

# Bulletin

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## Writing the Next Chapter: Honored, Grateful, and Ready for What's Next

*These remarks were delivered by Josh Morton, CEM, during the 2025 IAEM Annual Conference.*

Stepping into the role of IAEM president is one of the greatest honors of my career, and I am deeply grateful for the trust you've placed in me. This association has shaped my journey as an emergency manager in more ways than I could have ever imagined, and I'm excited for the opportunity to continue to give back to an organization that means so much to me.

Before I go any further, I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to Past President Carrie Speranza. Over the past seventeen months, we have walked through a lot of challenges and opportunities as an association. Carrie, your leadership has strengthened IAEM and this profession immeasurably. You have pushed us forward, and your legacy will be felt for years to come.

I also want to recognize our dedicated Board of Directors, our committee, commission, and caucus leaders, our staff, and our many past presidents. Your time, wisdom, and commitment form the backbone of this organization. And of course, congratulations again to Beth Armstrong, whose 38 years of service as executive director helped shape IAEM into the vibrant, connected, and influential community it is today. We wish you the very best in retirement.

On a personal note, I want to thank my wife, Bethany, and our



*Josh Morton, CEM, President, IAEM-USA*

daughter, Temmer. Many of you met Temmer at this year's conference—at this point, she might be better known around IAEM than I am! Without their support, there is no way that I could devote the time and energy that it takes to serve in IAEM leadership.

### Finding My IAEM Family

My IAEM story began in Reno in 2013, when I walked into my first conference (and straight into a Halloween zombie crawl!). That week, I met an emergency manager from Texas who told me something I'll never forget.

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## Writing the Next Chapter

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She said, “This is the week I look forward to all year. This is where I come to get excited about being an emergency manager again.”

And she was right. Every conference since then has recharged me, challenged me, and connected me with people who have become mentors, friends, and, in many ways, family.

I’ve met leaders who have shaped the field. I’ve built lifelong friendships. I’ve had conversations that changed my perspective. And I’ve learned that whether you’re from a big city or a rural county of 18,000 people (like mine) IAEM is a place where every voice truly matters.

That’s what makes this association special: our diversity, our shared passion, and our commitment to one another.

## Why This Year Is About You

As we move into the year ahead, my focus is simple: I want your IAEM experience to be more valuable and meaningful than ever before.

That’s why I’m excited to announce that we are launching a new Member Benefits Committee dedicated to strengthening the resources, support, and opportunities available to every member. Whether you’re looking for training, networking, mentorship, career development, or practical benefits to support your agency—we are committed to delivering real value.

We will also continue investing in our students and emerging professionals. The future of emergency management is already here, and our job is to build a bridge wide enough and strong enough for them to walk across.

## Standing Strong in a Time of Change

We all know that our profession is at a crossroads. The FEMA Review Council report and the FEMA Act currently sitting in Congress have the potential to shape the landscape of emergency management for years to come.

While the coming changes may bring uncertainty, here’s what I want every member to hear:

- IAEM will not sit on the sidelines.
- We will fight for a seat at every table.
- We will speak into every policy discussion.
- We will advocate relentlessly on behalf of this profession.

Emergency managers don’t just respond to disasters, we shape the world, and our collective voice must lead the way forward. The future of this profession must be defined by us, not without us.

## Let’s Build the Future Together

When I walked into my first IAEM conference 12 years ago, right into that zombie crawl, I never imagined the friendships, the lessons, or the opportunities that lay ahead. IAEM has given me purpose, community, and a sense of belonging. And it is my hope that every one of our members gets to experience that same sense of connection.

No matter your background, your agency size, or where you call home - there is a place for you here. Your voice matters. Your contributions matter. And together, we are stronger than any one of us could ever be alone.

This association was built by people who showed up, leaned in, and gave their hearts to the work. Now it’s our turn to lead boldly, dream bigger, and build a future the next

generation of emergency managers will be proud to inherit.

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your president. I truly believe our best days are ahead.

Let’s write the next great chapter of IAEM—together. ♦



# Shop the IAEM Store

Explore new deals and products





## IAEM in Action



*Universities and College Caucus attendees gather for a group shot during the 73rd IAEM Annual Conference.*



*The IAEM Annual Conference offered many networking opportunities to attendees.*



*Thought-provoking educational sessions were well attended.*



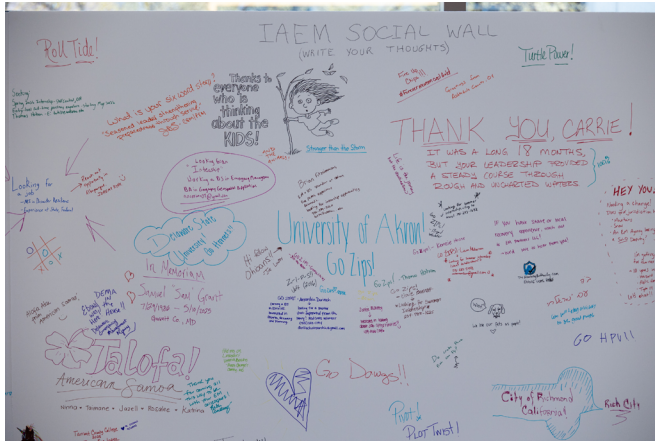
*The opening of the IAEM Annual Conference brought out the crowds.*

