorism and countering violent extremism are evolving and changing each day. The faces associated with this threat look like anyone on the street. Given that unique factor and complexity, it is critical to national security that we step up our information sharing and integration efforts at the local, state, tribal and federal levels. Essential elements to any countering violent extremism (CVE) strategy are strong local connectivity with impacted communities, and a robust federal partnership.

As a nation, we have to evolve and change at the same pace as those who wish to inflict harm on our nation. Those tasked with recognizing, understanding and taking effective action need to be supported with the right tools and information to ensure success in achieving the short-term objective while at the same time not creating long-term unforeseen consequences. There must be an actionable, coordinated, and collective national effort for these emerging threats, which are currently being addressed in fragmented pieces across the national spectrum. By leveraging all partners, identifying, coordinating, and documenting a national strategy and moving purposefully together in that direction the nation will be better prepared to address and combat these quickly evolving and emerging threats and trends.

ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) - The NFIP is in jeopardy of not being able to meet the needs of the country in recovering from floods, our most prevalent and costly natural hazard. Decades of charging less-than-actuarially-sound rates combined with significant payouts during Hurricane Katrina, Superstorm Sandy, and others have left the program over \$23 billion in debtⁱⁱ, with no clear path towards solvency. Additionally, enrollment in the program has declined by nearly 10% over the last several yearsⁱⁱⁱ, as rate changes designed to shore up the program have resulted in policy holders dropping their coverage. As a result, the incoming revenue to the program is declining, making debt settlement even more unlikely.

The greater consequence of this deeply flawed program, however, is not to the national treasury, but to families and businesses. In the absence of flood insurance, there are no systems in place to help make them whole again after a flood impacts their community. Governmental assistance and charitable giving may contribute a fraction of what they need to recover, but for many, a flood could destroy their single largest investment and leave them with no option to recover. This will slow and render ineffective recovery processes, making it more likely that those towns and cities will never return to normalcy.

There are many solid proposals to rectify this situation. A number of studies recommending methodologies to improve the financial performance of the program and encourage participation by homeowners have been conducted in the last couple of years and should be acted upon.^{iv}

- Several states have enacted legislation to encourage the participation of the private insurance market, and those efforts are beginning to see an increase in options available to the consumer;^v such legislation should be considered at the federal level. These and other affordability options such as direct financial assistance to policyholders and reformation of the program to allow for premium reductions at the household level are key to maintaining affordable rates so that people can stay in their homes and housing markets are not disrupted.

- Improved mitigation efforts in flood-prone communities should be aggressively pursued in order to reduce the risk to life and property.
- Greater investment in understanding the risk through better mapping and forecasting of flooding events will help educate consumers about the actual risk they face, allowing them to make the appropriate decision for their family, business, and community.

The NFIP is up for reauthorization in 2017. Without significant improvements, the program will fail to meet the current needs of the country, and individuals and communities will suffer as a result. NEMA recommends that the next administration work closely with Congress to forge a solution to this problem to ensure that Americans understand and are prepared to deal with the risk of flooding where they live and work.

Disaster Cost Reduction

Mitigation - The best way to reduce the cost of disasters is to design and harden the built environment to match the threat environment. One component of such effort is mitigation, which averages a 4 to 1 return on investment (ROI) in addition to the improvement in human factors. Federal spending, however, does not reflect this priority. From 2004-2013, FEMA spent \$71.2 billion in Public Assistance and Individual Assistance to help communities recover from disasters, in addition to tens of billions of dollars spent by the Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Labor, the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Transit Authority, the Small Business Administration, and the Army Corps of Engineers.^{vi} In that same time period, only \$5.2 billion was spent on Hazard Mitigation Grants to reduce the impact of future events.

Response and recovery programs are critical post-disaster investments, but speak to a cyclical focus that prioritizes managing the impacts of disasters instead of reducing or eliminating those impacts altogether. Incorporating mitigation into disaster recovery through Public Assistance or Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funding is necessary, but in the chaotic and often fragmented post-disaster environment, investments may not always address the long term, strategic needs

of the community. Mitigation should be encouraged before the disaster occurs to strengthen and protect our critical infrastructure, provide incentives for communities for the adoption and enforcement of effective building codes, and reward builders and homeowners who make responsible decisions to mitigate risk that can have positive impacts on the entire community.

Mitigation activities do not have to be accomplished solely with federal funding. The goal is to reduce vulnerabilities and increase resilience for the future using all available resources and these efforts can be more sustainable when coupled with investments from state, local, and tribal government as well as private sector and individual stakeholders. Collaborative mitigation strategies encourage relationship building and facilitate innovative funding mechanisms that can support the type of long-term, community-driven investments that risk reduction efforts require.

