

Political Will and Creative Approaches Needed for Future Disasters Demands

By Beverly Bell

Just like the head and tail of a coin, there are two sides to every disaster—providing help to those who need it and paying for that assistance. It's a tug-of-war that's becoming more contentious every year. Federal law requires assistance in times of disasters, but as threats grow in complexity—possible infrastructure failures, vulnerabilities from electromagnetic pulses and unforeseen consequences from hydraulic fracturing to name a few—the burden of marshalling the necessary resources and funding is an ongoing struggle.

On Sept. 11, 2001, a seismic shift occurred in the United States, one that challenged former assumptions, validated others and significantly altered priorities under the mantle of a changing world view. As the current presidential administration winds down and a new one assumes control in 2017, questions remain: What will be the next devastating incident? How will the new leadership manage it? Will it be a negative example of how something shouldn't be done? Or will future actions be the result of a disaster management structure that is adroit, adaptable and fiscally responsible? With coordination among all the key players—federal, state, tribal, local, private sector, non-profits and academia—this kind of thoughtful and resilient system is more than a pipe dream. It's the answer to providing aid and being able to pay for it.

How to Handle Rising Disaster Costs

In the 2013 Sandy Recovery Improvement Act, the U.S. Congress required the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, to address rising disaster costs. As background, the Disaster Relief Fund is the main account used by the federal government to pay for disaster response and recovery. Managed by FEMA, the fund provides a wide variety of grants and other support to state and local governments, as well as various nonprofit entities. Congress has traditionally appropriated money to maintain the Disaster Relief Fund, or DRF, at a certain level, and then provided additional financing for assistance through supplemental appropriations following a specific large disaster. For the last several years, Congress, the Government Accountability Office, the Office of Management and Budget, and others have expressed concerns over rising disaster costs.

FEMA's latest response to tackle the problem is a proposal adding a deductible to the FEMA Public Assistance—or PA—Program. The PA program is designed specifically to help states, tribes, jurisdictions and certain private non-profit organizations after a presidentially declared disaster. It's a multi-billion dollar program paid out of the DRF and has the potential to impact every government

and every jurisdiction throughout the country. The deductible proposal would function like a typical homeowner's insurance policy, requiring states to meet a certain financial commitment before qualifying for federal assistance. The deductible could be offset with credits the states would be given for mitigation and resiliency investments.

States have identified several key issues with the concept. For example, the deductible concept can't simply shift the financial burden of disasters to states, local jurisdictions, tribes, etc. It shouldn't result in ever-increasing and onerous administrative burdens, requiring more state and local personnel, more expense, and more bureaucracy. There must be ample time for implementation, both for FEMA and the states. For FEMA, this means full development of the concept, internal education and training, and the creation of understandable and consistent guidance for the states. On the state level, it will require enough time for state legislatures to be thoroughly briefed on the new requirements and plan through their budgetary cycles for additional deductible responsibilities. States also will need time for training of state personnel as well as all sub-grantees. Most importantly, any change in the program can't result in delayed assistance to those in need.

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Flexible Federal Grant Funding

Politicians often call out the inefficient use of public funds. However, when it comes to the difficult task of breaking down silo grant funding, they give up because of constituent backlash. The current state of grant funding has too many programs with too many restrictions and too little funding. Several years ago, the state emergency management community put forward an idea for streamlining the grant structure. It would have allowed stakeholders to work together in identifying and prioritizing the risks to a state or region, and engage in comprehensive planning to apply the grants to buy down that risk while building long-term capabilities. Given the current fiscal and political climate, such a model is still a viable and responsible alternative. Flexible grants that include transparency and accountability allow more deliberate and cohesive planning.

National Flood Insurance Program Still in Jeopardy

Despite recent attempts to address its serious fiscal problems, the National Flood Insurance Program, or NFIP, remains \$23 billion in debt. Created in 1968, this federal program provides insurance to property owners as well as businesses located in communities that are part of the NFIP. All participants agree to adopt and enforce floodplain ordinances in exchange for insurance. For years, however, policy costs have not reflected true actuarial rates. This, coupled with a decline in enrollment and revenue, as well as large payouts from recent hurricanes such as Katrina and Superstorm Sandy, has left the program dangerously underfunded. Exacerbating the situation is that the Federal Emergency Management Agency has updated flood maps to provide a more accurate picture, but some of these have been redrawn because of political pressures. Putting the NFIP on solid financial footing, along with educating citizens about the real risks of floods where they live and work, is vital to the long-term economic viability of communities faced with this hazard.

