

Community Safety Leadership

Are You Ready?

Municipal Emergency Preparedness & Response



New Jersey State League of Municipalities



MUNICH-AMERICAN RISKPARTNERS

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Acknowledgement

This primer draws on reports commissioned by the Bergen County Joint Insurance Fund and written by principals of Emergency Management Advisors L.L.C. (rg@emergencyadvisors.com). It also draws upon a wealth of materials published by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management.

Introduction

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 have made community leaders more aware of vulnerabilities posed by terrorism. For most municipal officials, heightened awareness is associated with a greater sense of responsibility for the safety of our families, neighbors, community and nation.

Is your community ready to respond to a terrorist incident or other large-scale emergency? This edition of the “Community Safety Leadership” series provides practical guidance on how to help your community to affirmatively answer this question. Response to a terrorist incident will take place within the context of the local emergency management function. As such, this primer reviews the essential elements of a community’s emergency management system.



Federal, State, and Local Roles

The current emergency management framework evolved from the “civil defense” needs of the Cold War era. With the end of the Cold War, emphasis shifted toward disaster relief, recovery and mitigation. In 1979, disaster-related responsibilities were consolidated into a newly created Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). State and local governments mirrored the changes at the federal level by adopting an “all hazards” approach to emergency management. The federal structure is expected to continue to evolve as the nation learns to adapt to terrorist threats.

In New Jersey, the most important organization for local officials is the Office of Emergency Management of the New Jersey State Police. Responsibilities of the state OEM include emergency planning, first responder training, organizing large-scale exercises and responding to major incidents. It focuses on four areas: severe weather, hazardous materials training and response, radiological preparedness and on overseeing the process of developing local emergency operation plans. In the event of a major emergency, the state OEM serves as the principal advisor to the governor. If a presidential declaration is issued and local governments become eligible for reimbursement of public costs, the state OEM plays a lead role in collecting information on damage, providing technical assistance to applicants, reviewing claims applications, disbursing grants and monitoring expenditures.

The state delegates emergency management functions to the county and municipal levels. Each county in New Jersey has an office of emergency management to provide technical support to municipalities and to review community emergency operation plans.

Mandates and “Best Practices”

To maximize readiness, municipalities should comply with relevant regulatory requirements and adopt common sense “best practices”. Municipal officials seeking to assess and upgrade their programs should strive to achieve the following goals:

Appoint an Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC) who is able to provide emergency management leadership in the community.



State law requires every municipality to appoint a resident to this position for a term of three years. The person filling this position should be capable of leading the emergency management function at the local level, and should play the pivotal role in the emergency planning process. Some communities assign the task to a municipal official with full-time duties while others have assigned citizen volunteers or part-timers. The candidate must be able to provide adequate

focus to the responsibilities of the position. In addition, he or she must be able to obtain the respect of other community leaders, particularly those in the public safety professions. Ideally, the individual:

- Should be experienced in the planning, development and administration of both municipal and emergency response activities, although many of these skills can be acquired through proper training;
- Should not have conflicting responsibilities to fulfill during an emergency, such as being an incident commander or head of a principal public safety service;
- Should not be subordinate to other public safety professionals in other aspects of their employment with the municipality.

The EMC must be recognized as having the authority to declare a “state of local disaster emergency” whenever a disaster has occurred or is imminent. This authority is provided by the New Jersey Emergency Management Act and specified in State Office of Emergency Management directives. This authority should be codified locally in the municipal emergency operating plan. In any major emergency, the EMC should be the person coordinating municipal resources. However, the EMC should not be the incident commander. This role can be performed by the police chief, fire chief, or other official specified in the municipal plan. If the right person is filling the EMC position and has been adequately trained, the governing body and chief executive officer should be comfortable with the statutory conference of such authority. In practice, the EMC will issue a declaration only after consulting with the mayor or administrator. The significant leadership role of the EMC during a disaster does not diminish and is not in conflict with the roles of other community leaders.

Every EMC must complete a home study course and attend a workshop as a condition for appointment. State Police guidelines go further by requiring every EMC to complete 24 hours of training per year. Municipalities need to provide adequate administrative and financial support to facilitate this level of training. In addition, EMCs should be encouraged to participate in professional emergency management organizations, especially those that permit networking with emergency managers from elsewhere in the nation where emergency planning practices are more advanced. EMCs should also be encouraged to obtain professional certifications, such as the Certified Emergency Manager and Certified Flood Plain Manager.