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## IAEM in Action

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*The IAEM Annual Conference offered a multitude of opportunities for attendees to participate, like in the pictured "IAEM Social Wall."*



*The 2026 President's Banquet was toasted by Manny Coya, IAEM's account manager with Amazon Business who sponsored the event.*



*The 2026 EMEX ribbon cutting—EMEX offered an opportunity for attendees to see displays on many products and services built to strengthen the emergency management community.*



*The 2026 President's Banquet was a festive evening filled with moving remarks, acknowledgements of the IAEM membership's many achievements, , and well wishes to Beth Armstrong on her well-earned retirement as IAEM's Executive Director after 38 years of service.*



*Outgoing IAEM-USA President Carrie Speranza, CEM, joins incoming IAEM-USA President Josh Morton, CEM, on stage during the 73rd Annual Conference.*





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## IAEM and the National Mass Violence Center Launch New Interactive MVI Checklist for Emergency Managers

In response to the increasing threat of mass violence incidents (MVIs) and the unique challenges they pose for emergency management professionals, IAEM has partnered with the National Mass Violence Center (NMVC) to develop a specialized, timeline-based checklist for planning, response and recovery. Now available online, this tool equips practitioners with a searchable, chronologically structured resource that flows from the first hour of an incident through the first 48 hours and into the longer-term recovery phase.

### Partnership and Purpose

The IAEM–NMVC collaboration brings together leading expertise in mass violence preparedness and the practitioner network of IAEM. NMVC provided subject-matter leadership by identifying key phases, decision points and victim-centric considerations while IAEM facilitated peer review and design for operational usability. The result: an interactive PDF checklist that emergency managers can ‘check off’ as tasks are completed, track gaps in capability, and embed into their exercises and training workflows.

### Structure of the Checklist

The checklist is organized in sequence: *Planning & Prevention*, *Initial Response (First Hour)*, *Extended Response (First 48 Hours)*, and *Recovery & Continuity*. Within each stage, users will find concrete items such as:

- Activate senior leadership notification protocols.
- Convene Family Assistance Center (FAC) staffing.
- Initiate reunification processes.

- Conduct after-action review planning.

For each item, the format allows users to mark “Complete,” “In Progress,” or “Not Applicable,” making it easy to integrate into agency readiness reviews, internal audits or full-scale exercises.

### Benefits for Emergency Managers

- **Ready-to-use:** [Download](#) instantly and begin customizing to your jurisdiction.
- **Audit-friendly:** Use the checkable format for training records and performance-improvement initiatives.
- **Scalable:** Suitable for small team drills or multi-agency exercise design.
- **Values-aligned:** Embeds victim-centered, whole-community language and aligns with senior leadership decision-making frameworks.

### Call to Action

IAEM members are encouraged to access the checklist today by visiting the [NMVC website](#). Integrate it into your next exercise or planning session, share it with your entire emergency management team, and use it to identify strength areas or capability gaps in your MVI readiness. By leveraging this tool, we can enhance institutional readiness and elevate emergency management’s strategic role when the unthinkable happens.

### Conclusion

The [EM checklist](#) for victim-based response to MVIs represents a significant step forward in supporting emergency manag-

ers with a structured, interactive resource designed around incident reality. In a high-stakes environment where every minute counts and recovery spans weeks or months, this tool helps decision-makers stay anchored, aligned and prepared. We encourage you to put it into practice and share your experiences with the IAEM community.

### What’s Next?

Building on the success of this new interactive MVI checklist, IAEM and NMVC are already working toward the next phase of support for the emergency management community: the development of an MVI-specific preparedness checklist. While the current tool focuses on response and recovery operations, this forthcoming resource will emphasize pre-incident planning, partnerships, and decision-making frameworks that can be established long before an incident occurs. The goal is to further normalize victim-centered operations within emergency management practices and ensure agencies are not starting from scratch when confronted with a mass violence, mass fatality, or mass casualty incident. As with the current checklist, this preparedness tool will be informed by real-world incidents, practitioner input, and collaboration with key partners across law enforcement, victim services, and emergency management.

Contact the authors:

■ [Carrie Gonzalez](#), Senior Emergency Management Specialist, Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM).

■ [Vanessa Flores](#), Interim Director of EM, University of California Irvine. ♦



## IAEM Conference Fundraising Efforts Raise \$41,404 for Scholarship Program

IAEM is proud to announce that the money raised for scholarships at the IAEM 73rd Annual Conference & EMEX totaled \$41,404. Thank you to all members and exhibitors who contributed to fundraising efforts for the IAEM Scholarship Program.

