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The Routine and the Catastrophic: Emergency Management After Hurricane Katrina

R. Steven Daniels

Hurricane Katrina revealed major weaknesses in the structure and operations of federal emergency management. Victims, the media, the public, and the U.S. Congress generally believed the response of the local, state, and federal executives and emergency management agencies to be slow, inadequate, and ineffective.1 The operational and structural failures catalogued in the aftermath of Katrina reflect policy dilemmas that go to the heart of emergency management theory and practice.

This chapter focuses on the impact that five of these core dilemmas—routine versus catastrophic disasters, reaction versus anticipation, decentralization versus centralization, political responsiveness versus comprehensive vulnerability management, and national security versus domestic disaster management—have had on the evolution of federal disaster policy. Underscoring these dilemmas are the responses of local, state, federal, and private emergency managers to a 2006 post-Katrina survey. The chapter concludes with a discussion of federal actions related to the issues raised in the survey.

THE ROUTINE AND THE CATASTROPHIC

Crises or routine emergencies generally involve situations that affect a limited geographical area and require the resources of one or two organizations. Disasters typically disrupt entire political jurisdictions and require intervention from regional or
state governments as well as from multiple local organizations. Catastrophes tend to disrupt local response and recovery completely, and require intervention at the regional and national levels.

Routine and catastrophic disasters generate different political and administrative stresses on the emergency management system. Naim Kapucu and Montgomery Van Wart suggest that catastrophic, major, or extreme disasters require more flexible and innovative administrative strategies than the standard bureaucratic practices associated with routine emergencies.²

Routine emergencies encompass both emergencies affecting one or two agencies in a local jurisdiction, and routine disasters affecting localities and regions but requiring state or occasionally national assistance.³ In routine situations, effective response and recovery reflects established emergency response plans, good communication and information technology, agreed-upon decision protocols, and formal systems of cooperation with boundary-spanning organizations.⁴ These procedures increase the likelihood that public expectations (emergent norms) and bureaucratic response will mesh to produce good outcomes for the affected population.⁵

Catastrophic, major, or extreme disasters, on the other hand, disrupt the normal processes of disaster management. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has described a catastrophic disaster as “an event having unprecedented levels of damage, casualties, dislocation, and disruption that would have nationwide consequences and jeopardize national security.”⁶ Although they have many of the characteristics of emergencies, catastrophic disasters overwhelm “the ability of state, local, and volunteer agencies to adequately provide victims with such life-sustaining mass care services as food, shelter, and medical assistance within the first 12 to 24 hours.”⁷ Kapucu and Van Wart indicate that the differences between routine emergencies and catastrophic disasters arise because catastrophes are unpredictable and unexpected, interrupt normal communications, disrupt and complicate decision making, and block the coordination of multiple organizations required for effective response.⁸ The disruptions increase the probability that a significant gap will occur between public expectations and bureaucratic performance.⁹ Thus, effective response to and recovery from catastrophic disasters require more than standard emergency management procedures can provide—notably, the ability to adapt and expand capacity, restore communications, provide flexible decision making, and expand coordination and goodwill.¹⁰

ANTICIPATION VERSUS REACTION

For much of its history, the federal government has generally reacted to natural and man-made disasters, focusing on the response and recovery components of the com-
Catastrophes tend to intervene at the regional and administrative levels, requiring more flexible and democratic practices associated with one or two agencies and regions but requiring formal systems of cooperation. The failure of the Management Agency to have unprecedented levels of preparation for the first 12 to 24 hours can increase the likelihood that the response will mesh and disrupt the normal management procedures, and disrupt the normal ability of state, local, and federal governments to respond effectively to and recovery from routine emergencies and disasters. The disruption between public expectations and governmental response fosters instrumental learning; it can also stimulate a reconsideration of the rationales underlying current policy ideas and thereby promote social learning.

