

2023 WHITE PAPER

EMPOWERING EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT TO MEET CURRENT AND EMERGING THREATS

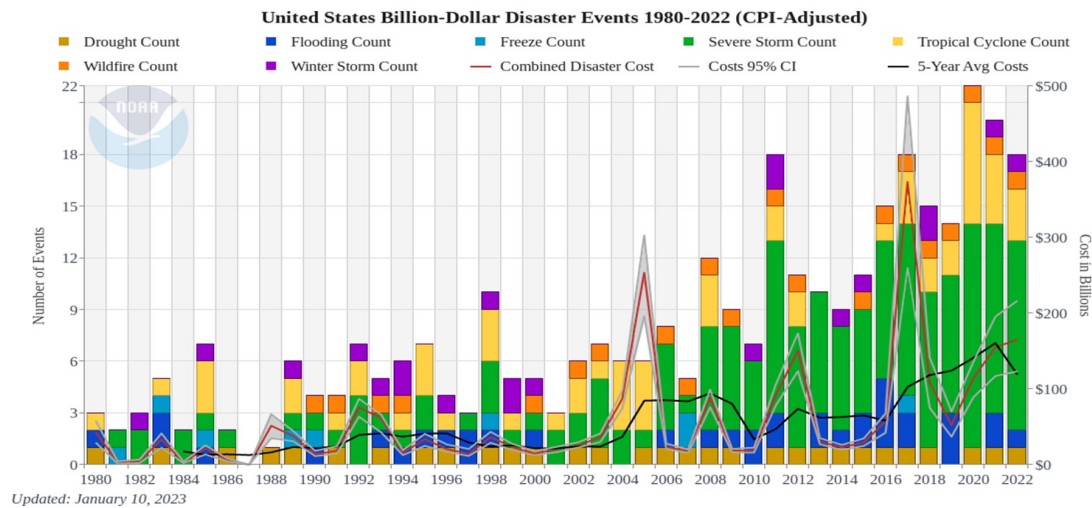
KEY ISSUES:

- 1** Disasters are occurring with exponentially greater frequency and complexity, and at a greater cost to state government revenues and the overall economic health of the state. A strong emergency management (EM) program can help minimize those economic impacts and expedite recovery.
- 2** State emergency management agencies are underfunded and understaffed, and as such are challenged to deal with the changing threat landscape and a constant cycle of disasters and emergencies.
- 3** States must invest significantly more funding to build greater emergency management capacity to deal with current and emerging hazards and threats. Current funding levels for most emergency management agencies (EMAs) are wholly inadequate to address the types of events that states are experiencing along with expanding mission areas.

Background

The increasing frequency, severity, and complexity of disasters require a greater level of engagement by state EMAs than at any previous point in time. Many EMAs are also being asked to provide support to a growing number of challenges not related to natural hazards such as cyber-attacks, school safety, homelessness, the opioid crisis, and humanitarian support for migrants. These types of events, and others, are placing tremendous strain on the current emergency management system.

Figure 1 shows the national trend for increased weather-related disasters. In the decade of the 1980s, states averaged 3.1 disasters a year that exceeded \$1 billion in cost-adjusted dollars. In the last three years, there have been an average of 20 weather-related disasters per year that exceed \$1 billion in cost-adjusted dollars.



<https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/billions/time-series>

Organizational Structure, Funding, Authorities, and Workforce

Emergency management is a core function of government and requires the appropriate positioning, resources, and authorities to meet today's challenges and those on the horizon.

Organizational Structure:

The location of emergency management agencies within government organizational structures varies from state to state. Regardless of where the EMA is located, it is extremely important that governors have a direct relationship with their state emergency management director including during non-disaster time to build trust, mutual understanding, and confidence before a crisis occurs. Quick decision-making is essential during a disaster to save lives and protect property. Direct access to the governor allows emergency management officials

to communicate the urgency of the situation and get immediate approval for necessary actions, such as declaring a state of emergency, mobilizing resources, and requesting federal assistance. The state's emergency management director is the governor's principal advisor on emergency situations and should be on equal footing as cabinet-level agencies. Adding layers of bureaucracy diminishes these responsibilities and authorities and has the potential to introduce confusion and delay life-saving decisions. >>>

Funding:

In today's ever-changing environment, adequate funding and resources are essential for EMAs to fulfill their missions to minimize the overall impact of emergencies. States must invest in their emergency management programs and not be overly reliant on federal funding which is insufficient and often comes with mandated programmatic requirements that limit state flexibility. Adequate funding is essential for several reasons:

- **Disaster Preparedness and Planning:**

Comprehensive disaster preparedness and response plans must be developed and coordinated among various stakeholders, including local governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and federal agencies.

