

## **APPENDIX 11**

### **EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

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Emergency preparedness has taken on a new meaning for elected officials in Mississippi and across the United States since September 11, 2001. Preparedness and prevention are the focus of emergency management in Mississippi and our nation today. It is easy to watch news broadcasts about disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes inflicting hundreds of millions of dollars of damage to communities across the nation; it is quite another to live the experience.

There is no greater pain than is the heartbreak felt by a supervisor when a citizen of their county has just lost their home or property due to wind damage, flood, or some other catastrophe. It is those experiences multiplied across a county that make emergency management important to supervisors and the constituents they represent.

No longer is an emergency merely the aftermath of a natural disaster. Weather related disasters such as ice storms, rising flood waters, straight-line winds or tornadoes, and hurricanes once dominated the thinking of county officials and emergency managers in Mississippi; but, now man-made disasters have to be considered as well in developing any plan for dealing with catastrophe.

Crisis leadership during times of disruption of normal routines is a large part of how citizens judge the effectiveness of county government and thus the five members of the board of supervisors. Prudent and appropriate actions before and during time of emergencies will grow public confidence in county government and goodwill toward elected county officials.

#### **MISSISSIPPI EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

There is a state comprehensive emergency management plan for dealing with natural and man-made disasters and civil disorder. As a part of that plan each county must have a coordinated effort for dealing with emergency situations beginning within the borders of the county and then in cooperation with other counties in the region and state. As a part of that plan, the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), conducts preparedness, training, and exercise programs for local emergency management agency directors and their staff. Other divisions of the emergency management agency that have regular contact with your county and its emergency management agency are: mitigation, response and recovery, administration and finance, and executive.

This training is mandatory for county personnel to ensure their continued service as emergency managers. Those who participate in the training are almost always designated by supervisors as the person to work with MEMA and federal officials in case of a natural or man-made disaster.

Even though by law they hold this position in the absence of an appointed emergency manager, almost none of the 82 counties utilize the president of the board of supervisors as the county's emergency manager. The dual position of board president and emergency manager is cumbersome because of the numerous responsibilities of the president of the board and the time-consuming procedures and formalities of dealing with emergency management contracts and procedures. Additional considerations for appointing an emergency manager are the weighty responsibility of being on-call around the clock in emergency situations and the on-going comprehensive training requirement by MEMA.

The county emergency manager also coordinates training from MEMA for other public agencies, services, and volunteer groups in the county on a continuing basis. After a natural disaster such as a hurricane or disaster, county officials must work together in an organized manner to prevent another disaster from being created by well-intentioned volunteers providing a warehouse of unsolicited goods and household items to those perceived to be in need of daily necessities. Dealing with sheltering of evacuees and those who have lost their homes in disasters is a delicate task best handled by those with emergency management experience or volunteer groups specially trained or with experience in dealing with large numbers of displaced persons.

The absence of a plan or reliance on an out-of-date, untested plan, is a blueprint for turning an emergency into an on-going catastrophe that cripples a county and punishes its people needlessly. Something as simple as obtaining health care for a family member, taking a meal to a neighbor, or even attending worship services at the church down-the-road takes on great difficulty and importance when electrical power is disrupted, normal transportation avenues are blocked or residents can't return to their homes because of ice, rising water, or damage caused by strong winds.

Emergency management at the county level should be handled on a daily basis by the emergency manager or head of the county emergency management agency. The emergency manager helps develop plans to increase public awareness of the threats to the county as well as education of citizens in ways to protect their families and property in times of emergency.

The head of the State of New York's emergency management agency told state and local officials gathered after September 11, 2001, to develop emergency plans in coordination with all local and state officials, and then "train, train, train, and train some more." He credited planning and training since the 1993 bombing incident in New York for preventing additional loss of life from the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center.

Almost every county in the state has signed the Statewide Mutual Assistance Compact (SMAC), which provides for other governments to assist your county with supplies, equipment, personnel, and services in time of emergency. This mutual-aid compact, which is activated by the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency upon notification of a declared emergency, helps county governments deal with emergencies efficiently and effectively without duplication of expensive equipment, manpower, or services. There is also liability protection worded in the compact.

## INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

When there is an emergency, it is most likely that the emergency manager will utilize a unified management system to deal with circumstances. The incident management system is coordinated by an emergency manager appointed by the county board of supervisors and decisions are made by the leadership in the operations center in concert and toward achieving the goal of minimizing the damage from the incident, recovery and restoration of normalcy.

Depending upon the circumstances and the emergency involved, the unified command structure can be comprised of emergency management, supervisors and other governmental administration, law enforcement, fire services, emergency services, health care, public information, public works, utilities, public safety communications, hazardous materials teams, school officials and others specific to the task of dealing with the emergency or recovering from its effects.

Usually the key representatives of those areas of responsibility gather together in a single location to deal with the emergency and this place is called an emergency operations center. It can be in a single location that is well-known, such as the courthouse or other public building with ample communications and safety equipment. It can be as informal as a specified location near the site of the emergency which allows for adequate communication to those working in and around the site as well as to those positioned at locations outside the area. This can also be called a command post.

Your county emergency manager is a trained professional in the field of emergency management, a broad and encompassing responsibility that covers local, state and federal law governing response, recovery and mitigation. The emergency manager is trained by state and federal officials to work with supervisors and other county officials to reduce disruption of community functions, provision of public service, and lessen personal injury or prevent loss of life.

Your emergency manager will help provide you with information that you will disseminate through the media and other public sources to your citizens so they can make the proper judgements as to where to go in time of emergency, how to shelter themselves and their families, how to protect their property, or how to call a community to action in case of a needed evacuation.

This person is the point of contact with the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. The emergency manager is on-call around the clock and notifies state officials in time of emergency that cannot be handled with local resources or is the person called by state officials in the emergency operations center in Jackson when there is catastrophe or threats of suspicious activities in your county. The emergency manager is constantly updated on the status and availability of resources and services required by the public to deal with unusual circumstances and to property their families and property.

Under state law, emergency management agency officials can muster forces inside the county to deal with fires, floods, storms, earthquakes or any issue of safety of people and the protection of property. The emergency manager can also call upon state officials to help in circumstances that

overwhelm local capabilities to control the situation. The board of supervisors would proclaim a local emergency as defined in Section 33-15-5 of the Mississippi Code Annotated. The emergency would last for seven (7) days and would have to be extended by another vote of supervisors and proclamation posted and published if circumstances required. It is during those times that the governor would declare a disaster and the state emergency operations center would become operational.

The emergency manager position can be full time, depending upon county resources and need. Larger population counties have a greater need for emergency management, and in some cases have departments with multiple staff. Counties with major energy generation or transmission facilities, interstate commerce connections, major governmental facilities, major tourism and entertainment attractions, also give a higher priority to the need for professional emergency management. County officials should also realize that in time of emergency, the emergency manager alone cannot solve the massive problems ahead, all local government must be organized into a unified command system to deal with the problems at hand in an orderly and efficient manner. There must be law enforcement help, fire services assistance, clerical and administrative help, as well as coordination of volunteer efforts, health care provision, and emergency services. None are more or less important to successfully dealing with the emergency, recovery, and return to normal life.

Some counties see the operation as an opportunity to work with adjoining counties to provide emergency management and find this works fine because many disasters have no respect for county lines and inflict suffering on more than one community or county. In some parts of the state, there are joint management structures among two or more counties or between counties and municipalities within the county and those joint districts or authorities offer opportunities to work together across county lines and jurisdiction borders

Terrorism is another ingredient in the mix that has become emergency preparedness and management. In Mississippi, U.S. Department of Homeland Security funding has been passed through the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. The Office of Homeland Security for Mississippi is also housed in MEMA. Most emergency managers in Mississippi serve as homeland security coordinators for the county and some even serve as homeland security coordinators for one or more of the municipalities located within the county. This sharing of homeland security responsibilities has allowed the state to maximize the federal funding received for local governments. It has also allowed the state to take a regional approach to homeland security to safeguard its citizens. The regional teams are being equipped so that the funds and equipment are spread across a number of counties to effectively and efficiently position expensive resources where they will do the most good.

Emergency management is a one call solution to complex problems that arise during times of turmoil and uncertainty. The management team you have in place and your close involvement with it will make your county safer and your citizens better protected against natural and man-made disasters.