The Basket Bonanza raised \$11,100. As in previous years, the tickets placed in each bag were weighed to determine the most popular baskets of the 31 donated by regions, caucuses, chapters, organizations, and individuals. IAEM-USA Region 4 was the clear winner, followed by IAEM-USA Region 3. Three baskets were virtually tied for third. They were the baskets from Jacksonville State University, Women in the Field of Emergency Management (WTFem), and the Unofficial Unicorn Caucus.

In conjunction with the conference, \$11,978 in donations were raised from individuals and regions. Many conference attendees gave gifts to the program in appreciation of the photographer's opportunity to take new headshots. The online auction raised \$9,902.

### 75th Anniversary Coin

The Scholarship Program unveiled a special challenge coin to

celebrate its 25th anniversary and raised \$4,650. This large 2.5-inch coin (pictured on page 8) is limited to 150 and sells for \$75. Some coins are still available and may be [purchased online](#).

### Gallop to Kentucky

Before the conference, scholarship supporters participated in the "Gallop to Kentucky" health challenge, which raised an additional \$3,774 for the program. The commission plans another wellness challenge in spring 2026.

### Year-End Giving

The Scholarship Commission truly appreciates the donations of items for the auctions and baskets for the bonanza, those who purchased the items and tickets for the bonanza, and the many members and regions who dug deep to make donations. Everyone's generosity helps IAEM support deserving students working on degrees in emergency management or closely related programs of study.

As the year ends, show your commitment to the future of emergency management by [making your tax-deductible donation online](#). ♦

## Dr. E.L. Quarantelli Essay Booklet Issued by the IAEM Scholarship Program

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of the IAEM Scholarship Program, the Commission offered a special one-time \$10,000 scholarship—the Dr. E.L. Quarantelli Scholarship for Doctoral Research. In addition to completing the graduate student application, doctoral students were required to submit an additional scholarly essay to be eligible for the special award. The Scholarship Commission commended the work students put into the special essays. Because of their high quality, a book of essays was published on the IAEM website. The book of essays includes the essay by the Dr. E.L. Quarantelli Scholarship recipient, as well as the essays of the 15 additional students with the highest essay scores. Review the book and be inspired by these essays. [Read the essays now](#).



HELP IAEM PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO DESERVING STUDENTS  
AND SUPPORT THE FUTURE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT.

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## Submit an Article for the IAEM Bulletin

The IAEM Editorial Committee is currently accepting submissions for future editions of the IAEM Bulletin. Refer to the [Author Guidelines](#) for tips and techniques for successfully submitting your article for publication.

The primary focus of the IAEM Bulletin is local. We are looking for articles that provide information and insights useful to other practitioners, in government and private sectors, who are educated and trained professionals.

- **Article Format:** Word or text format (not PDF).
- **Word length:** 750 to 1,500 words.
- **Photos/graphics:** Image format (png, jpg).
- **Email article, photos, and graphics to:** [John Osborne](#).

# Celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the IAEM Scholarship Program



**Purchase a limited edition challenge coin today!**



## A Proposal for an Inspired Collaboration: A Career Focus for Emergency Management

By Tim McDuffey, Individual Assistant Specialist, FEMA

The Spring of 2023 was a time that the people of Tennessee will never forget. A tornado had swept through several counties, leaving a wake of pain and destruction. Overwhelmed by the devastation, the governor, Bill Lee, quickly asked for FEMA's assistance.

Soon, teams of emergency managers were requested to deploy. My team was a Mobile Disaster Recovery Unit – 3B. Unknowingly, this deployment was also to be my day and time to be part of an effort that I had never experienced before—a team that exemplified an ideally run operation.

What made this deployment so extraordinary was the collaboration among its team members that had just “fallen into place.” It was a feat of taking the initiative beyond compliance, a team effort beyond a personal quest, an open mindset beyond a managed behavior. This was the team's moment to show what it could do best with its people skills and capabilities.

Moreover, it was this experience that had inspired me to write this proposal for a program that both EM and FEMA could build upon. A program that would initially encourage team members to simply help, share, and care for one another's performance. Even though we were all members of diverse task forces—Individual Assistance, Hazard Mitigation, and Small Business Administration. Together, we became a unit of one.

What I experienced serves as a good example of being inspired to develop a cooperative environment, which, in turn, authenticated and fueled a coordinated effort. And from that moment forward, the stage

was set for what had become a well-deserved feeling of accomplishment. With that said, we, the proud members of 3B, wish to offer these celebrated thoughts as a proposal for a new In-Person Training Program. Hopefully, too, this program could be leadership's opportunity to act upon a truly and creditable proposal. That is, to promote a collaborative effort to be shared with all personnel.