- **Rapid Response and Recovery:**

Keeping the workforce well-trained and up to date with the latest knowledge, best practices, and emerging technologies is required for effective response and recovery.

- **Infrastructure and Technology:**

Modern emergency management relies on advanced technology for communication, situational awareness, and data analysis. Funding is necessary for the acquisition and maintenance of innovative technology such as early warning systems, geospatial mapping tools, and communications networks. These technologies enhance decision-making during crises.

- **Public Awareness and Education:**

Effective communication is critical to ensure coordination, share information, and provide timely warnings and updates to the public.

- **Capacity Building:**

Well-trained personnel are essential for effective emergency management. This requires ongoing training programs that keep personnel up to date with best practices in disaster response resulting in a workforce that remains skilled and ready to manage evolving challenges.

- **Economic Impact:**

Insufficiently funded agencies can result in delayed response and longer recovery times when there are not enough trained staff to implement and manage state and federal disaster assistance programs in a timely manner. This is especially true during overlapping disasters which are much more common today.

Authorities:

Effective emergency management requires collaboration among various disciplines, agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. This can be challenging due to differences in organizational cultures, communication barriers, and varying mandates and priorities. Effective disaster management requires the proper authorities for EMA to direct interagency collaboration. Being able to speak with the support of the chief elected official enables emergency management officials to coordinate a cohesive and unified response to the disaster, reducing confusion and streamlining resource allocation.

Emergency Management Workforce:

Finding and retaining qualified and skilled emergency management professionals can be challenging. Emergency management faces significant workforce challenges with agencies being chronically understaffed. The COVID-19 pandemic and the increasing number of back-to-back disasters have resulted in disaster fatigue

and burnout. Over the past three years, emergency management has seen an increase in retirements as well as staff leaving to take positions with other state agencies that provide more stable work hours and less stressful environments. >>>

Emergency Management Workforce, cont'd:

Workforce shortages also impact the overall EM enterprise to scale to disasters as it has in the past. Not only are states short-handed going into disasters, but there is also a real concern about the ability to bring in talent from other state agencies, regions, and potentially from other states through mutual aid assistance.

The competition for talent from other sectors, limited funding for salaries, and the demanding nature of the work are issues that must be addressed. Continued job vacancies will both increase burnout and impair public service.

Conclusions & Recommendations

State governments differ and so will their approach to emergency management. As governors continue to turn to their emergency management agencies for more diverse and complex threats and hazards, states must ensure the agency is structurally aligned to meet these demands. Few states have deliberately evaluated their emergency management programs across all of their mission areas to determine if their agency is optimally positioned. Placing it too low in the state organizational structure results in poor coordination, missed opportunities, increased risk, and slower recovery. With the above imperatives in mind, states can thoughtfully evaluate where to locate their emergency management agency.

In summary, disasters are a reality that state governments must integrate into their business model. The question of whether a disaster will occur is no longer relevant. When disasters occur emergency management agencies must have the authority, access, influence, and resources to minimize impacts and catalyze effective programs. The threats and hazards facing states today, and those they may face in the future, require a strong emergency management system that is highly capable and poised to adapt to evolving challenges.

Recommendations:

- 1** Governors should establish direct lines of communication with the state emergency management director while ensuring the agency has the standing and authority to efficiently coordinate resources for response and recovery actions across state government and with all stakeholders.
- 2** Governors and state legislators must understand current and emerging threats and hazards and provide the necessary resources to the state emergency management agency to effectively prepare, mitigate, respond, and recover in ways that build resilience.
- 3** States should review emergency management compensation structures along with government hiring policies and procedures to ensure best practices are in place for successful recruitment and retention of a capable, diverse EM workforce that represents the public they serve.

State leaders must recognize that the cycle of disasters being experienced today will only continue into the future. Building state emergency management capacity and making resilience a priority is paramount to protecting citizens and their communities and ensuring a strong economy before, during, and after disasters.



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