



COVER STORY

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# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT —

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT IS AN INVISIBLE PROFESSION. When asked what emergency management is or what emergency managers do, most people will be at a loss to answer. Or they may link the profession to FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Unfortunately, FEMA conjures up images of rows of unused trailers or federal agents passing out checks after a disaster. Emergency management isn't FEMA, but we are in the same business of preparing for and recovering from disasters.

The beginning of disaster relief in the United States harkens back to 1934, when the Federal Bureau of Public Roads was given the responsibility of financing the reconstruction of highways and roads damaged during a disaster. In 1944, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was given authority over projects to control flooding. The early 1960s witnessed various federal relief programs consolidated in the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration under the umbrella of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Despite these changes, federal relief agencies still remained disjointed and uncoordinated. To address this issue, Congress passed the Disaster Relief Act in 1974 that established the process of presidential disaster declarations. That same year, federal relief efforts were brought under one roof when President Jimmy Carter issued Executive Order 12127 that created the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

In 1988, the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act, Public Law 100-707) amended the Disaster Relief Act to provide a systematic means of providing federal assistance following a natural disaster affecting state and local governments. Following a presidential declaration of an emergency or a disaster, the Stafford Act, through FEMA, provides financial and other assistance to local and state government. Under the Stafford Act, FEMA is also assigned responsibility for coordinating all federal relief efforts. In 2004, President George W. Bush signed the Homeland Security Appropriations Act that placed FEMA under the newly created Department of Homeland Security.

FEMA doctrine identifies four phases of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. These are the core responsibilities of all emergency managers today. Emergency management has evolved from repairing roads following a disaster and civil defense during the cold war years, to a system of professional practitioners involved in all four phases of emergency management.

At the local level, the State of Colorado has the Division of Emergency Management as part of the Department of Local Affairs and the newly created Office of Homeland Security as part of the Governor's Office. All Colorado counties must have, or be part of, a "disaster agency" that is tasked with

emergency planning and disaster response. Most larger Colorado jurisdictions also have emergency management coordinators who address these same issues.

In 1965, the Colorado Defense Association was incorporated and later became the Colorado Emergency Management Association ([www.cemacolorado.com](http://www.cemacolorado.com)). Today, CEMA is a statewide association whose membership consists of individuals and corporations in both the public and private sectors interested or involved in the four phases of emergency management (CEMA adopted "prevention" as a fifth phase in 2007). Although most local emergency managers have law enforcement, fire or military backgrounds, many entering the emergency management field today come with undergraduate and advanced degrees in emergency management or homeland security.

There are several certifications available to emergency managers with the most prestigious being the Certified Emergency Manager from the International Association of Emergency Managers. CEMA's program, modeled after that of IAEM, offers certification at the bronze, silver and gold level.

With that history in mind, its time to present the top 10 things you always wanted to know about emergency management but were afraid to ask.

## *but were afraid to ask*

### **What is emergency management and what exactly does someone in the profession do, especially when there is no disaster?**

The primary responsibility of an emergency manager is to have an emergency operations plan for their jurisdiction and keep it current by exercising the plan and modifying it when needed. This sounds pretty simple, but as Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, "In time of battle, plans are useless, but planning is everything."

It is the process of bringing all the stakeholders together when building a plan and then involving as many people as possible in testing the plan that is the key to a successful emergency manager and his or her program.

In conjunction with the operations plan, the emergency manager is responsible for activation and management of the local emergency operations center. This is the center of disaster management activities and includes all the satellite features of disaster management such as public information, policy decisions,

volunteer management, resource management, etc. The role of the EOC is to "provide a central location from which government at any level can provide interagency coordination and executive decision making in support of the incident response" (FEMA).

These primary responsibilities provide the framework for mitigating, preventing, preparing for, responding to and recovering from disastrous events. An emergency management system includes a myriad of other duties as well: managing grants, contracting and



*Emergency responders survey the scene on the blizzard-swept plains of Colorado. Photo courtesy of Polly White.*



A flood in La Junta drove residents from homes.  
Photo courtesy of Polly White.

mutual aid agreements, network building, planning, public education, staff and jurisdiction training, report writing, and much more.

### Does every county and municipality in Colorado have an emergency management program?

Colorado Statute (CRS - 24-32-2107) states “Each County shall maintain a Disaster Agency or participate in a Local or Interjurisdictional Disaster Agency.” Municipalities in Colorado are not required to have emergency management programs and many do not.

Currently, there are emergency management programs (and emergency managers) in:

- All 64 counties (some counties share an emergency manager)
- 30 cities
- Three universities
- Two tribes

### What is the difference between homeland security and emergency management?

As mentioned above, FEMA is an agency within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Since the creation of DHS in 2003, FEMA’s roll in disaster

management has ebbed and flowed with political currents. Currently, FEMA has renewed status as the agency within the federal government with the responsibilities of community preparedness, response to disasters under the Stafford Act and coordinating all federal relief efforts.

### Define “disaster.”

A disaster is an occurrence of a natural catastrophe, technological accident or human-caused event that has resulted in severe damage, death and/or multiple injuries (FEMA).

A “large-scale disaster” is one that exceeds the response capability of the local jurisdiction and requires state, and potentially federal, involvement (DHS, *Guide for All-Hazard Emergency Operations Planning*).

A “major disaster” is “any natural catastrophe, regardless of cause, any fire, flood or explosion, in any part of the United States, which in the determination of the President causes damage of sufficient severity and magnitude to warrant major disaster assistance under the Act to supplement the efforts and available resources of state, local governments and disaster relief organizations in alleviating the damage, loss, hardship, or suffering caused thereby” (*Stafford Act*).

