



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

April 2009

Local government leaders have long recognized the need for effective coordination and communication when a major disaster occurs. After the Hurricane Katrina catastrophe, they stepped up their call for a more systematic, organized approach that builds on a strong network of resources.

At the urging of the ICMA Executive Board, we published a white paper, “A Networked Approach to Improvements in Emergency Management” in 2006 that describes why changes are needed and makes recommendations for improvements.

In April 2008, key elements of the networked approach were incorporated into recommendations adopted by the National Homeland Security Consortium (NHSC) in its paper, “Protecting Americans in the 21st Century.” The NHSC met again in December 2008 and voted to send the white paper to the incoming Obama Administration, reinforcing the consensus recommendations from this diverse group of state and local government, nonprofit, and private sector organizations.

The recommendations include the following:

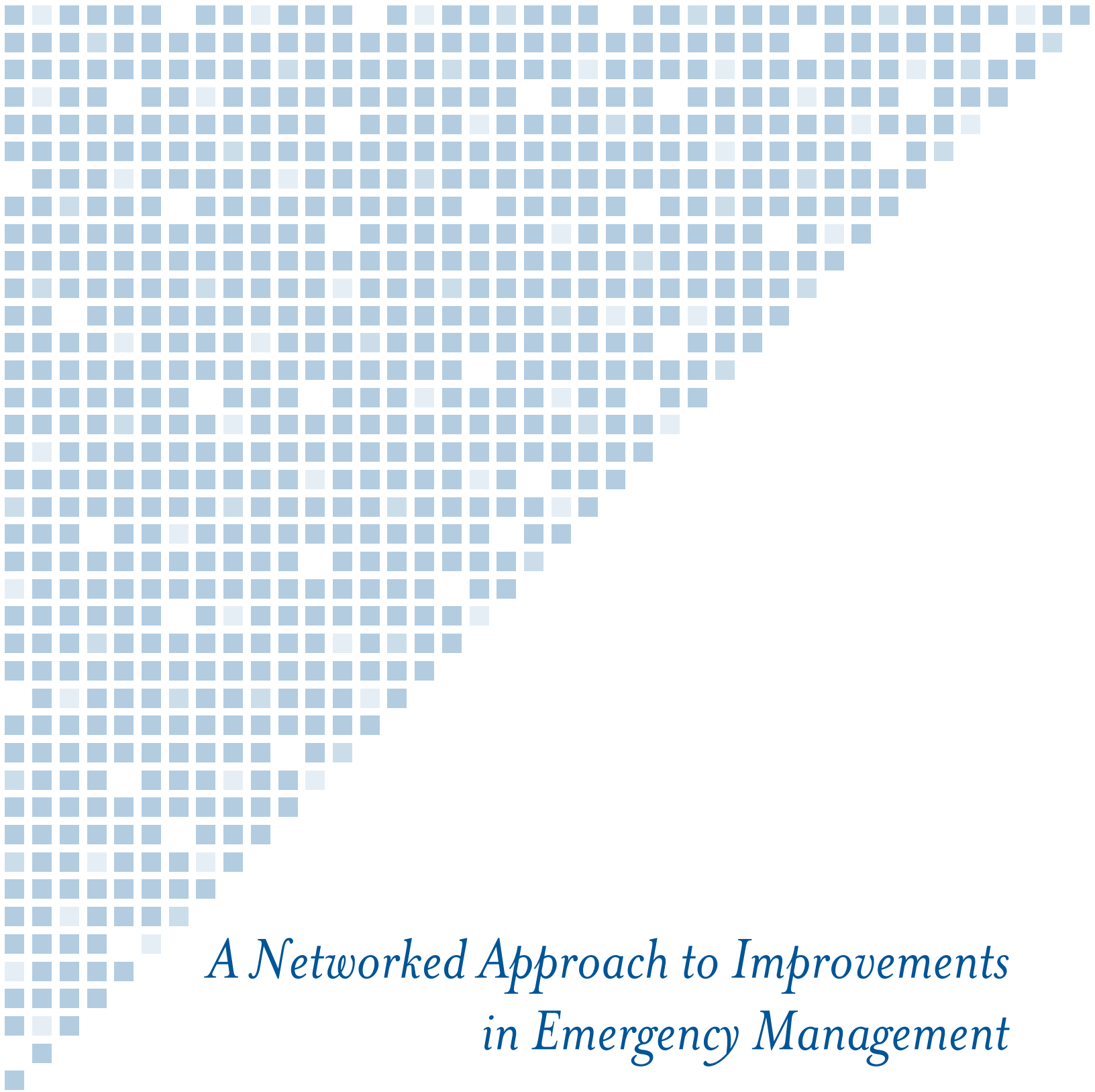
- Develop collaborative relationships that allow all involved – military, federal, state, local, the private and nonprofit sectors – to leverage their assets in a way that minimizes bureaucratic obstacles and complements and strengthens response capabilities.
- Organize, credential, and train region-based teams capable of rapid and sustained deployments in response to catastrophic situations.
- Establish robust, open, and consistent communication with local governments and other groups that are needed to provide assistance in all phases of a disaster.
- Build on the Emergency Management Assistance Compact so that local government teams can be deployed across state lines without delay.
- Improve our capacity to use technology to organize assets and to use reliable databases to adapt responses quickly as conditions change on the ground.

