Reflections on the Evolution of Emergency Management

Editor's note: Although this is presented more as a narrative than a research paper, it merits consideration. Bob Fletcher is one of the few people that was "there at the beginning" and has been a part of the development of the Federal emergency management strategy as it has moved to a focused plan that can be both rehearsed and executed. This provides an excellent background and insight to the Federal process developed to guide local, state and Federal planning and response.

By Bob Fletcher (with Kim Fletcher)

From the late 1960's, emergency management has evolved dramatically. I vividly remember my first emergency assignment with the government. Assigned to manage the removal of debris in rural Virginia following Hurricane Camille.. The remnants of Hurricane Camille had made its way north after striking a huge blow to Gulfport, Mississippi. I didn't know anything about emergency management then. I didn't know who was in charge of the overall response, nor did I know if there was a plan in place or even who was in charge of the operation. All I knew was my little piece of the puzzle as a junior engineer trainee working for the Corps of Engineers.

As it turns out, there was a plan and an organization that was charged with overseeing the operation. In 1969, it was the Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP) in the Executive Office of the President. In 1972, when Tropical Storm Agnes struck southern New York and Pennsylvania, the Office of Emergency Preparedness was still in place. The impacts of the storm were so widespread that the US Army Corps of Engineers established a separate new Susquehanna District Office just to focus on recovery of the area.

The situation was so bad in Pennsylvania that President Nixon sent Frank Carlucci, then Deputy Director of OMB to be the "Flood Czar" to coordinate the federal response and recovery with the state of Pennsylvania. This concept has been repeated since then, for example, with Andrew Card, Secretary of Transportation being sent to Florida for Hurricane Andrew in 1992 and Admiral Thad Allen being sent to Louisiana for Hurricane Katrina. The Department of Homeland Security has established a title for this position in its National Response Plan, calling it the Principal Federal Official (PFO). Mr. Carlucci was appointed to that role because the disaster required extraordinary measures and a personal White House emissary to do "hands on" management. The situation was similar for Hurricanes Andrew and Katrina.

It turns out that there was much more to emergency management than just response operations. By the early 1970s, the lead agency for disaster response had changed and was now the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration (FDAA) under the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In addition to natural disasters, the responsibility for Civil Defense activities had been assigned to Office of Preparedness later to be renamed Federal Preparedness Agency, at General Services Administration (GSA). The functions of emergency management as we know it today were bifurcated between FPA and FDAA. In 1975 all of that changed again as the Federal Emergency

Management Agency (FEMA) was created to consolidate all emergency functions into a single agency. The Executive Office of the President's programs for Earthquake Hazard Reduction, Dam Safety Coordination, Consequence Management in Terrorism, the Warning and Emergency Broadcast System;the National Weather Service's Community Preparedness; Department of Commerce's National Fire Prevention and Control; and HUD's Federal Insurance Administration were combined into FEMA. The only thing missing was a common plan. Each element has its own programs and plans and there was relatively little integration among them.

One plan in particular held promise for the response community. Published in 1987, the Plan for Federal Response to a Catastrophic Earthquake developed by the subcommittee on Federal Earthquake Response Planning of the Regional Steering Committee chaired by FEMA Region IX in San Francisco, advanced a new concept. The plan espoused an automatic decentralized response from the federal government for the first 30 days of the disaster. Secondly, it provided an architecture for how the federal departments and agencies engaged in the response would undertake their responsibilities by function (these functions were the precursors the Emergency Support Functions (ESF) in the current federal plan). The plan identified areas of responsibility by function with lead and support agencies and it was signed by 26 Federal Department and Agency heads, agreeing to its provisions. Elegant in its simplicity, it was based upon the fundamental premise that when a catastrophe occurred and the plan was implemented, all signatories would respond immediately. As it turned out, the plan was never tested in a real catastrophic earthquake, but it was tested through a series of response exercises conducted by FEMA in cooperation with the states.

