

TO: Wildfire Matters Review Committee

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Imagine a world that begins with waking up assessing the hazards and the threats for the day, having to determine what local capability is available to deal with the threat which changes daily, in an environment that cannot be predicted with any degree of accuracy, and loving every minute of that day.... this is the beginning of your emergency manager's day.

The plight of the emergency manager is first getting people to understand and then think or feel that it is important.....

We are not asking today for millions of dollars or for you to move or change heaven or earth. We are here to ask for your understanding and appreciation for the importance of emergency management.

History

Since the days of the World War II and the Cold War era Civil Defense programs provided civilian preparedness and security. Our current homeland security mission can be strongly linked to this history of defending the homeland from domestic and foreign threats. This model has dominated the national preparedness structure over the past 60 plus years with occasional national moments highlighting the impacts of natural disasters. FEMA was created in 1976 as the Federal coordination agency for natural disasters and administration of the Robert T Stafford Act. On September 11, 2001 with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, Pentagon and Flight 93 emergency management shifted the focus to security and anti-terrorism. With the integration of FEMA into the new Department of Homeland Security this focus became even more pronounced. In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina reminded local, state and federal officials that while homeland security is important, we will also still face large-scale natural disasters every year, thereby requiring a more comprehensive framework integrating the two schools of thought. Emergency Management's professional mission is deeply rooted in the game changing events of the past and will continue to evolve in our changing environment.

In Colorado the emergency management architecture is comprised of emergency managers working in government, private, non-profit and volunteer organizations. Emergency Management operates on four planes which are local, county, state and federal. Due to the diversity in architecture and differing local to federal missions, emergency management programs and capabilities span a wide range of activities and subject-matter expertise. Influences on emergency management functions range from community development issues such as planning and land use, emergency services functions, infrastructure stability, community concerns and policy issues. Emergency managers also serve under many structures throughout the state such as county commissioners, county administrators, city managers, special district boards, department directors, police and fire departments to name a few. Emergency managers and programs are coordinated and supported through two state-wide structures, the Department of Homeland Security- Office of Emergency Management (DHSOEM) and the Colorado Emergency Management Association (CEMA).

Our political, social and economic environment has increased in complexity over the last several years, leading to greater demand for coordinated efforts during large-scale emergencies and disasters. Since 2005 the mission of Emergency Management has transitioned into the professional form it exists as today. The broad mission of mitigation, preparedness, protection, response and recovery are applied nationally as true and guiding principles. It is in the application of this mission in Colorado that truly remarkable change and capability has been created over the past ten years. A few examples.....

Mitigation:

Wildland fuels mitigation projects occur throughout Colorado in an effort to reduce the risk of wildfires. One does not typically think of the City and County of Denver having a wildland problem but Denver has developed a fuels mitigation program for its 14,000 acres of forested and vegetated lands.

Many communities also have developed local hazard mitigation plans that create a community-wide planning effort. The hazard mitigation plan identifies hazards and develops mitigation strategies to reduce risks. As the density increases in Colorado in these high risk areas mitigation is critical in saving lives and property. Because of this, emergency managers must be involved in the planning, land use and legislative discussions to represent a critical view point.

Preparedness:

Preparedness is the cornerstone of any emergency management program. It involves the planning, training, exercise and community outreach programs that ensure agencies and the public are ready for when disasters occur. A few examples of preparedness efforts throughout Colorado include:

- Ready Colorado provides preparedness programs for individuals and businesses state-wide.
- The inter-mountain alliance which has connected all mountain communities together to be self-sustaining and supportive to each other. They responded to the challenge during the 2013 flood in Boulder.
- The City and County of Denver has an aggressive Citizen Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program which trains citizens how to operate during a disaster.
- Regional and state-wide training & exercise plans and programs are developing transferrable capabilities that can be surged into an affected disaster event.
- CEMA and DHSOEM with the support of the Colorado State Fire Chiefs, Sheriffs Association and Police Chiefs Association completed the first ever state wide response and resource mobilization workshops. The outcome of this effort was to facilitate local workshops focusing on response organization, communications, mutual-aid to resource mobilization, assess plans and processes in place and record challenges and best practices for future local planning efforts. The workshops goal of increasing understanding state-wide of the State Resource Mobilization System, Inter-agency dispatch, DFPC EFF process, disaster declaration process and disaster funding and finance was achieved.

Response:

Where management of an Emergency Operations Center was once considered a luxury, it is now a public expectation and an essential function in emergency management. The proliferation in EOC capabilities across the state over the past five years makes supporting first responders and providing assistance to community unmet needs possible. DHSOEM created an Emergency Managers Academy that prepares emergency managers to manage an EOC and perform related duties.