Emergency management strategies should not be unpredictable and idiosyncratic. While local governments have continued to strengthen mutual aid agreements and to look for creative ways to help each other across state lines, a national approach is needed. Some states are better organized and have well-prepared local governments. They can be used as models.

Training and practice are also essential and requires collaboration among the public, private, and non-profit sectors. When there has been an effective disaster response, there are well-organized and prepared local governments. Recognize that relationships matter and that it takes time and attention to develop them. A “city hall in a box” can be deployed just as seamlessly as an urban search and rescue team or out-of-state utility teams. Such teams need to be identified, organized, and recognized in advance of a disaster so that continuity of government can be provided when it is needed.

ICMA looks at emergency services as part of a system that builds on relationships, training, credentialing, and networks.

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*A Networked Approach to Improvements
in Emergency Management*

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Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

Hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, chlorine leaks, disease outbreaks, train or airplane crashes, and terrorist attacks can happen anywhere and at any time. Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, all levels of government recognized that the "command and control" approach had significant shortcomings. State and local governments have stepped up their efforts to develop more effective solutions, all of which rely on more sophisticated and organized networks and partnerships.

ICMA's Governmental Affairs and Policy Committee, led by Scott Hancock, Executive Director, Maryland Municipal League, Chair, and Robert W. Jean, City Manager, University Place, Washington, Vice Chair, chose the topic for this paper in consultation with the National League of Cities, National Association of Counties, U.S. Conference of Mayors, National Governors' Association, National Conference of State Legislatures, and Council of State Governments.

The paper describes why changes are needed and offers specific recommendations for improvements in our intergovernmental system. Building on lessons learned from recent disaster experiences, it lays out an ambitious new approach that is based on a network of partnerships among cities and counties and is supported by state governments and a sophisticated database. We hope these ideas will promote coordinated action, changes in policies, and improvements in our emergency management system.

Robert J. O'Neill

Executive Director

ICMA

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ICMA is the premier local government leadership and management organization. Its mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and advocating professional management of local government worldwide. ICMA provides member support; publications, data, and information; peer and results-oriented assistance; and training and professional development to more than 8,200 city, town, and county experts and other individuals throughout the world.



A Networked Approach to Improvements in Emergency Management

Executive Summary

Federal, state, and local governments need to bring a greater sense of urgency to the critical objective of improving our emergency preparedness and response system. Agencies at all levels must put the public first, giving priority to effective coordination and communication without engaging in turf battles.

A network-centered approach has the flexibility to move resources and assets where they need to be, when they need to be there.