The structure of the earthquake plan was integrated into an all-hazards, Federal Response Plan, reflecting a shift in thinking from event specific planning to planning for the consequences of a disaster. In the early 1990's, FEMA and many other Federal agencies developed the FRP.

In spite of strong support for the FRP by federal agencies outside of FEMA, not all internal elements of FEMA saw a need for generic response planning. Some of the more traditional FEMA program elements saw the FRP as a "doomsday plan," over-engineered and cumbersome. Initially, it was a hard sell inside of FEMA, as the FRP was being developed in the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and the traditional FEMA programs were managed in Disaster Assistance Programs (DAP). However, the planning continued and in April 1992, five years after the earthquake plan was published, we completed the FRP. It was signed by all Departments and Agency heads and was in the process of being printed when Hurricane Andrew struck Florida in August 1992. Even after Andrew, some resisted the all-hazards, scalable structure of the FRP, feeling that it did not pertain to certain traditional programs.

The FRP worked reasonably well in its first engagement. There were issues to be sure and the press blasted FEMA for its slow response. But when the hype and maneuvering was set aside, the Emergency Response Team (ERT) structure (where a core management group deploys and serves as the initial integration cell in concert with the affected states)

and ESFs were functioning in a real world event under the new plan. The functional approach was working. There was a major after action review of the federal response. As a result, a Federal Response Task Force convened by FEMA, brought more than 300 department and agency representatives to refine the plan. The plan was not rewritten; it was strengthened and reinforced. During this time, a significant number of states began to revise their plans to reflect the FRP. Focus for their planning efforts shifted to readiness and mitigation as ways to help ensure their overall preparedness. Coordination between the Federal government and the states was robust, with many ESF lead agencies engaging their regions in planning with their partner states.

The FRP continued to serve FEMA and the federal government until the first draft of the National Response Plan was issued by DHS for comment in 2003. (need a date check). Much has been written about the events of 9-11 resulting in fundamental changes in perceptions about risks and the necessary steps to confront them. While we can not begin to chronicle them here, other than to say that as much as we have refined our planning to meet the threat of terrorism and evolving threats such as pandemic influenza, we retained the fundamental need for an all-hazards approach to the activities associated with prevention, mitigation, response, recovery and contingency planning in general. The fundamentals have not changed.

The events of 9-11 precipitated the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and the National Response Plan (NRP). The NRP accomplished what FEMA was not able to do in the late 1990s: meld the Federal Radiological Emergency Response Plan into the NRP, strengthen the ties with the EPA and USCG and the National Contingency Plan for response to oil and hazardous substances releases and include law enforcement activities as an emergency support function to the Plan. The NRP has retained some of the fundamental concepts of the original earthquake plan of 1987 (and the FRP) such as the function focused Emergency Support Functions, the ERT structure, the Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) the State Coordinating Officer (SCO) and Disaster Field Office (DFO), (now called the Joint Field Office or JFO). The PFO concept begun by President Nixon in 1972 in Hurricane Agnes remains and has been strengthened with its own support cell and technology to assist the Secretary of Homeland Security maintain situational awareness. The FCO retains the authority for execution of the NRP under the Robert T. Stafford Act, the legislation that provides most Federal response authority.

There are 15 ESFs in the National Response Plan. They are:

Emergency Support Function	**Responsibilities**
ESF #1 - Transportation ESF Coordinator: U.S. Department of Transportation	Federal and civil transportation support Transportation safety Restoration/recovery of transportation infrastructure Movement restrictions Damage and impact assessment
ESF #2 - Communications ESF Coordinator: U.S. Department of Homeland Security / National Communications System	Coordination with telecommunications industry Restoration/repair and temporary provisioning of communications infrastructure Protection, restoration, and sustainment of national cyber and information technology resources
ESF #3 - Public Works and	Infrastructure protection and emergency repair

