

Emergency Management: Selected Policy Issues

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Every inch of our land, air, and water is vulnerable to disaster. The complexity of emergency management (EM) and its growing importance necessitates that lessons are learned, not merely noted, based on disaster experience. This symposium examines a number of issues important to the EM community, including state policymakers. The lessons imparted seek to build “institutional memory” for those involved with the various phases of EM: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

Governments alone cannot do all that is needed to deal with emergencies. EM involves building collaborative relationships among and between levels of government and across the public, private and non-profit sectors. Four of the articles here deal explicitly with partnerships – their need, development, and maintenance.

Christopher J. Moran, a Planner for the PA Region 13 Task Force, examines an important but relatively neglected issue, the role and use of volunteers in EM. In “**Utilization of Private Resources to Supplement Government Resources in Case of Emergency**,” Moran provides an overview of some of the key existing volunteer programs in the field of EM. He outlines the benefits and costs of using volunteers and provides a set of criteria to use when assessing policy options. Christopher Moran then makes a specific programmatic recommendation for supplementing government resources with private resources. Overall, Moran’s contribution buttresses the important point that EM can never be fully funded and that government must look to partnering with the private sector.

The development of partnerships beyond individual jurisdictions is an essential need for dealing with emergencies. State and federal resources cannot be relied upon initially and there is a gap between when resources are requested and when they are operationally available. Pennsylvania has an explicit comprehensive and systematic regional approach to emergency management. **Gregory G. Noll**, program

manager of the South Central Task Force (SCTF), offers an overview of Pennsylvania's regional approach in "**Regional Response to All-Hazards Events: A Commonwealth Perspective.**" The SCTF is one of nine regional counter-terrorism task forces formed in 1997 by the Commonwealth to coordinate local and regional efforts in response to acts of terrorism. Additional authorities were later granted under Pennsylvania's Counterterrorism Planning, Preparedness and Response Act 227-2002. Today, the nine task forces strive to develop all-hazards regional approaches.

Drs. Louise K. Comfort, Daniel Mosse, and Taieb Znati, all of the University of Pittsburgh, also examine regional response in "**Managing Risk in Real Time: Integrating Information Technology into Disaster Risk Reduction and Response.**" Emergency managers increasingly rely on decision support systems to provide real-time information for the complex tasks of predicting, communicating, and responding to emergencies. Various software programs already exist but, as the authors explain, none has been particularly successful in providing the type of dynamic, yet focused, information that emergency managers need. Emergency managers, operating at different locations and carrying out different functions simultaneously, require timely, valid information that can be updated quickly as conditions change. A "common operating picture" must be developed for the myriad of emergency managers working at different levels of responsibility and exposed to different degrees of risk to enable them to take more informed, effective action in a coordinated response for a region.

The authors present information on a prototype decision support system under development at the University of Pittsburgh. The Interactive, Intelligent, Spatial Information System (IISIS) Laboratory focuses on the degree to which the capacity of a region to respond to shared risk can be enhanced by innovative information technologies. A community's capacity for response is considered as a dynamic inter-organizational system characterized by four key decision points: 1) detection of risk; 2) recognition and interpretation of risk for the immediate context; 3) communication of risk to multiple organizations in a wider region; and 4) self organization and mobilization of a collective, community response system to reduce risk and respond to danger. The decision points embrace individual, organizational, and system levels of aggregation and communication of information that are used to create a "common knowledge base" that supports collective action to reduce risk.

The authors develop five propositions as part of a conceptual framework for building resilience in communities exposed to recurring risk.

The Joint Readiness Center, located at the Air Reserve Station in Pittsburgh, is another noteworthy collaborative model. It was established by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission in 2005 and has been identified by the Department of Defense (DOD) as a Center of Excellence in integrating civilian medical and business resources with military assets to provide unique, flexible, and effective emergency preparedness, response, and recovery to the nation. **George A. Huber, David R. Campbell, Keith G. Dorman, and Leigh A. McIntosh**, in “**Joint Readiness Center – Pittsburgh: A Model of Military-Civilian Readiness and Response**,” describe the Center’s origin and activities. The authors are part of the Joint Readiness Center Task Force (JRC Task Force), a community organization that supports the Center, which is a national model for homeland security and homeland defense.

The JRC seeks to improve the nation’s response to disasters caused by humans or natural hazards by combining the strengths of the active duty, reserve, and guard components of the military, including the five armed services; federal, state and local government agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), National Disaster Medical System, Disaster Medical Assistance Team, Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA); civilian practitioners skilled in disaster management; as well as the Pittsburgh region’s extensive healthcare resources. Realizing JRC’s full potential depends on continuing and enhancing the collaborative between the community and its partners.

A fifth symposium article was written by **Karen Finkenbinder**, a PhD candidate at Penn State Harrisburg in Public Administration. In “**Residency Requirements for First Responders**,” Finkenbinder assesses a previously neglected issue in emergency management. The response to the effects of Hurricane Katrina and the Great Flood of New Orleans in 2005 highlights an unacknowledged problem associated with first responder families. Evacuation plans in New Orleans did not include consideration of the special needs of the families of first responders. It was difficult for police, fire, and emergency medical personnel to help others when they were witnessing the endangerment of their families and homes. After Katrina, New Orleans and other cities turned to rewriting

their emergency plans to consider a host of issues, including the needs of first responders' families.

Finkenbinder presents a balanced treatment of the residency issue, both from the individual and community perspective. She offers a set of pro and con arguments and places the issue within the broader framework of federalism and related legal issues.

The sixth and final article in the symposium, "**The State Role in Emergency Management (EM): Significant Challenges,**" was written by the symposium editor, **Dr. Beverly A. Cigler**, Penn State Harrisburg. She argues that the key state roles in EM are: the facilitation of local disaster mitigation; assisting the public and elected and appointed leadership in understanding risk and mitigating disasters; building the capacity of first responders by strengthening their preparedness and response capabilities; and paying increased attention to shaping the environment in which the state and local governments operate within the federal emergency management system. Much of the state role is direct capacity-building directed at local governments, citizens, and first responders, but much involves money and legal issues.