Even though the United States has extensive capacity and experience with disasters, the country still faces substantial challenges, as hurricanes Katrina and Rita demonstrated. Too often, the U.S. has tried to manage disasters by “command and control”—an approach that has significant limitations. ICMA and other organizations representing local governments are proposing an alternative—a dynamic and network-centered approach that has the flexibility to move resources and assets where they need to be, when they need to be there. Working together in a well-organized and coordinated way will give us the greatest hope of not repeating the past. We must work together to:

- Identify region-based teams of federal, state, and local employees who can respond in emergencies
- Involve private and nonprofit sectors in planning and response
- Improve communication and interoperability
- Provide first-responder training and credentialing
- Demand accountability
- Ensure risk assessment and management
- Improve our ability to collect accurate information, analyze it, and respond accordingly, adapting quickly to changing conditions
- Take advantage of services the military can provide in emergencies, such as transport expertise and storage facilities

- Develop collaborative relationships that allow all involved—military, federal, state, local, and nongovernmental organizations—to leverage their assets in a way that minimizes bureaucratic obstacles and complements and strengthens the response
- Train, equip, stockpile, and stage before disaster strikes—early declarations and mobilization of resources are essential
- Restructure federal agencies and align federal processes for clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Strengthen the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) by ensuring that it has the resources it needs and by providing direct reporting authority to the President during states of emergency and disaster declarations
- Amend the Stafford Act to allow local solutions that are cost-effective, safe, and appropriate for the community, and that address long term recovery needs.

Why Changes Are Needed

Our current approach to disaster response suffers from systemic problems. Who is in charge? Who can access the resources and when? Who pays? All these questions represent huge challenges. In the current system it seems everyone can say “no” but almost no one can say “yes.” Local governments across the country were ready to assist after Hurricane Katrina, but few of them were able to get through the state and federal governments’ red tape to get into the region. Two elements of the inter-governmental system must change to move resources into communities more quickly: (1) FEMA processes and (2) a more effective and better understood Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC).

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One example of a FEMA regulation that should be changed is the restriction on paying local government employees to handle certain responsibilities. Local government employees, always part of the rescue and recovery work, bring a sense of dedication and experience to the job that can make them the most cost-effective resource for assistance. In some cases, such as debris removal, FEMA regulations can increase costs because they allow full reimbursement for contract labor, but not for local government personnel.

A number of cities processed thousands of Hurricane Katrina evacuees. San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas alone processed tens of thousands. Many of these cities were surprised to learn that other agencies and organizations, including the American Red Cross, were often unaware of their

responsibilities for such critical matters as facilitating long-term housing. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as the Red Cross and the Salvation Army, play key roles in providing basic necessities to survivors. But if their responsibilities and reporting relationships are not clearly defined and managed, and if they don't have the funding to accomplish their objectives, they become ineffectual and come to represent another failure to explain rather than a success to applaud.

Some, but not all, of the slow response to Katrina resulted from confusion about what qualifies as an "incident of national significance" (INS) and in what form a request for federal assistance must be presented. Another challenge arose at the state level because state emergency managers in Louisiana and Mississippi were flooded with requests for help as well as with offers of assistance. The EMAC pipeline soon became backlogged due to lack of capacity to process requests.

Some of the local government teams that received authorization to assist did not have the most targeted experience. And it took three weeks for some cities to receive any assistance, even though local governments that were prepared to help made heroic efforts to get teams into the region sooner.

In a disaster local and state capabilities are quickly overwhelmed, especially when local response personnel are victims as well. Overwhelmed state and local response capabilities, combined with an unclear process for initiating federal response, as demonstrated in Katrina, illustrated the need to take a fresh look at how disaster response is organized. Local and state authorities need to access and coordinate federal and military resources effectively and without delay.

Once clear standards of performance are in place for disaster preparation, response, recovery, and restoration, agencies can focus their attention on identifying, developing, and deploying the range of expertise that is needed.