The State now has a Resource Mobilization Plan and System that works. The system was used successfully during the Black Forest Fire, Flagstaff Fire, 2013 Floods & 2015 Floods. Local Emergency Managers are using this system to build local resource mobilization plans like Pitkin County. The effort in Pitkin County is truly remarkable with high involvement from first responders, legal advisors and finance departments.

Recovery

The state has had its fair share of recovery opportunities over the past few years. Recovery planning is a gap state-wide as the focus tends to lean toward the response aspects of an emergency or disaster. But the real heavy lift is in the recovery process, which involves all local agencies/departments, taxes local resources, and affects community planning efforts for many years.

A great example of strong recovery work is the Rio Grande Watershed Emergency Action Coordination Team (RWEACT). Following the 2013 West Fork Fire this group came together and involved the USFS, CSFS, BOCC, hydrologists, CWCB and local towns and first responders to deal with the consequences of a post wildfire world. The Counties of Hinsdale, Mineral, and Rio Grande develop capabilities to deal with the new risks of flash flooding and debris flows / landslides. The group developed improved response coordination, early warning and notification plan, public education programs, exercises to test plans and funding to put in place portable Doppler radar systems.

Role in Wildfire

The emergency manager's role will vary from county to county and in urban to rural areas. During a wildfire there are four significant responsibilities of the emergency manager (1) crisis management, (2) consequence management and (3) disaster declaration process management. Crisis management is all the great work being done by first responders within the incident command system and incident footprint. Emergency managers generally are in a support and coordination role and the EOC / Incident command interface is critical. EOCs provide communication coordination, resource mobilization, information management, situational awareness and policy group support. The emergency manager is usually the EOC manager during an event.

The consequence management responsibility deals with all the problems outside of the command footprint and usually comes from the decisions made by command and other policy makers. For example, crisis management may involve the need to notify and evacuate homes threatened by the fire, but consequence management involves the transportation, sheltering and unmet needs of the residents because of that evacuation. Consequence management requires a strong commitment from local government, non-governmental agencies and the private sector to effectively manage. The emergency manager's ability to build a multi-agency coordination system is critical to effective consequence management. Other consequence management duties include unmet needs, access and functional needs, coordinating with Volunteer Agencies Active in Disasters (VOAD), donations management, crisis community mental health, animal sheltering and disaster assistance centers.

The ability to effectively and efficiently assess damages or impacts within a community allows for a quick decision-making process to determine state and federal disaster declarations. This is important because a disaster declaration shifts the posture of a community to respond by activating emergency purchasing procedures, accessing emergency funds and requesting county, state and federal assistance. Consequence management benefits immensely from efficient and timely declarations as well, since additional support will be made available to the affected community in multiple areas of expertise. It also provides a quick glimpse into the future recovery struggles that lie ahead.

Lastly, recovery does not begin once the response is done, it begins the minute lives are disrupted and property or infrastructure is lost. The ability to lean forward and activate a recovery plan, damage assessment teams and recovery management structures is essential. The first step of recovery in many cases maybe the implementation of Continuity of Operations Plans to ensure government facilities and programs are not severely affected.

The Ask

Authority and responsibility for emergency management tasks vary by jurisdiction and span a wide-range of agencies and departments. No one agency will ever have all the authority over a large-scale incident. For this reason, emergency managers are critical. They are the conductors in a large orchestra that only functions when everyone works together.

We ask that CEMA be considered as a necessary organization to assist this committee in an advisory capacity on emergency management related issues. Our association has over 160 members from all levels and sectors of emergency management. CEMA also is connected to the International Association of Emergency Managers. CEMA is highly responsive and can provide a state wide perspective to issues from a rural, urban, plains to mountain perspective.

We ask that the committee consider solutions beyond wildfire efforts in order to create efficiency in disaster response and recovery, provide funding sources for recovery programs, support mitigation programs to reduce risk and reduce suffering and unmet needs in vulnerable populations. The all-hazards capability is a must because consequences of wildfire often include cascading events, such as flash flooding, landslides, debris flows, infrastructure damage and other threats immediately following the last hot ember being extinguished. If we do not consider emergencies in a holistic fashion, we are only addressing a portion of the problem.

The Role of the Emergency Manager Beyond Wildfire

We all know the saying “jack of all trades, master of none”. This does not apply to emergency managers. Emergency managers need to be a renaissance person, committed to learning the art and science of many professions or trades.

Emergency managers today must be qualified and experienced planners, trainers, educators, facilitators, program managers, coordinators, leaders and the last responders. A new role emerging for emergency managers is resiliency. Emergency managers are the ideal audience to engage in this endeavor because creating connections, building relationships, developing and linking capabilities is at the heart of emergency management.

I hope this presentation helps you to better understand emergency management’s history and where it serves today. More importantly I hope that the examples of current work and the state of emergency management makes you think or feel that the work of emergency managers is important.