### A Proposal

This memorandum is to provide a method for EM and FEMA to innovate a gateway through which they can improve the way they communicate with each other and with survivors. How so, you may ask? The answer to this question may appear to be a simple one. That is, to encourage its personnel to work together instead of working apart from one another, as if their workstations were separated into silos. Beware, however, that to energize such an innovation requires a team effort, which becomes complicated if not preempted by two key factors. One factor is a “willingness” from each individual to collaborate with one another, and the other factor is to inspire a team effort to move its mission forward and beyond.

Initially, EM needs to re-emphasize the importance of a team effort, but not one that promotes a motivation driven by a “carrot-and-stick”, but one that energizes an inspiration of trust and confidence. Just imagine the impact this could have, as it welcomes the diversity of its personnel. After all, EM's personnel are those who can contribute those essential and special qualities such as: unique perspectives, shared

opinions, new skills, gifted capabilities, and talented experiences.

This presents the need for a new model or paradigm that is to reshape a new style of communicating. To a style that does not confine its personnel to procedures that are already predetermined, scripted, and formatted, nor to those that are dominated by the dictates of a “command and control” attitude.

On the flip side, EM ought to engage a style of trust and confidence that is open to a new age of communication, and as one that inspires the effectiveness of people skills and the efficiency of interpersonal performances. These are the advantages that are becoming available to us from studies of social engineering and cognitive technology. However, the decision to take the initiative still awaits our commitment—that is, if we choose to do so. And why not? After all, this is our job, and it should matter to all of us.

### Definition

Collaboration requires a unique mix of rational and intuitive intellects. Taken together, it can be used by EM's personnel to share information with colleagues in a trustworthy, transparent, and respectful manner. But first and foremost, it needs an intuitive culture to set the stage for its development. Secondly, it needs a logical format, having a catalyst and a bonding element called Inspiration. And thirdly, it needs a message-processing system that is driven by an Inspired-Collaboration.

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## A Proposal for an Inspired Collaboration

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### Collaboration as a Composite

Collaboration, as a process, is a composite of people-skills that are used importantly in the workplace to share information and to enhance productivity. Even more so, it is a whole skillset that actively seeds the growth of a dynamic quality, a teamwork type of quality that inspires personnel with a feeling of personal value, a willingness to contribute, and a passion to do a better job. However, to promote such a collaboration is a delicate procedure. Although it can become a strength, EM needs to drive and enhance a better communication process. At the same time, it fosters a certain style of leadership for each of its members. A style that models a positive behavior, celebrates a diversity of personalities, and invests in both personal and collective growth.

Collaboration, as a structure, is a framework of a communication process that basically has three segments. The first is the Input Segment, which provides intuitive and rational thoughts that are relevant to those issues at hand. The second segment is the workstation, though more commonly known as the Processing Segment. Here lies a formula that describes the building of a workable collaboration. On this note and perhaps most importantly, the processing-segment is also equipped with a coefficient that acts as a modifier, as a multiplier, and as a catalyst. The coefficient is a very special factor able to elevate and clarify the value and meaning of collaboration. Does it sound complex? It is, but it can amazingly work without complication, even though during ordinary situations, it often appears unnoticed. But it does

work. Whether we are aware of it or not, it flows smoothly, seamlessly, and openly.

The third segment is the Output Segment, wherein the collaborative message is transmitted outwardly for interpretation. It transforms an internal thinking process into an external message-process, commonly called a language, such as a spoken language, an unspoken language, or a body language. All of which become deliverable messages.

### Summary

Once the cultural elements of trust, respect, and transparency are established, the stage is set for building a collaboration. It brings co-workers together to develop and implement an algorithm that inspires a team to produce better messaging. After which, it becomes a calculus of its own while realigning itself for the next thought to be processed.

### A Solution

One might ask—is this really possible? The answer depends on how it is done. The best solution is to first address those issues to be worked upon in a collaborative manner, as both possible yet feasible, as motivated yet inspired, as committed yet voluntary. If this becomes the prelude of the Input Segment, then the Processing Segment that follows may then weigh-in with a synergy of Inspiration that empowers the message to move forward. What then happens? It becomes the effectiveness and the efficiency that EM needs, the catalyst to enhance its mission, and the driver to bring about a positive change.

### A Mathematical Model

Collaboration as an academic concept can be shown as a distribu-

tive function. Such that: Collaboration = Inspiration times (the sum of cooperation + coordination).

### INPUT – PROCESS – OUTPUT

To first and foremost create an environment or culture that promotes a willingness to collaborate and an inspiration to achieve.

■ The Input segment is a domain of thoughts and issues that are relevant to EM's Core Values, to the issues that are to be targeted, and to the qualities of cooperation and coordination.

■ The Processing segment is the function of Input values. Wherein, the catalyst or coefficient is the multiplier over the (the sum of cooperation + coordination).