Incidents of National Significance and the Stafford Act

Four triggers relating to the incidents of national significance activate the National Response Plan, but there is lack of clarity on how and when an event becomes an incident of national significance and perhaps more importantly where responsibility lies for the declaration of such an event. Before any federal action is initiated, local governments must request assistance from their state government, and states must provide available relief before seeking federal assistance. States provide relief to one another through the EMAC, an interstate mutual aid agreement. Local government assets and personnel beyond the initial search and rescue stage of a disaster are not well organized or documented. Another barrier is that few local governments know how to work with EMAC.

In addition to the National Response Plan and the four triggers that initiate it, additional legislation further confuses the process. One of the

obstacles is that, although the President may declare that an incident is an “emergency” at his own discretion, emergency assistance is limited to \$5 million without notification to Congress. A “major disaster” has no limit on financial assistance, but the President declares a “major disaster” only at the request of a state governor. The distinction between an emergency and a major disaster is difficult to ascertain during the event, and the result may be no request and no declaration.

In the Northridge earthquake, local governments were able to tap U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development funds to help rebuild homes that were destroyed. Unfortunately, under the Stafford Act, federal funds can no longer be used for anything other than temporary housing. Many local governments in the Gulf Region have criticized the fact that federal dollars can be used to pay for FEMA trailers but not for safer, affordable housing that can be integrated into a community.

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The Katrina Cottage prototype, designed by Marianne Cusato, features two small bedrooms with an additional sleeping loft, full bathroom, kitchenette, and living room. It is more wind resistant and sturdier than a FEMA trailer and costs \$10,000 less. Source: <http://www.slate.com/id/2138981/>

When affordable housing is integrated into a community’s plan, the local government can make investments in parks and transportation services, amenities that are needed for many families to rebuild their lives. A FEMA trailer costs \$70,000 and is dangerous in a hurricane. Affordable housing can be constructed for considerably less and offers the advantage of giving a family a real home with the possibility of improvements over time. Local governments urge that the Stafford Act be changed so that federal funds can be used for better housing solutions. Katrina caused unprecedented levels of damage to the community buildings and tax base in several Gulf Coast communities, but the Stafford Act “bridge loans” that would have helped restore public services and rebuild devastated communities faster were slow in coming or nonexistent.

FEMA’s Role and Capabilities

The role of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), a relatively small agency under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is to mobilize resources when disaster assistance is anticipated and to make them available when the emergency is declared. A declaration by the President activates the federal response. Numerous federal agencies are responsible for various emergency support functions, and FEMA is responsible for coordinating them. FEMA had become a well-respected agency when knowledgeable and experienced people were appointed to

key positions in the 1990s. After Hurricanes Hugo and Andrew, all levels of government reflected on problems in the emergency response and recommended changes. And, had some of these changes been implemented, the situation in August 2005 might have been less chaotic. Unfortunately, when the massive Department of Homeland Security was established in 2003 with terrorism as its focus, FEMA got lost in the bureaucracy. Many strong professionals left the agency, leaving FEMA understaffed and with inadequate professional resources.

The process for obtaining federal emergency assistance is outlined in reams of paper and is subject to conflicting interpretations—an unwieldy process that had never been tested. There is a consensus that improvements are needed to restore and improve FEMA’s role in the emergency preparedness and response system:

1. FEMA’s mission to support state and local governments is too important to be left to the federal government to address alone. Whether FEMA needs to be completely reorganized and restored as a direct report to the President, or whether it can be left in the Department of Homeland Security, but protected like the Coast Guard, may be debated. The “Big 7” state and local government organizations need to be part of that discussion.
2. FEMA and other federal agencies can be more cost-effective and responsive to individuals in need if the Stafford Act and other federal rules are changed to provide more flexibility and freedom.
3. FEMA needs to regain its core responsibility to coordinate with states and local governments. All levels of government need to do a much better job before disaster strikes to make needed investments, identify resources, pool talents, and seek opportunities to train together on a regional basis so that people develop the relationships and confidence they need to respond effectively when a disaster strikes.