Despite their natural tendencies toward reactive policy making in emergencies, substantial evidence shows that governments do learn from catastrophic events. One of the basic tenets of the organizational learning literature is that dissatisfaction with program performance serves as a stimulus to search for alternative ways of doing business. According to Peter May, after major policy failures, governments often demonstrate that they can develop more effective policy instruments or better implementation plans (instrumental learning), or that they can change the definition of problems, the scope of policy, or policy goals (social learning). This suggests that the failure of policy ideas, like an organization's effort to close performance gaps, fosters instrumental learning; it can also stimulate a reconsideration of the rationales underlying current policy ideas and thereby promote social learning.

Thomas Birkland argues that the movement from crises (or routine emergencies) to disasters to catastrophes increases the likelihood that organizations and political actors will learn from their mistakes and make better plans or more effective problem definitions, policies, or goals. On the other hand, such movement also tends to destroy those policy and political processes that facilitate learning. In short, the occurrence of a catastrophe can promote learning but does not guarantee it.

DECENTRALIZATION VERSUS CENTRALIZATION

The traditional model of disaster management is a bottom-up, decentralized model designed to respond to routine emergencies and disasters, and it does so very effectively. When an incident or disaster occurs, state and local governments assess the damage and determine the capability of the local jurisdiction and the state to respond. If the disaster exceeds those capabilities, the governor formally requests assistance from the president through the FEMA regional office, having first certified that the disaster is beyond the state's capability to respond, and that the state has provided all required assistance and followed all necessary procedures. On the basis of the summary material received from the regional office, the FEMA administrator forwards a...
disaster packet to the president, combining the governor’s request, relevant political information about congressional and gubernatorial representation, and the agency recommendation for action. The final decision to grant or deny aid rests with the president. The effectiveness of the system rests on the preparation, planning, and training of the local and state emergency management agencies and first responders.

Because catastrophic disasters disrupt local and state infrastructure for response and recovery, they may well destroy the capacity of local and state governments to respond, which thereby increases pressure on the national government to centralize response and recovery operations. However, given that the national government must marshal personnel and resources to replace those disrupted or destroyed during the catastrophic event, the response is generally slower, less effective, and more likely to receive public criticism. The government responses to Hurricanes Andrew and Katrina typify the difficulties associated with centralization during a catastrophic event that destroys the local infrastructure for response.

In addition, centralization serves the political needs of local and state jurisdictions. For most local jurisdictions, the economic benefits of emergency planning are not immediately apparent because the risk of suffering a disaster or catastrophe in any budget year is very small and the political benefits of long-term planning are limited. With the passage of the Federal Disaster Relief Act in 1950, local jurisdictions recognized that they could transfer some of the risks and costs of emergency planning to the federal government, and at least partially indemnify themselves against their own lack of planning. As a result, the federal government has imposed mitigation and preparedness requirements on state and local jurisdictions in most of the amendments to the act. However, the political realities of the system have gradually increased the amount of centralization in the disaster management system.

COMPREHENSIVE VULNERABILITY MANAGEMENT VERSUS POLITICAL RESPONSIVENESS

Throughout the period of formal federal disaster assistance (1950–2007), presidents weighing the factors involved in issuing a disaster declaration have had to confront the inherent conflict between professional emergency management standards and the pressure exerted on elected officials for political responsiveness. Emergency managers and academics have approached disaster management through various models—comprehensive emergency management, integrated emergency management, sustainable hazards mitigation, or comprehensive vulnerability management—but the ultimate goal has been the same: to develop “holistic and integrated activities directed toward
the reduction of emergencies and disasters by diminishing risk and susceptibility and building of resistance and resilience.”

However, disasters have political characteristics that make them ideal arenas for political intervention and the selective application of emergency management principles. First, disasters are focusing events: They combine objective criteria (scope, severity, and visibility), extensive media coverage, symbolic characteristics (rarity, unpredictability, and victim vulnerability), and widespread secondary consequences. This combination of impact, media attractiveness, symbolism, and significant spillover effects generates an expectation of presidential action. Second, both the president and Congress frequently treat disaster policy as distributive. In other words, presidents can treat disaster relief as a preference dispensed for political motives that may bear little direct linkage to risk or susceptibility, whereas members of Congress can treat disaster declarations as pork—benefits for their districts.