Extreme Weather Adaptation

In recent years, emergency managers have witnessed more severe and more frequent weather events. They have seen ice storms and tornadoes in the same day. These extremes represent a new normal—one that calls for a broad, inclusive approach to planning along with adequate funding to support the effort. As more states manage massive wildland fires, prolonged and repetitive flooding, and more dangerous hurricanes, adaptation planning with all subject

matter experts at the table is required. This includes emergency management, which is best suited for evaluating the consequences and impacts of these serious hazards. In addition, emergency management can provide valuable expertise at the nexus of land-use questions and potential disasters.

The Critical Role of Emergency Management

Regardless of whether a disaster is natural or man-made, state emergency management acts as the central coordination point for all resources and assistance provided during the event. When a disaster strikes, emergency management remains one of the most crucial functions of state government. It also has the overarching responsibility of saving lives, protecting property and helping people recover once a disaster has occurred. Typically, emergency management comes to the forefront once an event has taken place. In reality, much of the work comes before—in the form of disaster drills and exercises, plans and programs, public warning tests, and preparedness education.

Emergency management includes four main parts, referred to as the Four Pillars:

- **Mitigation**—Activities that reduce or eliminate the degree of risk to human life and property;
- **Preparedness**—Activities that take place before a disaster to develop and maintain a capability to respond rapidly and effectively to emergencies and disasters;
- **Response**—Activities to assess and contain the immediate effects of disasters, provide life support to victims and deliver emergency services; and
- **Recovery**—Activities to restore damaged facilities and equipment, and support the economic and social revitalization of affected areas to their pre-emergency status.

On the state level, these four elements encompass many different aspects, from planning and implementation to training and exercises. A state emergency manager will interact with all sectors of the population, including other state agencies, elected officials, local jurisdictions, all public safety personnel, the private sector, volunteer organizations and the general public.

State Emergency Management Organizational Structure, Budgets and Staff

States use a variety of structures when it comes to the emergency management function. In 16 states, the emergency management office is located within

Table A: State Emergency Management: Agency Structure, Budget and Staffing

State or other jurisdiction	Position appointed	Appointed/ selected by	Organizational structure	Agency operating budget FY 2016 (excluding federal funds)	Full-time employee positions
Alabama.....	★	G	Governor's Office	\$3,381,343	83
Alaska.....	★	G	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	\$2,457,700	62 (a)
Arkansas.....	★	G	Governor's Office	\$2,109,509	104 (a)
Arizona.....	★	ADJ	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	\$3,899,518	51
California.....	★	G	Combined Homeland Security/Emerg. Mgt.	\$140,897,321	950 (a)
Colorado.....	...	GHSA	Combined Homeland Security/Emerg. Mgt.	\$953,147	85 (a)
Connecticut.....	...	PSS	Combined Homeland Security/Emerg. Mgt.	\$4,889,917	78 (a)
Delaware.....	★	G	Public Safety	\$1,971,000	37
Florida.....	★	G	Governor's Office	\$58,034,342	157 (a)
Georgia.....	★	G	Governor's Office	\$3,207,396	116 (a)
Hawaii.....	★	G	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	\$2,400,000	75
Idaho.....	★	ADJ	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	\$1,533,450	41 (a)
Illinois.....	★	G	Governor's Office	\$32,493,200	209 (a)
Indiana.....	★	G	Combined Homeland Security/Emerg. Mgt.	\$20,758,455	267 (a)
Iowa.....	★	G	Combined Homeland Security/Emerg. Mgt.	\$3,694,623	74 (a)
Kansas.....	★	G	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	\$1,576,261	47
Kentucky.....	★	G	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	\$1,850,000	78
Louisiana.....	★	G	Combined Homeland Security/Emerg. Mgt.	\$6,894,297	51 (a)
Maine.....	★	G	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	\$1,105,298	29 (a)
Maryland.....	★	G	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	\$2,218,103	74
Massachusetts.....	★	G	Public Safety	\$12,952,030	102
Michigan.....	★	G	State Police	\$4,959,500	71 (a)
Minnesota.....	★	PSS	Public Safety	\$11,073,800	79 (a)
Mississippi.....	★	G	Governor's Office	\$5,733,175	155
Missouri.....	★	PSS	Public Safety	\$2,498,000	93
Montana.....	...	ADJ	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	\$1,264,472	26 (a)
Nebraska.....	★	ADJ	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	\$1,899,577	38 (a)
Nevada.....	★	PSS	Public Safety	\$373,611	33 (a)
New Hampshire.....	★	G	Public Safety	\$4,782,914	43 (a)
New Jersey.....	★	G	State Police	\$22,010,000	387
New Mexico.....	★	G	Combined Homeland Security/Emerg. Mgt.	\$2,584,700	65 (a)
New York.....	★	HSD	Combined Homeland Security/Emerg. Mgt.	\$6,409,000	427 (a)
North Carolina.....	★	G	Public Safety	\$12,106,590	188 (a)
North Dakota.....	★	ADJ	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	\$9,343,329	70 (a)
Ohio.....	★	PSS	Public Safety	\$6,027,438	94
Oklahoma.....	★	G	Governor's Office	\$570,049	30
Oregon.....	★	ADJ	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	\$2,051,096	42 (a)
Pennsylvania.....	★	G	Governor's Office	\$15,290,000	173
Rhode Island.....	★	G	Governor's Office	\$1,950,000	32
South Carolina.....	★	ADJ	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	\$2,928,162	60
South Dakota.....	★	PSS	Public Safety	\$777,301	20
Tennessee.....	★	G	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	\$2,900,000	110
Texas.....	★	PSS	Public Safety	\$5,243,369	265
Utah.....	★	PSS	Public Safety	\$1,470,000	62 (a)
Vermont.....	★	PSS	Public Safety	\$2,456,028	26 (a)
Virginia.....	★	G	Combined Homeland Security/Emerg. Mgt.	\$9,830,080	155 (a)
Washington.....	★	G	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	\$3,306,125	82 (a)
West Virginia.....	★	G	Military Affairs and Public Safety	\$3,218,977	53 (a)
Wisconsin.....	★	G	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	\$3,325,187	61 (a)
Wyoming.....	★	G	Governor's Office	\$1,000,000	25 (a)
Dist. of Columbia.....	★	M	Combined Homeland Security/Emerg. Mgt.	\$4,551,525	98 (a)
Guam.....	★	G	Combined Homeland Security/Emerg. Mgt.	\$2,000,200*	17 (a)
U.S. Virgin Islands.....	★	G	Combined Homeland Security/Emerg. Mgt.	\$5,134,418*	61 (a)