■ The Output segment is the message or product of collaboration that is measured for its effectiveness ( people-skills) and for its efficiency (performance).

### A Closing Thought

If anyone should ask me, what is emergency management about? I would proudly say: FEMA is a good example of EM having a mission to provide a human service. As such, it inspires its personnel to serve survivors (compassionately and effectively) and to perform its duty (diligently and efficiently). All this is to be done for one purpose – to serve the survivor! ♦



# A Worrying Future for the World: Polar Melting, Rising Seas, and Coastal Shark Attacks

By Ahmed Gharib Ibrahim Megahed, Master's Degree in Arts,  
Geographic Information Systems Consultant

Climate change is no longer a distant or future threat; it is a present reality that is dramatically reshaping our planet. This research explores the interconnected consequences of climate change by focusing on three emerging and increasingly urgent risks: the accelerated melting of polar ice, rising sea levels, and the growing frequency of shark encounters near coastlines. Each of these climate-driven developments poses serious threats to human safety, public infrastructure, and emergency management systems.

Using spatial analysis, recent scientific findings, and environmental data, this paper highlights how global warming is altering Earth's physical systems and influencing marine ecosystems in ways that increase hazards

for coastal populations. The rapid loss of polar ice contributes directly to rising sea levels, which in turn impact coastal erosion, flood risks, and habitat displacement. Simultaneously, warming ocean temperatures are shifting marine species' behaviors, including the migration of sharks into areas where they previously were uncommon, putting beachgoers and local economies at increased risk.

Together, these evolving challenges demand proactive adaptation strategies from the emergency management community.

Emergency responders, planners, and policymakers must now integrate climate resilience tools, enhance coastal monitoring, and develop public awareness campaigns to prepare for this new reality. The complexity and urgency of these threats require

a coordinated, data-informed approach to safeguard both ecosystems and human life in an era of climate instability.

## Polar Ice Is Melting Faster Than Expected

Polar regions are warming at more than twice the global average. The Arctic has lost more than 13% of its sea ice per decade since 1979, according to the National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC). In Greenland and Antarctica, massive ice sheets are breaking off, adding billions of tons of freshwater into the oceans. The result is not only sea level rise but also global climate disruption.

The melting of reflective ice accelerates warming through the loss of albedo, the Earth's ability to reflect sunlight. This feedback loop drives changes in the jet stream and polar vortex, contributing to unusual cold snaps, heatwaves, and increased storm intensity in temperate zones. For emergency managers, this means more frequent and severe events requiring real-time monitoring, early warning systems, and integrated recovery strategies.

## Sea Levels Are Rising and So Are Coastal Risks

Rising seas are among the most visible and damaging effects of climate change. Driven by glacial melt and ocean thermal expansion, global sea levels have risen over 8 inches since 1900. The IPCC projects a further increase of up to one meter (3.3 feet) by 2100 if emissions remain

Future sea level rise and a review of vulnerable coastal cities

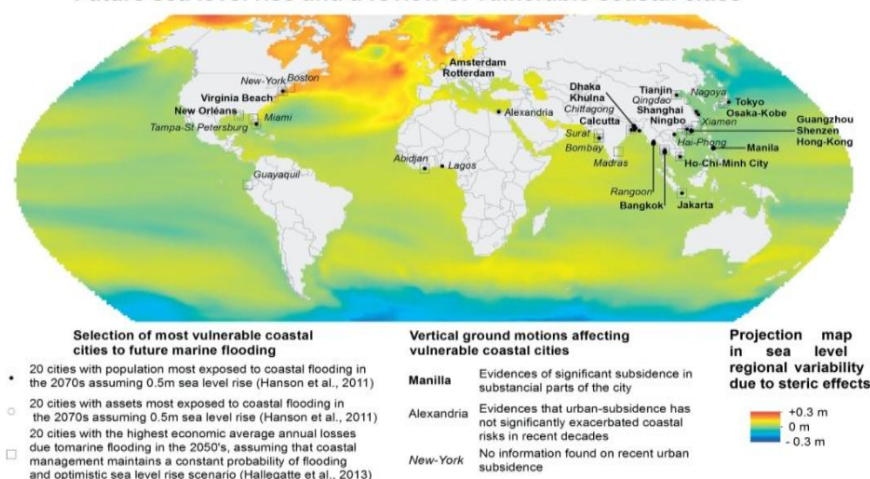


Figure 1: Projection map in sea level regional variability due to steric effects (differences between the 2080–2100 and 1980–2000 periods, with the global mean difference removed; output of the CNRM-CM5 run rcp8.5 r1i1p1 climate model [Voldoire et al., 2013]) on which are superimposed sites of most vulnerable coastal cities [Hanson et al., 2011; Hallegatte et al., 2013]. This map highlights that by the end of the 21st century, many vulnerable cities are located along the eastern coast of the USA and in southeast Asia. There is evidence of ground subsidence in some areas of several of these cities but systematic measurements by precise positioning techniques are lacking.