Amy Donahue and Philip Joyce distinguish between the effects of functional federalism (each level of government has emergency management competencies that it should emphasize) and legislative theory (each level of government has political incentives that may or may not relate to their competencies). Comparing the expectations from the two models to the reality of federal emergency management functions and funding, the authors conclude that political incentives significantly shape modern emergency management.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT VERSUS NATIONAL SECURITY

Just as political incentives conflict with the exercise of comprehensive vulnerability management, national security concerns often dominate disaster management functions. In its search for a proper balance, the federal government has combined, separated, and recombined several critical functions in its various federal disaster assistance agencies between 1950 and 2007:

- Coordination of emergency military, civilian, and industrial mobilization; and general preparedness planning
- Development, operation, and maintenance of emergency telecommunications systems (e.g., the Emergency Broadcast System)
- Administration of civil defense programs
- Administration of disaster assistance and insurance programs
- Administration of fire prevention and training programs.
Although the comprehensive emergency management model clearly suggests that the emergency management function concentrate on all disasters and emphasize dual-use strategies, national security concerns have almost always dominated or superseded disaster management functions. The dominance appears to arise from three sources: the primary role of the federal government in national security, the tendency of state and local jurisdictions to shift the political risks of disaster management to the federal government, and the greater prominence of national security compared with disaster relief in the public’s list of most important problems facing the country.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the focus was on civil defense. During the 1970s and 1980s, the focus shifted to continuity of government following a nuclear attack. In the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew, the National Academy of Public Administration noted that stovepiping hampered FEMA’s two main directorates: its larger-budget and top-secret National Preparedness Directorate, which administered the continuity-of-government function, and the State and Local Programs and Support Directorate, whose more limited funding clearly impeded FEMA’s ability to respond effectively to the hurricane. Since September 11, 2001, terrorism and homeland security have largely overshadowed disaster assistance in federal emergency management because of the public’s concerns over terrorism, the Bush administration’s policy focus on national security, and the placement of FEMA under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

DISCUSSION

The preceding discussion suggests that the five dilemmas have reinforcing influences on each other. Most disasters are routine. In the case of a routine emergency, the decentralized system of emergency management provides both standard response and recovery functions (reaction) and requirements for mitigation and preparedness (anticipation) that build on the model of comprehensive vulnerability management. However, as the scope of disaster increases, the likelihood of significant disruption of local and state capabilities also increases, making the political benefits and risks to the president and Congress more visible, and the pressure on the president to act overwhelming. As Saundra Schneider notes, the more disruptive the disaster, the greater the probability and necessity of federal intervention. But federal intervention necessarily slows response. Thus, the more disruptive the disaster and the greater the federal responsibility, the more widespread will be the belief that the federal response was a failure, regardless of the actual success or failure of federal intervention.

Both real and perceived policy failures often trigger policy learning. The passage of most of the significant amendments to the Federal Disaster Relief Act of 1950 followed large-scale or catastrophic disasters. In the aftermath of most disasters, the rou-
have reinforcing influ-
ence on the public's concerns
over the president to act.

The passage
of the Public
Relief Act of 1950
and other federal
actions have
reinforced the
importance of
routine procedures
for managing
catastrophic
events. However,
the residual
capabilities
and resources
are not fully
adequate to
handle such
disasters.

**SURVEY: THE FIVE DILEMMAS AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA**

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, it is useful to examine catastrophic disasters
from the perspective of local and state emergency managers, and to find out how those
managers view the dilemmas outlined above. With the approval and assistance of the
International Association of Emergency Management (IAEM), I administered a sur-
evay to the members of the association and to fifty-four state and territorial emergency
management directors (members of the National Emergency Management Association
[NEMA]) from May to July 2006. Despite a low response rate (3.0 percent, or 111 valid
responses from a total of 3,654 potential respondents), the surveys I received back
came from all ten FEMA regions, thirty-five states and territories, eighty-five counties,
four Canadian provinces, and one Australian state. The political jurisdictions (states
and counties) in the survey responses represented 26 percent of the U.S. population.

