

A Whole of Community Approach to Catastrophic Preparedness, Response, and Recovery - 11103

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ABSTRACT

Here at FEMA, saving and sustaining lives is our number one priority, no matter the scale and magnitude of a crisis. Yet that task is qualitatively different in a major catastrophe, where extraordinary levels of mass casualties, damage, and disruption overwhelm our traditional, and well established, response and recovery plans and procedures. While life saving/sustaining is our core mission, catastrophic events have far-reaching implications that can also threaten our national and economic security as well as our citizens and communities. In today's world of increasingly deadly threats, national security, homeland security, and economic security have become inextricably linked. The Whole Community concept acknowledges the close interrelationships among all of these three dimensions of security and addresses the fundamental components of the security spectrum--Prevention, Protection, Response Mitigation, and Recovery. These five components or pillars provide the foundation for our approach in achieving *national resilience* as our overarching outcome. Our society must be prepared to respond in ways that lie outside the routine paradigms in which we traditionally operate. The health, safety, and security of millions of citizens may be imperiled without swift and aggressive intervention and assistance. Time is of supreme importance, and that imperative to action begins within *communities* where people live and work, where businesses and industries operate, and where local governments and government institutions reside. Through the implementation of the Whole of Community concept, FEMA will foster a national approach to emergency management that is built upon a foundation of proactive engagement with neighborhood associations, businesses, schools, faith-based community groups, trade groups, fraternal organizations, and other civic-minded organizations that can mobilize their networks to build community resilience and support local needs in times of catastrophe.

INTRODUCTION

While Emergency Management, public health, security, law enforcement, critical infrastructure and medical organizations already possess the legislative authorities, policies and doctrine to step into and execute assigned roles and responsibilities immediately, with little to no notice, our Whole of Community approach recognizes that extraordinary incidents may require crisis-based standards, regulatory waivers, and perhaps even new policies, strategies and doctrine. We must begin to institute a new level of participatory planning and preparedness; one that engages all segments of society. This means moving away from a mindset that government is always in the lead, to a mindset that builds upon the strengths of our local communities and, more importantly, our citizens. It also means planning for communities as they are, not painting an imaginary picture of what we would like them to be. How effective we all are as a functioning and practiced team in the first 72-hours following the onset of a catastrophe, whether man made or natural disaster, will largely define how successful we are in terms of the most important measure: lives saved, and then in how quickly we can stabilize communities and support their timely recovery and return to self-sufficiency.

Our approach is outcomes-based; it is grounded in results, not processes. Results will be defined by measureable objectives and tasks. Standards will be set that are aligned with outcomes and evaluated by metrics. Our approach will also focus on the individual, not the incident, and on people, not processes. Individuals and communities are key assets, not liabilities. Our citizens are force multipliers, who offer specialized knowledge and skills, provide neighbor-to-neighbor assistance, and allow emergency responders to focus on caring for the most vulnerable members of society. That begins with personal disaster preparedness, which is, and will remain, a national priority. Nothing will contribute more to saving and sustaining lives than a citizenry prepared and provisioned to reduce their exposure to harm, or, when unavoidable harm comes, to function in an austere, reduced services environment in the days immediately following a catastrophic disaster. Every family that takes even the most basic preparedness actions, such as having sufficient water and non-perishable food for at least 72 hours, frees responders and critical resources to provide for those who truly need such assistance, both the casualties of the disaster, and our most vulnerable populations, such as persons with disabilities and children. Partnerships that reflect this reality are fundamental to maximizing our combined strengths, achieving resilience, and in having the capacity to reach those community members that are most in need of assistance.

This principle drives our agency's culture, priorities, programs, policies and budget, but FEMA is only part of the emergency management team. To begin this change in national preparedness practices and doctrine, we are enlisting the active participation of the whole of community, in partnership with emergency management, public health, security, law enforcement, critical infrastructure and medical organizations to plan, train, organize, and heighten awareness as a functioning and practiced team. We have identified the highest priority tasks necessary to save and sustain lives and stabilize a catastrophic incident in 72 hours, and have begun to work across all segments of society to identify how we can collectively achieve those outcomes. While the initial 72 hours of an incident are the most critical in saving/sustaining life, our approach spans not only response operations following a disaster, but also recovery, prevention, protection, and mitigation activities that occur before, during and after disasters. Changing outcomes will require public engagement and public action, which means not only personalizing preparedness, but in fully embracing “two way exchanges” between our public safety and emergency services institutions and the society they serve. It is embodied in our mission: “Working together as a nation to prepare for, respond to, mitigate and recover from all hazards.”

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