Source: The National Emergency Management Association, April 2016.

Key:

★ — Yes

... — No

G — Governor

ADJ — Adjutant General

DHSEM — Director of the Division of Homeland Security and
Emergency Management

HSD — Homeland Security Director

GHSA — Governor's Homeland Security Advisor

M — Mayor

PSS — Public Safety Secretary/Commissioner/Director

*Territories receive only federal funding for their operating budgets.

(a) Includes homeland security and emergency management positions.

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the state military department under the auspices of the adjutant general. Twelve states have it in the public safety department. In 10 states it's housed in the governor's office and in 12 states it's located in a combined emergency management/homeland security agency. The remaining states use other organizational structures.

Regardless of how an agency's daily operations are organized, most governors make the final decision on who serves as the state emergency management director. The governor appoints the state emergency management director in 34 states.

The majority of states—34—combine their emergency management and homeland security full-time equivalent positions. The total number of full-time equivalents for these states is 3,945 and averages 116 staff per state. For those states that have a stand-alone emergency management office, FTE positions total 1,966, averaging about 103 per state.

Agency operating budgets for the 2016 fiscal year range up to \$141 million, with the average state agency budget at approximately \$9 million, while the median is about \$3.2 million.

State Homeland Security Funding and Responsibilities

The State Homeland Security Grant Program is a central federal source that supports and sustains state and local government homeland security capabilities. For fiscal year 2016, it's funded at \$402 million. Eighteen states rely solely on those federal grants to fund their homeland security offices. This represents an increase from 2015, when 15 states depended totally on federal grants. Thirty-nine states receive at least 60 percent of their funding for their state homeland security office from federal sources, down from 42 percent in 2015. On average, states rely on 74.5 percent federal funding, 21.3 percent state appropriations and 4.2 percent from other sources to pay for their homeland security function.

When it comes to the state homeland security offices, responsibilities and organizational structures vary from state to state. In some cases, state homeland security directors manage grants and budgets; in others, they have very limited roles. In 19 states, a combined emergency management/homeland security office oversees daily operations of the homeland security function. Fifteen states keep the homeland security function in their public safety department and seven states have it in the adjutant general/military affairs department. Six states run it out of the governor's office. The rest

of the states have other organizational structures for their homeland security function.

On the Horizon

On-Going Public Health Dangers

The Zika virus came to the public health forefront in the U.S. in 2015 with an outbreak in South America and Mexico. There are now confirmed cases of the virus, which causes birth defects, in almost every state. This latest infectious disease highlights the crucial relationship between state emergency management and health departments. These two critical agencies have been working more closely together since the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic. Those efforts resulted in improved information sharing and coordination that played a key role in managing the 2014 Ebola outbreak, the largest in the disease's history, which resulted in four infections and one death in the U.S. The Ebola scare was followed in 2015 by the Highly Pathogenic Avian Flu. Twenty-one states reported an outbreak in their domestic bird population and an unprecedented loss in the poultry industry occurred with the death of millions of animals. These examples show that public health risks can't be isolated to one particular country or region of the world. As a result, infectious diseases represent another area of responsibility that requires emergency management—along with their public health partners—to plan for and address.