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**Figure 15-1. Most likely sources of catastrophic disasters in localities and states, IAEM-
NEMA survey, 2006.**

![Bar chart showing percentage ranking of disaster types.](chart.png)

- Percentage ranking type of disaster:
  - Tornado/Storm: 69%
  - Chemical/biological attack: 60%
  - Fire: 52%
  - Winter storm: 52%
  - Drought: 52%
  - Earthquake: 34%
  - Hurricane: 32%
  - Bombings: 24%
  - Chemical terrorism: 23%
  - Nuclear terrorism: 21%
  - Mudslides: 11%
  - Riots: 8%
  - Nuclear: 8%
  - Biological: 7%
  - Other: 6%
  - Volcanic: 4%

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Type of catastrophic disaster
Dilemma 1: Routine versus Catastrophic Disasters

Using FEMA's definition of a catastrophic disaster—an "event having unprecedented levels of damage, casualties, dislocation, and disruption that would have nationwide consequences and jeopardize national security"—the survey asked local and state emergency managers to identify the five most likely types of disaster to produce catastrophic results in their jurisdictions. As shown in Figure 15-1, the five most likely types of disasters identified by more than 50 percent of respondents are flooding, tornadoes and associated storms, chemical accidents, fires, and winter storms. Of those five types, four are natural and only one is human caused.

In addition, different FEMA regions ranked disasters very differently. Flooding influenced every region. Winter storms rated highly in New England and the mid-Atlantic; tornadoes were most prevalent in four midwestern and southern regions; hurricanes figured prominently in the Southeast; terrorism and riots/civil disturbances were among the most likely disasters to affect the Washington, D.C., region; and wildfires and earthquakes were most common in the West.

![Figure 15-2. Anticipation and reaction in Hurricane Katrina, closed-ended responses to IAEM-NEMA survey, 2006.](image-url)
In general, most emergency managers believe that natural disasters would generate catastrophic outcomes more often than human-caused accidents, and that accidents would occur more frequently than terrorism.

**Dilemma 2: Anticipation versus Reaction**

Survey respondents also evaluated the anticipation and reaction to Hurricane Katrina. They were asked to respond to ten statements on a five-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The ten statements shared four common dimensions:

- Flawed mitigation procedures and economic development decisions (two items)
- Inadequate state and local leadership and response (four items)
- Inadequate FEMA leadership and response (two items)
- Response was effective/scope of disaster beyond government control (two items).

With the ten closed-ended statements, emergency managers largely focused on two themes noted in Figure 15-2: flawed mitigation procedures and economic development decisions by all levels of government (68 percent), and inadequate state and local leadership and response (66 percent). Only half as many respondents believe that inadequate FEMA leadership and response was the problem (33 percent), and consid-
erably fewer believe that the response was effective or that the disaster was beyond government control (18 percent).

The survey also allowed respondents to provide open-ended responses (see Figure 15-3) to the question of anticipation and reaction. The most commonly cited reasons for the belief that government response was ineffective were inadequate planning, mitigation, and preparedness (25 percent); poor leadership (at all levels of government) (17 percent); inadequate response, recovery, execution, and communication (17 percent); and poor intergovernmental coordination (10 percent).

Several state, local, and private emergency management professionals identified one or more of these factors in their open-ended responses. William Cover, director of the Cass County, Nebraska, emergency management agency, suggested that the primary causes were “failure of coordination between levels of government, failure to exercise plans ahead of the disaster, and failure to use available plans during the disaster.” Another senior government official noted, “The major flaw appeared to be the coordination between the levels of government and an understanding of the federal response system.” One anonymous official argued, “The single most important reason for local government inadequacy was a failure to respond quickly in requesting fed-

![Figure 15-4. Decentralization and centralization: Appropriate level of control, IAEM-NEMA survey, 2006.](image-url)
eral aid while the federal government (FEMA) did not have experienced emergency management personnel in key positions due to political appointments and stripping of needed funding.” At least one official in the survey placed the blame directly on a failure to educate the public about the responsibilities of emergency management:

Communication, communication, communication. I spent a great deal of time yelling at the television during this event because of the lack of education and ignorance by the public, some government officials, and, in particular, the media, regarding emergency management responsibilities at the local, state, and federal levels. Emergency managers strive to keep relationships with all involved entities, but the combination of politics and the blame game takes the focus off the real issue: serving and protecting the public!