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## A Worrying Future

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unchecked.

Coastal cities like New York, Miami, Dhaka, Jakarta, and Alexandria are on the front lines. Tidal flooding, storm surges, and saltwater intrusion are becoming more common, threatening infrastructure, displacing populations, and damaging water supplies. As shown in Figure 1, many of these vulnerable areas lie within low-lying zones densely populated by communities lacking resources for large-scale relocation or coastal defense.

Emergency managers must leverage GIS technology to model flood zones, create evacuation plans, and prepare communities for permanent or temporary displacement.

## Warming Oceans Are Driving Sharks Closer to Shore

A less obvious but growing consequence of warming oceans is the shift in shark behavior. Rising sea temperatures cause fish populations to migrate into new regions, and sharks follow their prey sometimes right into human swimming areas.

Data from OCEARCH and NOAA show a spike in shark sightings along the East Coast of the United States, Australia, and parts of the Mediterranean. Notably, New York's Long Island saw five shark bites in just two weeks during the summer of 2022, an unusual pattern for a region historically not prone to such encounters.

Although shark attacks remain rare, their increasing frequency and geographic expansion signal the need for public safety adaptation. Emergency managers should collaborate with marine experts to develop shark monitoring systems, beach alert protocols, and awareness campaigns to educate the public on water safety.

## A Chain Reaction of Environmental Risk

Melting polar ice, rising sea levels, and marine displacement are part of a connected chain of climate-driven risks. Melting ice contributes to higher sea levels, which reshape shorelines and ecosystems. These changes drive marine species, including sharks into human-inhabited waters, creating new public safety challenges.

The emergency management field must now broaden its scope beyond conventional natural disasters. Climate-driven biological hazards (like animal migration) and slow-onset events (like sea encroachment) require forward-thinking planning and interagency collaboration.

This map highlights coastal regions at high risk due to sea-level rise, based on geographic exposure to ocean encroachment, population density, and low-lying elevation. Areas in red indicate zones with heightened vulnerability, emphasizing the need for urgent climate adaptation and emergency planning.

Data sources: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), NASA Climate Data, and simulated spatial modeling

## Recommendations for Emergency Managers

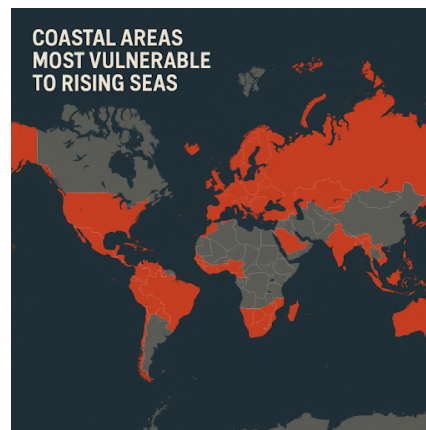
To address these evolving risks, emergency managers should:

- Use GIS and real-time satellite tools to model sea level rise, identify risk zones, and track environmental changes.

- Incorporate Climate Resilience into Urban Planning, updating building codes and emergency routes for at-risk coastal areas.

- Launch Public Education Campaigns about beach safety, flood risks, and marine life awareness.

- Partner with Scientists and



*Global Coastal Areas Most Vulnerable to Rising Seas*

Conservationists to understand marine migration and its implications on human activity.

- Support Climate Policy and Resilience Funding at the local, state, and national levels.

## Conclusion

The Earth's climate is changing rapidly, and the consequences are appearing where we live, swim, and build our cities. From melting glaciers to rising tides and the arrival of predators at popular beaches, we face a multi-layered crisis. Emergency managers are on the front lines, not just responding to disasters, but planning for future ones.

Climate change does not impact only the environment; it alters how we must manage human safety and infrastructure. We must act now, with science-based strategies and collaborative leadership, to prepare for the world that's already emerging around us. ◆

## References

- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Reports
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
- National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC)
- NASA Climate Change Data Portal
- OCEARCH Shark Tracker Reports
- "Melting Arctic Ice and Climate Feedbacks," Scientific American



# Deconstructing ICS: Why It's Time to Retire a 20th-Century Command Structure

By Misha R. McNabb, MA-EMEL, VT-EMD, NRP, Executive Director, Crisis Management Partners, LLC

**B**orn from wildland fire-fighting in the 1970s, the Incident Command System (ICS) was designed to bring order to chaos—specifically, to unify the response of federal, state, and local firefighters battling multi-agency wildfires. It accomplished that goal with surprising efficiency for its time. But that time is long past.

Today's threats, from climate disruption to cyberattacks to public health crises, are far more complex, cross-sectoral, and continuous than the fireground incidents that ICS was built to manage. And yet, ICS remains the bedrock structure underpinning nearly every emergency response doctrine in the United States. Despite its longevity and federal mandate, ICS has become a rigid, hierarchical system misaligned with 21st-century threats, especially when applied to multi-jurisdictional, community-driven, or equity-centered emergencies.

