

Disaster Response Management

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Synonyms

Response resource organization, emergency response

Definition

There are four phases to emergency/disaster management: mitigation/prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. Response includes the organization of personnel and resources and the delivery of services to victims and communities with the goal of ending the emergency/disaster. For purposes of discussing this topic the term “emergency management” will be used, since disaster is a type of emergency. (See the entry on “Crisis, Emergency, Disaster and Catastrophe.”)

[Insert “Figure 1 – Phases of Emergency Management” here.]

Introduction

Unwelcome community events (crises, emergencies, disasters and catastrophes) require that the resources of the community be organized to deliver services to the victims in the most efficient and effective manner. To meet this goal, the emergency management organization for the community develops a threat assessment, creates plans for responding to these various potential events, organizes personnel and materiel resources to implement the plans - including training, equipping and exercising – and works with the community to prepare for self-support during potential events. The response becomes necessary when the threat materializes as an event, and people, property and/or the environment are threatened with harm or damage. The response may come from the local community or from many levels of government, depending on its severity and the scope and specialized nature of the response that is needed.

All Disasters Are Local

Various nations organize for response in different ways, but all disasters are local. They occur in some town or village, some state or region, and the victims are the people, property and environment in that area. In a crisis the area may be very limited – just one neighborhood or small portion of a community – and emergency response resources within the community may be adequate to effectively respond to save lives and property. However, in a catastrophe the area may include nations on two continents, as in the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. Such an event uses immediate aid from local resources, but requires additional nationwide and even international responders to augment available local resources. Regardless of the breadth of the event, it is people in local areas who experience it, and who are present to start rescue and delivery immediate emergency medical care. Unless they are evacuated they experience the short and long-term recovery, and have a vested interest in all phases of the emergency management cycle.

In some nations, such as the United States, all initial response resources are owned by the local government. For example, police, fire, emergency medical services and transportation department personnel all work for the locally elected officials. This means that the initial response is centralized in the impacted community, which may enhance the speed and coordination of the resources, but which may also mean that responders and their families are victims of the event. In some nations, such as Japan, the initial response resources are located at different government levels. For example, the fire department works for the mayor of the city, while the police department works for the governor of the prefecture. Some nations, like Italy, have a national fire corps based in the Ministry of the Interior, but the Fire Chief of the province is still the incident commander at a scene. In Italy they have created uniform regional disaster resource caches and uniform response training, to permit rapid, coordinated assistance across Italy’s 20 regions and 101 provinces. Because of the strategic location of these equipment caches across provinces, at least nine emergency response vehicles can be brought to the scene of an emergency event within one hour. In other nations the emergency response