Dilemma 3: Decentralization versus Centralization

The survey also asked respondents to identify the appropriate level of government to control mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery activities in the case of a catastrophic disaster. Five statements focused on federal mechanisms, two focused on local and state governments, and one stated that no level was effective (see Figure 15-4). State and local emergency managers rejected centralization in the White House, an independent task force, DHS, and the military out of hand. More than one-third believe...
that no level would produce effective results. However, the majority of respondents agreed that the appropriate locus of control is the local government (61 percent), FEMA (57 percent), or the state government (55 percent), with no clear preference indicated.

The responses reflect the belief that the effectiveness of the system rests on the preparation, planning, and training of the local and state emergency management agencies and first responders. When respondents were asked to evaluate the adequacy of their jurisdiction's emergency operations plan on sixteen dimensions developed by David Alexander, their answers indicated that some significant gaps exist that may increase the likelihood that catastrophic disasters would disrupt their local and state response and recovery (see Figure 15–5). Their greatest concerns—indicated by the lowest percentages agreeing with the statements that articulated the dimensions—involve hav-

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**Figure 15–6. The evolution of presidential disaster declarations, 1953–2005. The vertical line indicates passage of the Stafford Act.**

Source: Federal Emergency Management Agency. Available through the Freedom of Information Act, FEMA FOIA Helpdesk, E-mail: FEMA-FOIA@dhs.gov, Telephone: (202) 646-3323
The majority of respondents (61 percent), FEMA survey preference indicated. The system rests on the preparedness management agencies rate the adequacy of their operations developed by David cos exist that may increase local and state response indicated by the lowest per-
mensions—involve hav-

Dilemma 4: Vulnerability versus Responsiveness

The IAEM-NEMA survey did not directly assess the need to achieve a balance between vulnerability management and political responsiveness; however, an examination of presidential disaster declaration activity between 1953 and 2005 clearly suggests a broadening definition of the federal role and the increasing political visibility of the disaster management process (see Figure 15–6).

Disaster requests, major disaster declarations, and turndowns all increased from 1953 to 1973, and then, despite some spurts, generally decreased until 1988. Throughout the period, the number of turndowns averaged 12.7 per year with the number exceeding twenty in only five years (1973, 1974, 1977, 1978, and 1980). By contrast, the number of requests and major disaster declarations increased significantly after the passage of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act) in 1988. Given that the number of turndowns remained relatively constant, this meant a significant increase in the approval rate for major disasters (from 65 percent before 1989 to 79 percent after).31

Using the percentage of major disaster requests approved as the dependent variable, I used dummy variable regression to test the impact of political responsiveness on the presidential disaster declaration process. Two variables seemed particularly relevant: the passage of the Stafford Act, which expanded the definition of major

<table>
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<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Sig. (one-tailed)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>64.8%</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter dummy</td>
<td>-14.6%</td>
<td>0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential election year</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>0.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage of Stafford Act</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-Squared</td>
<td>0.287</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of cases</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Federal Emergency Management Agency, available through the Freedom of Information Act, FEMA FOIA Helpdesk, at FEMA-FOIA@dhs.gov, telephone: (202) 646-3323
disasters to include human-caused disasters and signaled a significant change in the federal role in disasters; and presidential election-year politics, which put increased pressure on presidents to grant assistance in marginal cases. I also controlled for the Carter administration because presidential documents from the Carter Library clearly indicated that President Jimmy Carter was unusually reluctant to grant major disaster assistance. The results of the regression appear in Table 15-1.