It's time to say it plainly: The 20th-century ICS model is no longer fit for modern emergency management. The longer we delay deconstructing and modernizing it, the greater the risk of compounding future failure.

## Command-and-Control Doesn't Scale Across Sectors

ICS was designed to consolidate tactical decisions in environments where quick, authoritative action was essential. However, most modern disasters require collaboration across non-hierarchical systems, including healthcare coalitions, community-based organizations, school districts, and utility providers.

In these settings, a "single incident commander" is impractical and

inappropriate. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, public health departments were expected to coordinate vaccine distribution, logistics, public messaging, and data analysis, all while aligning with emergency management agencies using ICS terminology and expectations. The result? Confusion, role conflict, and operational friction (FEMA, 2023).

The command-and-control model assumes decision-making happens within a static chain of command. However, in reality, most emergency response environments today are decentralized, multi-agency networks that function more effectively with coordination, rather than control (Kapucu & Garayev, 2011).

## Jurisdictions Comply on Paper—But Not in Practice

Because ICS is mandated through federal guidance and grant eligibility requirements, jurisdictions are forced to train staff in its structure, assign roles accordingly, and develop EOPs based on its framework. But anyone who has facilitated or observed a real-world activation knows that ICS is often followed symbolically rather than operationally.

Job Action Sheets sit unused. Section Chiefs are assigned without understanding their roles. Small towns, understaffed public health departments, or hospital teams "check the box" while reverting to informal or ad-hoc coordination in practice. Forms are retroactively filled out, not to inform operations, but to check boxes for FEMA reimbursement, which may take two to three years to process and is often denied due to insufficient documentation.

During the COVID-19 pandemic,

several rural health departments submitted ICS organization charts and incident action plans (IAPs) that were never actually used but produced solely to remain compliant with PHEP or Public Assistance funding requirements. This performative compliance is not sustainable, wastes time, and undermines both response effectiveness and recovery funding.

This façade of compliance masks a deeper issue: we've institutionalized a system that prioritizes form over function. Emergency management frameworks must be evaluated not by their elegance on paper, but by their ability to support flexible, scalable, and practical action during real events (Henstra, 2010). ICS fails that test in many cross-sector and cross-discipline settings.

## Complex Threats Require Adaptive Structures

Today's emergencies often begin without an apparent "incident" or end without a defined demobilization. They're prolonged, overlapping, and often societal, such as pandemics, mass displacement, cyberattacks, or coordinated misinformation campaigns. These require horizontal collaboration, rapid feedback loops, and iterative planning, not static position assignments and span-of-control checklists.

For example, after the COVID-19 response in Vermont, the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) and the Health Operations Center (HOC) transitioned to a decentralized Incident Support Model (ISM), offering community-based assistance rather than a top-down command approach. This enabled cross-sectoral

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## Deconstructing ICS

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planning, facilitated faster information sharing, and fostered more culturally competent responses to vaccine hesitancy and testing access. The former ICS model was simply not equipped to support that level of nuance or equity (FEMA, 2025; Town of Springfield, 2024). Researchers warned decades ago that rigid systems are brittle. Flexibility, not hierarchy, is the defining trait of resilience (Holling, 1973).

### Mandating ICS Creates a Barrier to Participation

One of the core themes in both the FEMA Whole Community Framework and international disaster frameworks such as Sweden's Civil Preparedness Model or Finland's societal security strategy is the critical importance of inclusive, community-based participation in disaster preparedness (För samhällsskydd och beredskap, 2022; Finland PMO, 2017; FEMA, 2011).

Yet the formalism of ICS, its language, roles, and structure, alienates many non-traditional partners who are essential to modern preparedness. Small nonprofits, tribal councils, faith-based groups, and immigrant community leaders often feel underrepresented in ICS training materials. Nor should they.

Instead of forcing community partners into a paramilitary model, we should design inclusive coordination frameworks that allow for contributions without formal conformity. Sweden's civil preparedness doctrine refers to this as "responsibility without subordination"; each stakeholder has a defined role, but autonomy is preserved (För samhällsskydd och beredskap, 2022). This approach is more inclusive, and it's more operationally efficient.

## We Can Do Better: Three Ways Forward

Rather than discarding ICS entirely, it's time to acknowledge its limits and offer viable alternatives where appropriate. Here is how we begin:

**1. Decouple Grant Compliance from ICS Mandates:** Federal guidance (e.g., FEMA's CPG 101 and related PHEP deliverables) should offer flexible frameworks that allow jurisdictions to adopt adaptive, context-appropriate models. ICS should be practically applicable, not holistic, compliance-mandatory, for grant eligibility. This reduces the performative burden of compliance and encourages systems that work in practice.