Establish a broad-based Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) that meets regularly to review emergency plans and improve response capabilities.

State and federal law require every municipality to have a functioning LEPC that meets at least once per year to review the municipal emergency plan.

The LEPC should include representatives of all municipal agencies involved in emergency response and recovery, as well as managers from any high risk or large industries in the community. By statute, the group is chaired by the emergency management coordinator. In addition to the leaders of the emergency services, the LEPC should include:

Mayor and/or administrator	Construction official
Other elected officials	Finance officer
DPW	Health officer
Engineer	Media representative
School representative	Risk manager (optional)
Public Relations Officer (Optional)	Operators of facilities subject to SARA Title III

In addition to reviewing the municipal emergency operations plan, the LEPC should conduct regular evaluations of community vulnerabilities and review the emergency plans of any high-risk facilities, including any schools and healthcare institutions.

The LEPC should meet at least four times per year. Ideally, it will meet monthly.

Elected officials that are not on the LEPC should attend at least one meeting a year to obtain a first hand exposure to emergency management challenges and resources.

Assuring the active participation of school representatives is a particularly important challenge. School officials are outside the normal organizational structure of the municipality and are thus at risk of being isolated from the integrative functions of local government. However, schools are custodians of a critical population (children) and resource (school facilities that are commonly designated as shelters) and must be intimately involved in the emergency planning process.



Similar efforts should be made to closely involve representatives from utilities, authorities, and other organizations that are not a formal part of the normal municipal government structure.

Conduct a broad evaluation of local vulnerabilities, encompassing hazards in adjacent jurisdictions, flood risks and vulnerabilities of public facilities.

Disasters are generally categorized as either natural, i.e., caused by a force of nature, or “technological.” The latter, also called “man-made” disasters, are caused by the failure of a system or piece of equipment, an accident, or an intentional act of man.

Disasters can also be classified as either predictable or non-predictable events. A hurricane, for example, is now relatively predictable because it can be tracked long before it reaches land.

On the other hand, fires, transportation accidents, chemical releases, terrorism and major incidents of school violence usually occur without warning. In these cases community officials must rely on established emergency plans that, ideally, will have anticipated the course of events. These plans should be incident specific, since a procedure that will work for one type of event may not work for another.

The local emergency planning process begins with a comprehensive analysis of community hazards and vulnerabilities, i.e., the likely impacts of those hazards. Any basic vulnerability analysis should consider the following issues:

Risk	Issues
Terrorism	What community resources or infrastructure could be the focus of terrorist attention? Have plans been made for continuity of government and government operations? What steps have been made to assure citizen and family preparedness?
Flooding	What areas are likely to flood during periods of severe weather or when drainage systems or dams fail (including those in neighboring communities)? What community assets are located in floodplains? How vulnerable are municipal records, communications, utilities and other basic infrastructure?
Other natural hazards	What is the likely impact of a severe hurricane or winter storm?
Transportation incidents	What are the risks posed by major transportation corridors in the community and in nearby towns? What is the likelihood of an air crash? Do any pipelines create special risks?
Technological incidents	What facilities in and near the community use or store hazardous materials and what are the risks? If a chemical release occurred, what areas would be affected?
Public facilities	What are the vulnerabilities of schools, healthcare facilities, high-rise apartments, transportation centers and other sites with large concentrations of people?
Large scale fire	What sites (both structures and undeveloped properties) are particularly vulnerable?
Infrastructure failure	What is the risk and likely impact of disruptions to power supply, water, sewer and other key systems?

The staff of the municipal office of emergency management, local emergency and support services and the LEPC must work together to identify the hazards, assess the risks and analyze the implications for the community. This evaluation will provide the foundation for the municipal Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) which will describe how the community is to prepare for, respond to and recover from the major vulnerabilities.

Update the municipal emergency operations plan once per year, disseminate the contents to key staff and coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions.