Adjusting for other factors, President Carter granted 15 percent fewer major disaster declarations than other presidents prior to the Stafford Act; all presidents granted 8 percent more major disaster declarations during presidential election years than during other years; and Presidents George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, whose administrations followed the passage of the Stafford Act, granted 12 percent more major disaster declarations than their predecessors. These results suggest that political responsiveness has played an increasing role in the disaster declaration process. Both the increases during election years and the expansion of presidential declaration activity after the Stafford Act broadened the federal role in disaster assistance imply that presidents have become increasingly sensitive to the political effects of the disaster declaration process.

**Dilemma 5: Disaster Management versus Homeland Security**

The likely causes of catastrophic disasters reported above clearly suggest that emergency management professionals place terrorism relatively low (except in New York and Washington, D.C.). Yet homeland security has come to dominate disaster management funding. In fiscal year 2008, FEMA's budget, the State Homeland Security Program, Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention, the Urban Areas Security Initiative, and Transportation and Infrastructure Protection account for nearly 80 percent of the funding for emergency management performance grants to state and local governments.

What solutions did emergency managers suggest to redress the balance between disaster management and homeland security? The survey asked respondents to evaluate six statements concerning the relationship between emergency management and homeland security. According to their responses, the majorities of respondents believe that the FEMA administrator should have extensive emergency management experience (92 percent), should report directly to the president (86 percent), and should separate from DHS (79 percent). Less than a quarter of the respondents believe that mitigation and preparedness should be separate from response and recovery (23 percent), and far fewer believe that the president should abolish FEMA and replace with another agency (4 percent), or that homeland security functions should dominate emergency management functions (3 percent).
To gain specific details, the survey asked respondents to place themselves in the role of the FEMA director and address the following question:

If you were the director of FEMA, what key changes would you make to improve agency performance and achieve the agency’s goals as listed in the FY 2003–2008 Strategic Plan (1. Reduce loss of life and property; 2. Minimize suffering and disruption caused by disasters; 3. Prepare the nation to address the consequences of terrorism; 4. Serve as the nation’s portal for emergency management information and expertise; 5. Create a motivating and challenging work environment for employees; and 6. Make FEMA a world-class enterprise.)

The EM professionals made six broad recommendations noted by at least 20 percent of respondents:

- Separate emergency management and homeland security (33 percent)
- Recruit expertise and experience (32 percent)
- Restructure and refund FEMA (27 percent)
- Improve intergovernmental coordination (24 percent)
- Focus on comprehensive emergency management (24 percent)
- Improve preparedness and training (21 percent).

**Discussion**

The survey revealed a fundamental discontinuity between the professional concerns of local and state emergency managers and the evolving structure of federal emergency management within DHS. Most local and state managers emphasized that the most likely cause of catastrophic disaster in their jurisdictions is natural in origin. They placed primary responsibility for the failures of mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery after Katrina on the local and state governments in Louisiana and Mississippi. They also identified significant shortcomings in emergency management planning that might increase the disruption of local and state response during a catastrophic disaster. While they disagreed about the appropriate level for dealing with catastrophic disaster, placing nearly equal emphasis on local, state, and FEMA responsibility, they strongly argued for the separation of FEMA from DHS and the placement of greater emphasis on comprehensive emergency management.

However, after 9/11 and the passage of the Homeland Security Act, the structures and functions of federal emergency management shifted dramatically, and the primary emphasis of DHS (and FEMA) became homeland security, with the bulk of state and local grant assistance and program funding directed toward domestic terrorism. A major restructuring of FEMA in 2003 and 2004 shifted preparedness functions to a
separate division within FEMA. In addition, the location of FEMA within the organizational structure of DHS limited the agency director's direct access to the president; most communication had to go through the secretary of DHS.