Proactive Instead of Reactive

Mitigation represents one of the best methods in achieving resiliency while reducing the impact of future disasters. However, it has often been at the end of a typical disaster cycle, something to be tackled after the disaster has occurred and following significant response and recovery expenditures. The ideal approach places a more robust mitigation program at the beginning, before a disaster takes place. It anticipates the protection of critical infrastructure and provides incentives for the adoption and enforcement of effective building codes under an umbrella of long-term needs, clearly formulated by a community.

Understanding the Total Picture

All of the mentioned elements—the NFIP, climate change, public health threats, disaster funding, mitigation investment—are not disparate pieces. The NFIP is inexorably linked to increased flooding and sea level risings created by climate change. Climate change issues such as drought and lack

Table B: Homeland Security Structures

State or other jurisdiction	State homeland security advisor	Homeland security organizations	
	Designated homeland security advisor	Day-to-day operations under	Full-time employee positions
Alabama	Public Safety Secretary/Commissioner	Public Safety	5
Alaska	Dual Title—Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Director	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	62 (a)
Arizona	Homeland Security Director	Homeland Security (stand-alone office)	17
Arkansas	Dual Title—Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Director	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	104 (a)
California	Dual Title—Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Director	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	950 (a)
Colorado	Dual Title—Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Director	Public Safety	85 (a)
Connecticut	Deputy Commissioner	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	78 (a)
Delaware	Homeland Security Advisor	Public Safety	1
Florida	Florida Dept. of Law Enforcement Commissioner	Florida Dept. of Law Enforcement	157 (a)
Georgia	Dual Title—Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Director	Governor's Office	116 (a)
Hawaii	Adjutant General	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	5
Idaho	Dual Title—Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Director	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	41 (a)
Illinois	Public Safety Secretary/Commissioner	Governor's Office	209 (a)
Indiana	Dual Title—Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Director	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	267 (a)
Iowa	Dual Title—Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Director	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	74 (a)
Kansas	Adjutant General	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	0
Kentucky	Homeland Security Director	Governor's Office	15
Louisiana	Dual Title—Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Director	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	51 (a)
Maine	Adjutant General	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	29 (a)
Maryland	Homeland Security Director	Governor's Office	2
Massachusetts	Homeland Security Director	Public Safety	8
Michigan	State Police Superintendent/Director/Commissioner	State Police	71 (a)
Minnesota	Public Safety Secretary/Commissioner	Public Safety	79 (a)
Mississippi	Homeland Security Director	Public Safety	15
Missouri	Public Safety Secretary/Commissioner	Public Safety	10
Montana	Adjutant General	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	26 (a)
Nebraska	Lieutenant Governor	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	38 (a)
Nevada	Dual Title—Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Director	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	33 (a)
New Hampshire	Dual Title—Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Director	Public Safety	43 (a)
New Jersey	Homeland Security Director	Homeland Security (stand-alone office)	109
New Mexico	Dual Title—Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Director	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	65 (a)
New York	Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services Commissioner	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	427 (a)
North Carolina	Public Safety Secretary/Commissioner	Public Safety	188 (a)
North Dakota	Homeland Security Director	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	70 (a)
Ohio	Public Safety Secretary/Commissioner	Public Safety	24
Oklahoma	Homeland Security Director	Homeland Security (stand-alone office)	20
Oregon	Adjutant General	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	42 (a)
Pennsylvania	Homeland Security Director	Governor's Office	6
Rhode Island	State Police Superintendent/Director/Commissioner	Public Safety	0
South Carolina	State Police Superintendent/Director/Commissioner	State Police	19
South Dakota	Homeland Security Director	Public Safety	2
Tennessee	Homeland Security Director	Public Safety	26
Texas	State Police Superintendent/Director/Commissioner	Public Safety	5
Utah	Public Safety Secretary/Commissioner	Public Safety	62 (a)
Vermont	State Police Superintendent/Director/Commissioner	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	26 (a)
Virginia	Public Safety Secretary/Commissioner	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	155 (a)
Washington	Adjutant General	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	82 (a)
West Virginia	Dual Title—Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Director	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	53 (a)
Wisconsin	Adjutant General	Adjutant General/Military Affairs	61 (a)
Wyoming	Dual Title—Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Director	Governor's Office	25 (a)
Dist. of Columbia	Dual Title—Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Director	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	98 (a)
Guam	Homeland Security Director	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	17 (a)
U.S. Virgin Islands	Dual Title—Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Director	Combined Emerg. Mgt./Homeland Security Office	61 (a)

Source: The National Emergency Management Association, April 2016.

(a) Includes homeland security and emergency management positions.

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of food and potable water can result in increased public health emergencies. These events and all disasters exert more pressure on the federal budget and disaster funding mechanisms such as the DRF. A greater focus on mitigation allows smarter planning and better consequence management. The different factors demand problem solving that acknowledges the entire picture, making the most of common resources and synergetic opportunities.

About the Author

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