The format and organization for municipal EOPs in New Jersey have been standardized by the state Office of Emergency Management. The EOP must, by law, be updated every two years, but an annual review and update is recommended. EOPs are certified by the State Police every four years. The EOP of each municipality consists of multiple chapters or “annexes”. Each annex focuses on a key component of the emergency management program. The contents will reflect the unique characteristics and hazards of the community, but every municipal EOP will have these annexes:

Basic Plan (executive summary)	Hazardous materials
Alert, warning and communications	Public health
Damage assessment	Public works
Emergency medical services	Radiological protection
Emergency operations center	Resource management
Emergency public information	Shelter, reception and care
Evacuation plans	Social services
Fire services	Terrorism

Each community should also consider developing a separate annex with specific plans for any high risk facilities, such as schools, healthcare facilities, shopping malls, office complexes or high-rise buildings. While these plans are not required by the state, they will greatly enhance public safety and the preparedness of the emergency services.

The plan should be reviewed for functionality after every emergency event or exercise. If responders were forced to depart from the plan, or some assumption proved unrealistic, the problem should be discussed at an LEPC meeting and the plan should be modified. The municipal EOP should never be viewed as complete. It should be continually revised to reflect changes in the community and recommended improvements.



To help jurisdictions with terrorism planning, a jurisdiction’s existing EOP should be expanded to address:

- the unique planning requirements associated with weapons of mass destruction;
- the identification and protection of critical infrastructure;
- continuity of operations and government to ensure that essential services can continue without interruption, the needs of victims can be met, and the government can respond;
- mutual aid agreements as means to augment existing response organization resources.

The EOP should include plans for assuring the safety of the families of emergency responders. Public safety leaders, staff, and emergency responders can focus fully on their duties during an emergency only when their personal responsibilities for the safety of their own families is assured.

Implement a standardized “Incident Command System” (ICS).

No matter how much time, money and effort are invested in mitigating risks, developing emergency plans and training responders, the risk of a sudden emergency cannot be totally eliminated. When the unthinkable happens, local leaders will face a barrage of questions. Who is in charge? How do we respond to calls for assistance? How do we tell the public and news media? What are the priorities?

If the community has an effective emergency plan, most of the answers should be found there. How well those plans are actually put in action will depend on the ability of the response team to manage and control the event. The basic approach to incident management that has been adopted by New Jersey and an increasing number of states is a tool called the Incident Command System, or ICS. The State Police has mandated that ICS be the standard command and control system during emergencies, including fires, and federal law requires the use of ICS for hazardous materials incidents. In addition, the ICS approach must be integrated into emergency operation plans. Consequently, any local official who may become involved in the response to an emergency, including off-site support personnel, needs to understand the concept.

The approach provides a means to coordinate the efforts of separate agencies as they all work toward stabilizing an incident. Coordination is key in emergency management because most incidents will require the response of multiple agencies in one jurisdiction or involve multiple jurisdictions. Regardless of the size of an emergency or the number of organizations involved, there must be some coordinating mechanism to ensure that resources are used effectively, efficiently and safely.

Establish and equip a functional Emergency Operations Center (EOC).



In a large-scale disaster numerous incidents are likely to be reported. Whether there are two or two hundred events, the Incident Command System should be applied to every one of them. While ICS is an effective means of coordinating resources on the scene at individual incidents, some organizational mechanism is needed to establish priorities among the incidents and coordinate the emergency response across the entire community. That function is performed at the EOC.

An EOC is where the EMC, department heads, elected officials and volunteer agencies gather to coordinate the response to an emergency. It is normally activated only for large, area-wide events, such as those caused by severe weather and major technological incidents. The space is designed to provide the logistical tools and supplies to properly manage the disaster. Every department that plays a role in managing the event should have a representative in the EOC with the authority to make decisions for the individual agency. All personnel assigned to the EOC should be trained in its operation, and ideally, will have participated in exercises in which the EOC has been activated.

Conduct at least one drill or exercise per year.

State regulations require each municipality to conduct one drill or exercise per year. The drill should be designed with particular goals in mind or should test specific chapters of the municipal emergency plan and should involve both volunteer and paid responders. Any weaknesses revealed by the drill should result in changes in the emergency plan.