AFTERMATH: THE POST-KATRINA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT REFORM ACT OF 2006 AND THE RESTRUCTURING OF FEMA

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, emergency management officials and elected politicians issued many recommendations for the improvement of federal emergency management. Most of these recommendations mirror the recommendations and policy changes identified by the respondents to the IAEM-NEMA survey. Several elected politicians, including Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.), Rep. Bob Etheridge (D-N.C.), Sen. Daniel Akaka (D-Haw.), Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.), and Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), sponsored or supported legislation to make FEMA independent of DHS, establish a direct reporting line to the president, or both. IAEM and NEMA lobbied extensively during the period from September 2005 to October 2006 to strengthen FEMA's emergency management authority, bring preparedness back into FEMA as part of the comprehensive emergency management model, and increase funding for and maintain the natural disaster components of Emergency Management Performance Grants.

After considerable debate, President Bush signed the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act 2007 on October 4, 2006. Title VI of the act—the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (Post-Katrina Act)—sought to restructure federal emergency management generally, and FEMA specifically, to answer the criticisms arising from the failures of governmental performance during that hurricane. Among other things,34

- The act transferred preparedness functions back into a restructured FEMA.
- The act requires FEMA “to lead and support efforts to reduce the loss of life and property and protect the nation from all hazards through a risk-based system that focuses on the expanded comprehensive emergency management components of preparedness, response, recovery, and hazard mitigation.”35 The expanded concept of comprehensive emergency management includes “protection.”
- The act grants FEMA independent status within DHS, similar to the status of the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Secret Service.
- The act prohibits the secretary of DHS from separating or transferring FEMA functions or resources, and requires the secretary to follow statutory appropriations requirements when allocating funding to FEMA.
The act grants the FEMA administrator (new title) the rank of deputy secretary of DHS. As such, the FEMA administrator reports directly to the president, the Homeland Security Council, and the secretary of DHS; may receive cabinet status during a national emergency; and must have emergency management or homeland security experience (although the White House has contested the limitation on presidential appointment power).

- The act allows FEMA to have up to four deputy administrators appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate.
- The act requires FEMA to develop and maintain robust regional operations headed by regional administrators who have extensive emergency management and homeland security experience.
- For disaster response, the act provides the administrator greater authority to preposition resources or unilaterally provide assistance without a state request.
- The act requires the appointment of a national advisory council and ten regional advisory councils to provide state, local, nonprofit, and private expertise to FEMA and its regional offices. It also creates regional strike teams to provide assistance during disasters.
- The act creates a disability coordinator, a chief medical officer, and a small-state and rural advocate. The administrator appoints the first, the president selects the third, and the president with the advice of the Senate chooses the second.
- Finally, the act makes changes to ensure greater flexibility in the delivery of services and assistance during the response and recovery phases of a declared disaster.

FEMA has begun to implement these initiatives through the creation of the National Preparedness Directorate and the development of the Catastrophic Disaster Planning Initiative. In addition, in its FY 2008 budget request, FEMA has begun the process of converting its short-term response employees into permanent employees.

A comparison of the policy recommendations of the post-Katrina reports of the White House, the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, and the Government Accountability Office, the respondents to the IAEM-NEMA 2006 survey; and the actions taken by Congress and the president suggests that Congress and the president have listened. The Post-Katrina Act has strengthened FEMA, reestablished the direct linkage between the FEMA administrator and the president, refocused the agency on comprehensive emergency management, and recognized the importance of regional differences in catastrophic disasters. The only federal recommendation not implemented is the separation of FEMA from DHS. However, the actions taken to increase
the status of FEMA within DHS and reestablish direct reporting lines to the president have achieved much of the advantages associated with independence.

At the same time, though, the Post-Katrina Act does little to ensure that state and local jurisdictions make their emergency operations plans more comprehensive, retrofit their emergency operations centers, and make economic development decisions that promote comprehensive vulnerability management. These actions will require a greater commitment from state and local elected officials with support from the state and local emergency management community.

Endnotes


3 Kapucu and Van Wart, “Evolving Role of the Public Sector.”
to ensure that state and comprehensive, ret- development decisions these actions will require a support from the state


5 Schneider, Flirting with Disaster.
8 Kapucu and Van Wart, “Evolving Role of the Public Sector.”
9 Schneider, Flirting with Disaster.
10 Kapucu and Van Wart, “Evolving Role of the Public Sector.”
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