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Common Themes

In the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, congressional committees and federal and state agencies examined what went wrong and what could be learned from the experience. Several consistent themes emerged:

- We must recognize that the first information received in a disaster situation is often inaccurate, incomplete, or wrong.
- We must improve communication and interoperability.

- We must restructure federal agencies and align federal processes for clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- We must clarify the appropriate role for the Department of Defense and its relationships with other disaster response participants.

As one Department of Defense official said, “Our approach to planning and resource identification . . . is like declaring war, but you don’t know you have an airborne battalion with combat experience sitting in Washington State.” These are some of the critical needs:

- To identify region-based teams of federal, state, and local employees. Such teams should be specific to the stage of the disaster they are called on to address (i.e., search and rescue or rebuilding and recovery)
- To provide first responder training and credentialing
- To provide for risk assessment and management
- To increase accountability
- To involve private and nonprofit sectors in planning and response
- To use tracking software to help identify and organize local government response capabilities.

Whether the emergency is a hurricane, an earthquake, a wildfire, a terrorist act, or a train wreck with a chlorine leak, local governments understand that emergencies can happen anywhere, at any time. Regardless of the scale of the event, there are questions of jurisdiction, who is in charge, and who is accountable.

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Lessons Learned and Local Government Perspectives

The response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita taught us a number of lessons that we need to employ in making changes to our approach to emergencies.

The Breadth of Local Government Resources

First, local governments possess deep and broad resources that can be tapped in emergencies if an effective networked approach can be developed. Before disaster strikes, those resources need to be acquired in a systematic way. Qualified professional local government personnel who can maintain or restart vital services need to be identified and undergo training and an approval process so they can be deployed without delay.

The Importance of Networks

Second, a network of personal relationships can help expedite response and recovery efforts. Many local governments found ways to get help into the Gulf Region after Hurricane Katrina through their personal relationships with individuals in the communities affected by the disaster. By developing relationships with key personnel and training with local governments in the region, it was possible to sustain a long-term recovery effort. Such regional teams provided recovery assistance for more than three months by rotating personnel and establishing clear management protocols. In this way they were able to retain essential capabilities in their own region while providing long-term assistance in another state.

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External Supply Chains

Third, it is important to establish supply chains in a remote location so supplies can be accessed if the community's food, water, materials, and equipment are destroyed. The business model of a "just-in-time inventory" fails in a disaster in the absence of a sophisticated logistics plan (like Wal-Mart's) to deliver quickly in an emergency. Even the Red Cross became overwhelmed when confronted with the magnitude of Hurricane Katrina; it faced the same capacity challenges as the local governments and the EMAC.

Revising the EMAC Process

Revisions are expected in the EMAC process as part of a "lessons learned" review of the Katrina response. Local officials have been invited to provide feedback in the review process, organized by the National Emergency Management Association.

Expertise Beyond the First Response

Major disasters require more than public safety expertise. The recovery and restoration phases require a wide array of talent, well beyond first responders. Debris removal may well take a year or more. Counselors for children and families may be required for extended periods. Building inspectors, technology and communications professionals, utility workers, finance and accounting specialists, lawyers, planners, and engineers all have extensive roles. A community that cannot communicate and keep records is unable

to recover. Communities that have good technology and financial planning as elements of their disaster plans do better than others.

Communication systems are critical. Unless the military allows local governments to use satellite communications, communication lines go down for a period of time. Without a communication system, emergency needs can't be transmitted. Local governments understand the need to anticipate and prepare for loss of communication.

Similarly, information technology plans are essential for continuity of government, and those plans should include storage of backup data outside the immediate area. GIS map expertise with printer capability is especially helpful in emergency operations centers so that crews from out of town can assist in rescue and recovery efforts.

Good financial planning also helps a community get back to normal more quickly. Some well-prepared local governments have business interruption insurance that provides critical resources to rebuild the economy in the first months after a disaster.