The State OEM recommends testing seven annexes per year. These exercises can vary in complexity. The simplest is a drill in which an individual organization, such as the fire department or rescue squad, practices its particular function. In most communities, the emergency services are conducting drills throughout the year. The next step is the “tabletop” exercise, in which agency representatives, assembled in a command center, are asked to respond to various scenarios in a simulated emergency. A third testing option, the “functional exercise,” is actually conducted in the field. Here, various organizations practice performing one or more coordinated activities such as a large-scale evacuation. The most extensive test is the full-scale exercise, which draws on all or most annexes and organizations. Such an exercise can be expensive and requires extensive planning, but is the most effective test, short of a real emergency.

Ensure that all emergency responders are properly certified.

The plan should not assign special tasks such as hazardous material incident command to individuals unless those persons have earned the required certifications. Documentation of these certifications should be readily available.

Develop the means to issue a town-wide alert in a timely fashion.

The response capabilities of every community need to include an effective and efficient method of conveying meaningful information to the public. In the event of severe weather or a major technological incident, whole neighborhoods (or an entire community) may need to be evacuated on very short notice. The people at greatest risk need to be contacted and told what to do and where to go, sometimes in a matter of minutes. In other, less threatening situations, emergency managers may be required to convey important public safety information to residents so that people can take preventive measures.

Most communities in New Jersey lack an effective means of alerting their residents of an impending emergency or a way of disseminating information about public safety. Many towns, rely on Cold War era air raid sirens as the principal alert mechanism, but these devices cannot convey meaningful information and are often confused with alerts meant for volunteer firefighters. In addition, sirens require electrical power and a local telephone connection to be activated, which makes them highly vulnerable during periods of severe weather.

New communication technologies may offer better alternatives. Two types of systems, now available at relatively low cost, give local officials the capability of issuing a near instantaneous alert to specific neighborhoods or an entire community. Messages can be pre-programmed, based on community vulnerabilities, or can be customized and broadcast at the time of an incident. One system, involving tower-mounted speakers, can deliver an audible message throughout the community, or just in high-risk areas. Another technology relies on telephones and can be thought of as a “reverse 911” type of system. With this approach, a community subscribes to a computer-controlled, emergency telephone notification system that can transmit a large volume of messages, either pre-recorded or customized for an unfolding event, to homes in a large geographic area. The disadvantages of automated telephone systems are their vulnerability to a failure of the telephone grid and the need to obtain unlisted numbers. Since each public warning technique has its own flaws, the judicious approach is to rely on multiple systems.

Financing Emergency Management

While many emergency preparedness steps are not costly, a complete program will require resources in order to be fully implemented. The emergency planning and budgeting processes must be integrated in order to achieve optimal results.

Integrate emergency planning with financial planning.

Whether approached incrementally or through more systematic means, the municipal budget is a reflection of a community's values and priorities. If emergency planning is to be seriously considered, it will have an impact upon the local budget.

The local operating budget should reflect compensation for the EMC, provide for training, reflect funding needed to upgrade equipment and systems, and provide for the mitigation of threats. Fortunately, intergovernmental aid is available to help reduce the impact of these efforts upon local tax rates.

Local purchasing ordinances and procedures should anticipate the need for emergency requisitions of supplies and services. New Jersey law permits local emergency purchases without formal bidding (N.J.S.A. 40A:11-6). The EMC should be familiar with these procedures and have written guidelines and access to the municipality's contracting officer.

Coordinate and plan with other municipalities.

While mutual aid is critical during emergencies, coordinating planning with neighboring communities may help to reduce expenses or to identify opportunities for sharing resources.



Take advantage of state and national grant-in-aid programs.

Local costs can be offset by:

- applying for matching grants for operating costs;
- using the rich assortment of on-line and classroom training resources offered by the state and federal governments;
- inviting state and county officials to assist in local planning efforts;
- taking advantage of federal surplus property programs;
- participating in pre-disaster flood and hazard mitigation grant programs;
- using the federal Public Assistance Program after a disaster strikes; and
- taking advantage of conservation and environmental grants which are geared toward flood control.

Some municipalities have also been successful in obtaining grants and other forms of financial assistance from the private sector.

Beginning in October, 2004, compliance with multi-hazard mitigation planning standards will be a key to both pre- and post-disaster funding.