Engineering ESF Coordinator: U.S. Department of Defense / U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Infrastructure restoration Engineering services, construction management Critical infrastructure liaison
ESF #4 - Firefighting ESF Coordinator: U.S. Department of Agriculture	Firefighting activities on Federal lands Resource support to rural and urban firefighting operations
ESF #5 - Emergency Management ESF Coordinator: U.S. Department of Homeland Security / Federal Emergency Management Agency	Coordination of incident management efforts Issuance of mission assignments Resource and human capital Incident action planning Financial management
ESF #6 - Mass Care, Housing, and Human Services ESF Coordinator: U.S. Department of Homeland Security / Federal Emergency Management Agency	Mass care Disaster housing Human services
ESF #7 - Resource Support ESF Coordinator: U.S. General Services Administration	Resource support (facility space, office equipment & supplies, contracting services, etc.)
ESF #8 - Public Health and Medical Services ESF Coordinator: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services	Public health Medical Mental health services Mortuary services
ESF #9 - Urban Search and Rescue ESF Coordinator: U.S. Department of Homeland Security / Federal Emergency Management Agency	Life-saving assistance Urban search and rescue
ESF #10 - Oil and Hazardous Materials Response ESF Coordinator: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Oil and hazardous materials (chemical, biological, radiological, etc.) response Environmental safety and short- and long-term cleanup
ESF #11 - Agriculture and Natural Resources ESF Coordinator: U.S. Department of Agriculture	Nutrition assistance Animal and plant disease/pest response Food safety and security Natural and cultural resources and historic properties protection and restoration
ESF #12 - Energy ESF Coordinator: U.S. Department of Energy	Energy infrastructure assessment, repair, and restoration Energy industry utilities coordination Energy forecast
ESF #13 - Public Safety and Security ESF Coordinator: U.S. Department of Justice	Facility and resource security Security planning and technical and resource assistance Public safety/security support Support to access, traffic, and crowd control
ESF #14 - Long-Term Community Recovery	Social and economic community impact assessment Long-term community recovery assistance to States, local

ESF Coordinator: U.S. Department of Homeland Security / Federal Emergency Management Agency	governments, and the private sector Mitigation analysis and program implementation
ESF #15 - External Affairs ESF Coordinator: U.S. Department of Homeland Security	Emergency public information and protective action guidance Media and community relations Congressional and international affairs Tribal and insular affairs

With the new NRP, there is a principle difference in the concept of operations. The Earthquake Plan was based upon a decentralized response, with federal departments and agencies responding automatically upon execution of the plan. This planning assumption has been replaced by an assumption of centralized response initiated by DHS and FEMA in Washington, DC upon the occurrence of a significant event. Today's extensive information management technology - based systems and interoperable communications technologies make it possible to do real-time coordination for quick decision making and activation of systems and response processes. This is especially true for systems for situational awareness and asset visibility. In incidents with warning such as hurricanes, the national level apparatus spins up more quickly and more profoundly than regional resources can, in many cases. National assets managed by headquarters organizations are often deployed in advance of an event in anticipation of being needed by federal, state and local response organizations.

Federal response activities are conducted under the Stafford Act where the affected states identify requirements that they are unable to meet with their resources. The Federal responders then direct one or more other agencies to provide that support through a mission assignment, which has information such as the scope, deadlines, and cost. Federal agencies may also have existing authority to provide support to the states as part of their own program authorities.

Another significant accomplishment in the evolution of emergency management is that we have made great strides in defining what "emergency management" means. With the publication of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1600 Standards for Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs in 2000, for the first time in the United States, the meets and bounds of a professional emergency management program have been defined in a set of written standards. Now when a government, business or non-profit organization is confronted with the challenge of building an emergency management program, the fundamental concepts and elements of a viable program have been codified. And for government entities who wish to do so, accreditation may be achieved through the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) just as in other profession areas. Emergency Management has come of age. The International Association of Emergency Managers offers an Emergency Management Certification (CEM) and colleges and universities offer undergraduate and graduate degrees in emergency management and homeland security.

The art and science of emergency management had certainly evolved over the past 38 years. What has remained constant is the interdependence of all levels of government

and business in providing support and assistance to affected states. Our focus and attention may shift, based on current events, but being prepared and aware of all of the potential hazards remains the foundation of all emergency management programs.

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