Knowing What Assistance Is Available

Knowing what is available through the National Incident Management System (NIMS) saves time and avoids frustration. For example, if long-term feeding and shelter is needed, it is important to request an incident management team that has experience with these needs. Such teams may have been deployed by the National Forest Service to handle emergencies such as wildfires. They can be authorized by FEMA and have the authority to execute contracts for such immediate needs as portable shelters or bathroom facilities.

The Importance of Preparation

Preparation should include having emergency declarations in place so that they can be executed quickly in a disaster. In addition, it is important to know what kind of documentation is required for reimbursement for recovery expenses. A plan to deal with the paperwork requirements is vital to minimizing errors and recouping expenses. Once a federal disaster is declared, employees eligible for overtime can support the operation and can be reimbursed by FEMA. It also is important to be prepared to deputize federal personnel so they can help enforce local laws.

Local governments have learned that they need to improve their emergency plans and their preparedness. Here are examples of issues that most communities now recognize need to be included in their emergency planning:

- Include animal control experts in disaster planning.
- Identify alternatives for long-term shelter, such as vacant warehouses, leased space, and hotel facilities. Develop aid agreements with hotels so that they know they will get paid to shelter emergency personnel

and evacuees. Developing contracts with multi-family apartment owners for long-term shelter is a good strategy to minimize contract management and invoicing overload. Most emergency plans do not consider long-term shelter needs and rely on schools and arenas, which are inappropriate for anything other than immediate shelter.

- Make plans for where trailer communities should be located, or find alternatives to them.
- Include the faith-based community as a resource in plans.
- Have a plan to manage volunteers and get to know the leaders of key volunteer organizations as part of preparedness work. These non-profit organizations can provide training for volunteers and manage their assignments.
- Plan transportation to evacuate the frail and poor.

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Lessons from International Experiences

After the tsunami in December 2004, ICMA worked through its CityLinks project, funded by USAID, to provide long-term support to affected communities in India and Sri Lanka. For example, members from several Florida local governments were selected to work with their colleagues in Cuddalore and Nagapattinam, India, to help them prepare for and mitigate future disasters along the southern Indian coastline. These Florida managers were selected because of their knowledge and expertise in disaster recovery. They worked with the Indian communities in the areas of:

- Disaster preparedness and development of response plans
- Coastal management
- Development and implementation of financial management strategies
- Land reuse
- Park redevelopment (Cuddalore)
- Port redevelopment (Nagapattinam)
- Improved citizen access to municipal services.

This international model is cost-effective and achieves long-term goals. With financial support from USAID, ICMA has been able to deploy local government teams to provide restoration support to areas devastated by the tsunami, but there is no comparable system to assist devastated communities in the U.S.

Recommendations for a Networked Solution

Drawing on the “lessons learned,” ICMA proposes the development of a networked approach to disaster preparedness—a system to leverage the people, facilities, and equipment that are needed in the four phases of disaster situations: preparation, response, recovery, and restoration.

This approach is based on a network of partnerships among cities and counties, supported by a sophisticated database. It would employ multi-disciplinary teams with a full range of local government expertise, not just police and fire personnel as first responders. The teams could be identified in advance and pre-approved through a rigorous training and certification process that can demonstrate their ability to respond to a disaster. States would be involved in developing the pre-certification criteria, and the local government personnel who are willing and able to be deployed through the EMAC would be certified to respond across state lines in specific functional areas, such as information technology, utilities, code enforcement, public works, finance and accounting, housing, EMS, police and fire, and other essential operations.

Once the recovery phase has concluded, the relationships that have been formed can help bring together the businesses, nonprofits, associations, universities, and other organizations that are needed to help communities rebuild.

This networked solution includes a technology platform that consists of (1) a comprehensive database of human and physical assets from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors available for emergency response and recovery efforts and (2) a geo-mapping tool to identify, select, activate, track, and manage response assets. The database would accommodate the organization of human and physical assets available for rapid deployment. Participating local governments would use the database to maintain information about the availability of people, equipment, and technology that could be called upon in a disaster. Equipment and materials not in use could be stored in accessible locations, such as available military base facilities, which are well suited for this function. The network of relationships would need to include the military officials who have been tasked with support to local governments in disaster situations.