Further Information

Further information and professional assistance on emergency management is available from County Emergency Management offices and from the State Office of Emergency Management. Non-profit professional and charitable organizations are also deep sources of both support and information. In some cases, retention of outside consultants can also be a cost effective way of upgrading systems and building consensus.

Further information on emergency management and these support organizations is readily available on the Internet, especially at the following web locations:

New Jersey Office of Emergency Management - County Emergency Management Coordinator's Association - <http://www.state.nj.us/njoem/>
Civilian Defense and Disaster Control Act - http://www.state.nj.us/njoem/a9_371
Duties and Powers of Municipal Emergency Management Coordinators and County Emergency Management Coordinators - http://www.state.nj.us/oem/county/law_directives_61.html
New Jersey State Police - <http://njsp.org/>
Federal Emergency Management Agency - <http://www.fema.gov/>
DHS | Department of Homeland Security | DHS Home Page - <http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/>
Ready.gov - From the U.S. Department of Homeland Security - <http://www.ready.gov/>
Public Entity Risk Institute - <http://www.riskinstitute.org/>
National Weather Service - <http://weather.gov/>
National Weather Service Mt. Holly Office - <http://www.erh.noaa.gov/er/phi/>
National Weather Service Upton New York Office - <http://www.erh.noaa.gov/er/okx/>
American Red Cross - <http://www.redcross.org/>
Salvation Army - <http://salvationarmy-usaeast.org/>
Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster - <http://www.nvoad.org/>
Institute for Business and Home Safety - <http://www.ibhs.org/>
Natural Hazards Observer - <http://www.colorado.edu/hazards/>
National Emergency Management Association - <http://nemaweb.org/>
CBS News Disaster Links - <http://www.cbsnews.com/digitaldan/disaster/disasters.shtml>
NJ Emergency Management Association - <http://njema.org/>
NJ Emergency Preparedness Association - <http://www.emergencymanagement.net/>
NJ Conference of Mayors - <http://www.njmayornet.com/>
NJ League of Municipalities Hometown Security Initiative - <http://www.njslom.org/>
IAEM - International Association of Risk Managers - <http://www.iaem.com/index.shtml>

Publications from these organizations that may be of immediate help includes the following:

“When Disaster Strikes - Managing Municipal Response Operations”
www.state.nj.us/njoem/preparedness_league.html

“Disaster Recovery - A Guide for Municipal Officials”
www.state.nj.us/njoem/preparedness_league_art2.html

“Local Emergency Planning Committees Enhance Disaster Plans, Resources”
www.state.nj.us/njoem/preparedness_lepcart.html

“Managing The Emergency Consequence of Terrorist Incidents”
www.fema.gov/onp/managing.shtm

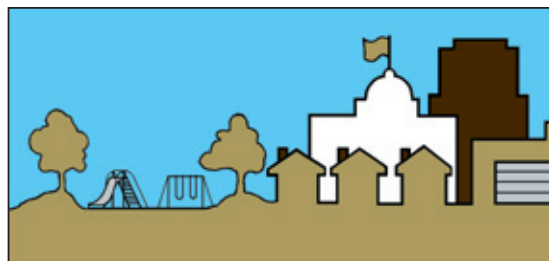
“Toolkit for Managing the Emergency Consequences of Terrorist Incidents”
www.fema.gov/onp/toolkit.shtm

Nine Easy Ways To Make Safety a Priority

Your municipality can reduce its accident rate by:

- Requiring that a formal safety program be in place and that its status be a recurring item on the governing body's regular workshop agenda;
- Committing to making municipal safety - for both residents and workers - a priority;
- Comparing your safety record to other towns;
- Determining how your safety program is structured and how it can be improved;
- Tracking your safety record to see if it's improving;
- Requiring monthly meetings of your community safety committee, focusing on public safety as well as municipal employee safety;
- Publishing the safety committee's minutes and distributing them to the governing body;
- Communicating potential hazards with your work force and encouraging them to share this information with you as well;
- Having a mechanism in place for employees and residents to report unsafe conditions and a procedure for remedying them on a priority basis.

If you want to serve on the steering committee or have questions regarding the CSL Program or suggestions for improving it, please contact us at (201) 587-0555.



Community Safety Leadership

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