*disaster*, n. An occurrence causing widespread destruction and distress; a catastrophe (*American Heritage College Dictionary*, 1997).

In short, a disaster is an event that exceeds the resources of your jurisdiction.

Nearly every event that impacts the citizens of jurisdiction can be handled with local resources, plus mutual aid as needed. An incident becomes a disaster when response and recovery exceed your resources and help is needed beyond normal mutual aid.

### How does the local emergency manager relate to the county, state and federal governments?

All disasters are local.

No matter what the disaster, it all starts at home. It affects your family, your neighbors and your community.

As local resources are depleted, municipalities should look to their county (or counties) for assistance. This is the local response. The State of Colorado Emergency Resource Mobilization Plan provides for state mobilization when “all local and mutual aid resources have been depleted.” Authority to request state resource mobilization is vested in the county emergency manager, county executive, board of county commissioners, county sheriff and incident commander acting under a delegation of authority from any of the above.

At the state level, state resources and interstate mutual aid will provide the second line of emergency response and incident management support. “When State resources and capabilities are overwhelmed, governors may request federal assistance” (*National Response Plan, Quick Reference Guide*, May 2006). This request for assistance is made to the director of FEMA, who would recommend that the President issue a declaration of a disaster or emergency. A presidential declaration activates the Stafford Act.

### What is the role of citizens during a disaster?

Be responsible for yourself, your family and your neighbors.

Citizen responsibilities

- Be prepared – 72-hour kits, family plans, etc.
- Don’t become additional victims
- Know where and how to get information
- Follow the direction of those in authority
- Help yourself, your family, and your neighbors

### How is emergency management structured/budgeted?

Most often in Colorado, county offices of emergency management are within the county sheriff’s offices, although emergency managers also report to county commissioners, county managers, city managers, mayors and fire and police chiefs. Staffing most often is an emergency management coordinator with the director being the county sheriff or local police/fire chief or

city/county manager. Not counting the director, an office-of-one is the norm in Colorado.

County and municipality OEMs are, in most cases, funded through the local general fund. All county OEMs and municipalities with populations greater than 100,000 are also supported by the Emergency Management Program Grant. This federal grant can provide up to 50 percent of the budget for staffing, equipment and activities; however, historically, support is significantly less than 50 percent. In Colorado, the average amount of EMPG support for emergency management programs is 20-30 percent, with rural counties receiving a full 50 percent while “urban” counties like Jefferson and Denver and most municipalities receive around 10-15 percent of their total OEM budget. Some rural OEMs in less populated Colorado counties would not exist without this grant support.

### What is the role of city/county managers and elected officials during a disaster?

Local ordinances should detail the roles, responsibilities and powers of city and county managers.

City or county managers and their department/division directors compose the policy group. The role of the policy group is to issue emergency/disaster declarations, issue restrictions or modifications to business as usual (e.g. curfews, business closures, driving restrictions, etc.), suspend meetings as appropriate, authorize emergency spending, coordinate public information and other policy decisions as needed and appropriate.

Elected officials have the very important responsibility of reassuring the community. They are the face of government and by being visible assure the populous that government is still functioning and that everything that can be done is being done to keep the community safe. It is also the role of elected officials to support the actions and decisions of the policy group.

In the City of Arvada, the Emergency Operations Plan assigns the following responsibilities to elected officials:

- Authorize the city manager to initiate all actions necessary to develop the City's

EOP and to implement all or part of the plan prior to, during and after an emergency or disaster to protect the health and safety of the citizens of Arvada.

- Approve emergency resolutions as necessary to meet the needs of the disaster response.

### What are key attributes of a successful emergency manager?

The Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University offers the Emergency Preparedness Leadership Initiative program that teaches Meta-Leadership. This in-depth program focuses on the key attributes or dimensions that make a good emergency manager (Marcus, L. J., et al, *National Preparedness and the Five Dimensions of Meta-Leaders, National Preparedness Leadership Initiative*, Harvard University, 2007). The attributes of meta-leaders are:

- Know yourself – recognize your strengths and weaknesses and believe in life-long learning. The emergency manager will be in the spotlight during an emergency and must be the professional and the leader everyone expects.
- Know the situation – know what to expect and train for the unexpected.
- Lead your silo – champion your program in your jurisdiction to insure that your incident management team is trained and capable, your responders are ready to act, and your neighboring emergency managers are part of your system and you are part of theirs.
- Lead up – ensure the leaders of your organization are informed and are influenced by your abilities. To be successful, the emergency manager must have the support of community and agency leaders.

Connectivity – building networks to connect people and organizations that

are needed to address the phases of emergency management. Often this involves influencing people in organizations in which you have no authority.

### Why is emergency management important?

Emergency managers tie the four phases of emergency management — mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery — together through the planning process. It is the hope of every emergency manager that their community won't wait to learn from “the big one” the value of planning. The entire community benefits from preparedness education, self-help training and preparedness/response planning.

Emergency management is often referred to as an insurance policy. This profession is much more than that. Emergency managers are the bridge between the citizens of our communities and the response and recovery systems that assist in time of need. Many of the skills taught are rural skills that have been lost in the urban environment. Preparing for emergencies should become part of our culture the same way energy conservation has become everyone's concern.

To be as prepared as your community can be takes dedicated professionals working toward this end. Emergency managers may be invisible most of the time, but they are in the background ready to muster the resources needed to prepare, protect and assist our communities. As you hear and read about disasters striking different parts of the country, rest assured that you now have answers to many of the questions you had about the efforts of emergency managers and that if you have more, you won't be afraid to ask them.



A car on fire near Denver International Airport. Photo courtesy of Polly White.