

The Role of the Emergency Manager: Has It Changed Since 9-11-01?

By Michael J. Fagel, Ph.D., CEM

For years, many have defined emergency management as the organization that is known by responses to weather related events, natural disasters that affect the public. At the end of the last decade (the 1990's) we were faced with a potential massive challenge brought on by the impending Y2K "rollover" that brought out a whole new concept to the public.

After the World Trade center attack in 1993, we have become more cognizant of the potential for terrorist activities on US interests. Then, April 1995 saw the horrific Oklahoma City bombing. More worldwide attacks occurred, 2001 saw the attacks on 9-11 at the World Trade Center in New York City, The Pentagon and the crash in Pennsylvania.

Emergency management has come to the front of awareness again. We are on the forefront of planning and coordination. We have been involved in ALL RISK, ALL Hazard Planning for decades.

Since 9-11, we have been called upon to help our organization prepare for response to terrorist activities. The threat of Biological, Nuclear, Incendiary, Chemical and Explosive scenarios have been considered in the risk management programs in earnest these last 7 years. The events of 9-11 have reinforced our efforts in these areas.

Operational Security issues have become more important to various officials since those events. We have been given new focus based on real events. No longer are we planning for the if, but WHEN.

Over the years, Emergency management has been generally a quiet role, often relegated to agency officials that were appointed to the position as a collateral duty. States have been involved in training and support to local emergency management.

These roles have increased at both the state and local levels for the last several years. Many communities were involved in threat assessment and state planning for the next wave of events, Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).

How are we different today than on September 10, 2001?

Initially, our communities were placed on heightened alerts. Our programs for continuity of government (COG) have been an important element of our varied emergency operation plans. (EOP)

Emergency managers (EM) have become a key component in government operations of most communities and counties. The role has always been that of a resource as

well as coordination with all the local government partners during a time of emergency, crisis or disaster. The EM has now garnered new responsibilities in these changing times.

Homeland security is now a key additional coordination role in many EM offices.

Always ready to open and operate the Emergency Operations Centers (EOC), the EM has now been involved in discussions of Operational Security (OPSEC) in their respective jurisdictions.

Since the latter part of the last decade, each of the 56 FBI field offices has had an agent involved in WMD support to local and state governments. Also, with over 400 resident agencies of FBI field representatives, we have had a great resource in sharing our operations with the FBI staff. We have opened up lines of communication that were never thought of before.

After Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, the federal government redoubled its efforts to support local first responders.

Emergency Managers have long been key in coordinating the organizations response during any crisis that involves multiple agencies, jurisdictions or inter-governmental operations.

That role became even more apparent during the first moments after the 9-11 events that rocked our nation and the world. EOCs were stood up in state capitols, counties and localities around the nation to help coordinate and prepare for the unfolding of events.

Businesses have been getting much more interested in emergency planning. Cities have begun to evaluate and enact legislation to enhance and require more stringent emergency planning, high-rise evacuation training and other measures to enable a better response.

The World Trade Center evacuation in 2001 was responsible for saving many thousands of lives. I spent over 100 days at Ground Zero, supporting FDNY in many phases of the efforts. I recall speaking to literally hundreds of people who escaped with their lives because they had PRACTICED emergency evacuations. Since the 1993 world trade center attack, millions of dollars had been spent on upgrading the twin Towers emergency capacity. Stairwells were enhanced, emergency lighting, as well as redundant command posts all aided in the evacuation.

The building mangers invoked their disaster plans almost immediately. Many of the building officials stayed on their post to help evacuate, sadly, almost 550 people lost their lives in public service to others that day.

I spent weeks helping to create an emergency plan for the WTC site at ground zero. Safety, Logistics, Security were all elements of the ever-changing document.

Emergency management has finally become of age in this series of horrific events. We have always been involved in natural disasters and crisis management, now; we have added the WMD scenarios to our ALL RISK, and ALL HAZARD planning.

As a newly “discovered” resource, we have been involved in more planning meetings to support our organizations. In some communities, EM had been relegated to a caretaker position. That is not happening now. We now have a seat at the table with our response partners. Every agency has a stake in emergency operations.

Our professional organization, the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), has been in the forefront of helping build better relationships. We at IAEM established a professional credential with a rigorous screening and testing process to elevate the status of the profession. The IAEM has a Certified Emergency Manager (CEM) credential that is now recognized as a level of achievement in federal state and military organizations as a hallmark of achievement in this profession. IAEM works with state federal and the international community in much the same way LOCAL emergency managers work to support their own agencies. We have the ability to help bring assets to bear during a crisis. During the WTC events, several members of IAEM were deployed through various organizations to support the city and state during that crisis. (See sidebar.)

Emergency management is an evolutionary process, much like the plans we are continually improving. Emergency managers will continue to be an important asset to the organizations in which we serve. Our roles *have* been expanded with the advent of WMD issues. Exercise and training opportunities are often coordinated through these offices. Businesses have now added emergency management as a collateral duty.

I have spent many years the business community as well as over three decades of public service. We have seen more importance being placed on emergency planning and training in the last decade, and even more so today.

Safety and security departments and staff are now taking on an enhanced role in supporting emergency management. We are even seeing a merging of some safety, security operations in the private sector to now being called Office of “Homeland” security in their respective jurisdictions and facilities.

For many years, I have advocated a closer working relationship with emergency management and safety practitioners. We need to open up all lines of communication between all disciplines. As I wrote in a September 2000 article published in the *NDPO Bulletin*, it is not a matter of if, but WHEN.

We must be prepared to help bring all parties to the table to begin the planning process in earnest. Exercises, drills and planning help to foster a better understanding and build TRUST of the capabilities of your response and planning partners. It now up to US to make a difference.

About the Author:

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[Sidebar 1 to IAEM Article]

[header] About IAEM

The International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to promoting the goals of saving lives and protecting property from disasters. IAEM's more than 1,900 members represent all levels of government, industrial, commercial, educational, military, private, non-profit and volunteer organizations in the U.S. and around the world. IAEM makes its members' voices heard through active participation in federal-level working groups, and it offers a unified voice to help educate federal legislators and the executive branch about the impact of policies on emergency management. The foremost benefit of joining IAEM is the opportunity to network with and learn from emergency management professionals from around the world. The 50th IAEM Annual Conference & Exhibit will be held on Oct. 12-16, 2002, in Columbus, Ohio, the city where IAEM was founded. For more information on IAEM membership and activities, visit www.iaem.com.

[Sidebar 2 to IAEM article]

[header] Certified Emergency Manager Program®

The ultimate credential in emergency management, the Certified Emergency Manager® designation, is administered by IAEM. Internationally recognized, the CEM® Program was created by IAEM to raise and maintain professional standards. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) and a host of allied organizations supported the program's development. Certification is a peer review process administered through IAEM, and you need not be an IAEM member to be certified. For details on CEM® Program requirements, visit the IAEM Web site at www.iaem.com.

[Sidebar 3 to IAEM Article]

[header] IAEM Scholarship Program

In 1999, IAEM established a scholarship program to nurture, promote and develop disaster preparedness by furthering the education of students studying the field of emergency management. Through donations from individuals, companies and organizations, IAEM's goal is to raise \$100,000 to fund scholarship awards to undergraduate or graduate students enrolled in an accredited college/university program, pursuing a degree that includes courses in emergency management and/or community

planning. The first IAEM scholarship was awarded at the IAEM 2001 Annual Conference. Contributions to the IAEM Scholarship Program are tax-deductible.

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