Hazard mitigation is a demonstrably cost-effective effort with a documented return on investment. Providing incentives and empowering communities, business owners, and government officials at all levels to mitigate is a compelling narrative that shifts the focus from federal to community priorities that reflect evolving risk on the ground. A prepared community is a more resilient community, and risk reduction efforts based upon local determination of major threats to the economic and social equilibrium are in need of continued attention.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Recovery Programs - Federal disaster assistance is best spent on the individuals and communities who need it most, rather than on managing the program itself. The next administration should ensure that FEMA remains aggressive in reviewing the structure and business practices of their recovery efforts, the largest and most costly of all of their programs. Great effort has been undertaken thus far to ensure that those programs meet the needs of state and local government after a disaster strikes, and that recovery takes place in a

manner which minimizes bureaucracy and maximizes the community's ability to restore normalcy in a smart and timely manner. This effort is currently underway and needs continual focus throughout the next administration to ensure that the goals of the program are met.

Close attention should also be paid to the funding level of the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF). It is important the President maintains an adequately funded DRF so that FEMA has the resources to support communities during a disaster instead of waiting for congressional action. This is especially important in catastrophic disasters where delay can cause death and diminish the opportunity for a successful recovery.

Grant Reform Efforts - This nation has made great strides in improving our safety and security. We have more comprehensive interoperable communications systems, regional response assets, a national system of intelligence fusion centers, and an unprecedented level of collaboration and teamwork among state and local responders.

Emergency management and homeland security grant programs have done much to help the public safety community and other professionals conduct a broad range of preparedness functions. From our neighborhood communities through all levels of government, we have acquired resources, achieved collaboration, and built systems to mitigate, prevent, prepare for, and respond to natural hazards and terrorist threats.

Currently, however, there are too many grant programs with too many restrictions and too little funding to accomplish the comprehensive and integrated efforts to appropriately prepare for the threats to our country. This system must be reevaluated and restructured to allow state and local governments the opportunity to develop and share solutions to the issues they face. In this way we will ensure that those programs achieve their maximum effectiveness.

Opportunities for Success

Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) –

EMAC, established by the states and ratified by Congress in 1996, is the nation’s interstate mutual aid agreement that allows for the legal sharing of resources across states lines during governor-declared emergencies and disasters. Mutual aid resources may include personnel, equipment, and commodities. Many of these resources and capabilities have been built and sustained through federal investments in emergency management and homeland security grant programs. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands and Guam are members of the compact.

EMAC has been utilized in response to the nation’s largest disasters as well as hundreds of events that did not rise to the level of a presidential disaster declaration yet required additional or specialized assistance for impacted states. State-to-state mutual aid often allows for more timely and cost effective disaster response rather than relying solely on the federal government. During large-scale, multi-state disasters EMAC is able to provide support when federal resources are stretched thin. EMAC also provides invaluable training opportunities for state and local personnel who deploy to impacted areas allowing them to not only provide much needed assistance, but also learn from the situation in ways that will benefit their own states should similar events occur in the future.

EMAC represents a national capability that is ultimately a cost savings to the federal government. NEMA urges the next administration to be a strong advocate for EMAC and all mutual aid.

Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) -

In 2001, NEMA members collaborated to further advance the professionalism of the emergency management community when they established the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP). EMAP is a voluntary assessment and peer review accreditation process for emergency management programs that is based on collaboratively developed national standards. Accreditation is open to emergency management programs at all levels of government, international programs, higher education institutions, as well as the private sector.

Recent analysis of the FEMA State Preparedness Report (SPR) results indicate that accreditation has a positive impact on emergency management programs. States that have earned EMAP accreditation are broadly rated as being more prepared across all of the thirty-one core capabilities. NEMA urges the next administration further our nation’s preparedness by providing incentives for accreditation.

The Path Forward

The U.S. has made tremendous advancements in emergency management over the past two decades and even greater opportunities exist by taking bold and innovative positions on these issues. A quick and aggressive plan of action will clearly demonstrate strong leadership to the nation, and intent to continue the improvements made since Hurricane Andrew, 9/11, and Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy. This effort and initiative will be championed and strongly supported by the emergency management community nationwide. NEMA eagerly awaits the opportunity to partner in those efforts.

ⁱ<https://www.dhs.gov/cybersecurity-overview>

ⁱⁱ<http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/668415.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ<https://www.fema.gov/total-policies-force-calendar-year> and <https://www.fema.gov/policies-force-month>

^{iv}<http://www.nap.edu/search/?rpp=20&ft=1&term=flood+insurance+affordability>

^v<http://www.flair.com/Sections/PandC/FloodInsurance/FloodInsuranceWritersFL.aspx>

^{vi}<http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/667606.pdf>