Foundational Support for Regional Response Teams

The following actions build the foundation to support the regional response teams:

1. Identify the skills and experience necessary to respond to the four phases of a disaster.
2. Develop a system to identify regional or state-based local government teams and individuals with the necessary skills and experience to respond to each phase.
3. Develop a process of pre-certification for the local government teams in the areas of preparation, response, recovery, and restoration. The

pre-certification process would be developed in cooperation with NEMA and its state EMAC and would include a streamlined approval process to deploy teams to other states.

4. Use tested software that can systematically organize the human and physical assets so that they could be accessed during and after a large-scale event. These assets might be from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.
5. Develop a model for training, practice, and simulation programs that would address preparation, response, recovery, and restoration. The training and simulation programs would cover communication, staffing, skills, disaster environments and challenges, policies, procedures, and overcoming barriers.

Implementing the Concept

Using the networked approach, teams can provide assistance at each of the four phases of a disaster.

Preparation The preparation phase includes the planning necessary to ensure that teams and resources can be positioned prior to the event. As noted earlier, teams should be assigned to such functions as information technology, utilities, code enforcement, public works, finance and accounting, EMS, police and fire, and other essential operations.

Equipment inventories and asset identification should be conducted and equipment and materials not currently in use should be stored in accessible locations, such as available military base facilities, which are ideal for pre-positioning and storage.

Response Response requires EMS, police and fire, medical, public works, and other essential service providers; restoration of essential local government functions such as water and sewer services; and coordination with nongovernmental organizations, including businesses, religious institutions, and nonprofits that are able to provide services and donate needed supplies.

Recovery Recovery involves restoring basic community services such as schools and building inspections; identifying long-term housing solutions; coordinating with federal, state, and regional organizations; finding and managing public and private aid; and recruiting and managing volunteer networks.

Restoration During the restoration phase, the team needs to address any issues related to infrastructure, sustainability, and location of facilities. Working with community leaders, the team can help develop mitigation strategies to prevent repeat scenarios, and identify regional capabilities able to provide long-term restoration of services and help businesses return to productivity.

All too frequently, the initial outpouring of support is not sustained. The ICMA approach includes making available pre-certified local government

professionals who can be deployed as individuals and/or teams to provide assistance in addressing the steps necessary for recovery. Recovery assistance would be provided on a relatively short-term basis, such as a six- to twelve-week period, rotating local government teams and individuals as necessary. Ideally, teams would have significant overlap in personnel as well as experience training together on a regional basis so that multiple communities can support the effort and the momentum of the recovery is strong. Management of the recovery process should be seamless and well documented so that rotating teams are clear about priorities and overall objectives.

Restoration can take place over years. It works best when communities that need ongoing, long-term assistance are matched with local governments able to provide such assistance. The assistance may include redevelopment advice and capacity building and would be provided over an extended period of time agreed upon by the participating local governments.

Local governments interested in participating would identify the technical areas in which they are willing to provide pro bono technical assistance, and this information would be maintained in the database for easy identification and retrieval. Reimbursable expenses would be limited to materials, equipment, and other non-labor costs.

Now is the time to develop a network of capabilities that we can deploy in advance of a known disaster, or quickly after one strikes.

Time for Action

The United States has much more capacity to prepare for and respond to disasters than was evident in Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Cities and counties outside the Gulf Region were ready to deploy multi-disciplinary teams to help, but the intergovernmental system in place did not facilitate rapid deployment.

The stakes are too high to wait. Now is the time to develop a network of capabilities that we can deploy in advance of a known disaster, or quickly after one strikes. A networked approach is more nimble than our present hierarchical structure.

ICMA Governmental Affairs and Policy Committee, 2005-2006

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The mission of ICMA is to create excellence in local governance by developing and fostering professional local government management worldwide.

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