**2. Operationalize Multi-Agency Coordination Systems (MACS):** While ICS focuses on incident management, MACS are designed for coordination across organizations and jurisdictions. FEMA's doctrine includes MACS, but few jurisdictions know how to operationalize them. By investing in MACS training and regional coordination centers, we can shift focus from controlling to connecting, especially during multi-county or cross-sectoral events (FEMA, 2025).

**3. Incentivize the Design of Locally Owned Models:** Vermont's HOC & Local Health EOC structure, Finland's decentralized readiness index, and Japan's community-based disaster risk reduction programs demonstrate that one-size-fits-all systems are neither necessary nor ideal (JICA, 2024; Town of Canaan, 2024; Finland PMO, 2017). FEMA should encourage jurisdictions to develop their own interoperable response frameworks, providing technical assistance rather than relying on one-size-fits-all templates.

## The Global Context: ICS Is Uncommon Abroad for Good Reason

Globally, few countries have adopted a structure as rigid or hierarchical as ICS. Most disaster-prone nations recognize that the complexity and diversity of modern crises necessitate distributed, decentralized coordination rather than rigid chains of command. As a result, they've invested in flexible, interoperable systems built on collaboration, subsidiarity, and mutual accountability.

In Japan, the "KYOJO" model prioritizes community self-sufficiency and peer support as the primary response—mobilizing trained neighborhood groups well before national agencies arrive (JICA, 2024). In Finland, the "comprehensive security" strategy ensures that preparedness is embedded across every ministry, municipality, and private-sector partner, under a shared national framework (Finland PMO, 2017). Sweden's MSB replaces command-and-control with a shared responsibility model, empowering cross-sectoral actors to operate autonomously while coordinating collaboratively (För samhällsskydd och beredskap, 2022).

These systems aren't perfect, but they are far better suited to today's dynamic, boundary-spanning risks. More importantly, they demonstrate that operational resilience and local autonomy can coexist and thrive without rigid centralization. These systems are more adaptive to modern threats and more respectful of local autonomy. It's time for the United States to consider options from successful global best-practice models.

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## Deconstructing ICS

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### Conclusion: Let ICS Retire with Dignity

ICS served its purpose. It was the right system for a specific moment in emergency management history, a time defined by fire suppression, clear hierarchies, and tightly scoped tactical incidents. But that moment has passed.

Today's emergencies are longer, more complex, and fundamentally more human-centric. They demand inclusive coordination across NGOs, health systems, school districts, utilities, community leaders, and private-sector partners, most of whom do not fit neatly into a box labeled "Operations Section Chief." They require flexibility, trust-based partnerships, and adaptive frameworks that reflect how people actually work under pressure.

ICS is not inherently terrible. But clinging to it as the universal solution limits innovation, burdens responders, and erodes resilience from within. Let's honor ICS for what it was, and release it for what it is no longer. It is time to stop defending a legacy and start building a future. One that's dynamic, equitable, and operational in the world as it is, not as it was in 1970.

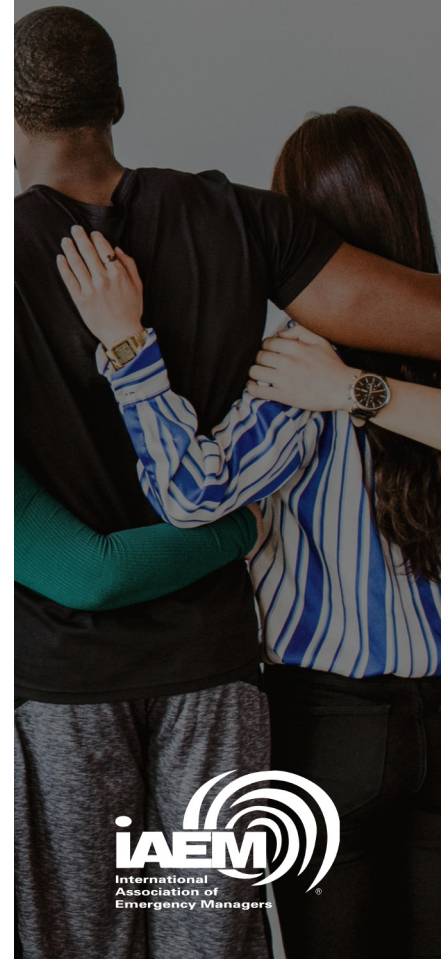
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## Elevating EMS: Why it Deserves Recognition as an Essential Public Service

By Yancey D Jones, Emergency Hazards Analyst, Pantex;  
Volunteer Firefighter/Medic, Randall County Fire and Rescue

**E**mergency Medical Services (EMS) is an undeniable pillar of community safety and health. Yet, unlike fire and law enforcement, EMS often struggles for recognition as an essential public service, facing funding disparities and lower societal acceptance. This gap has profound implications for how communities receive emergency medical care. This article explores the historical and operational reasons for this disparity and advocates for a fundamental shift in perception and policy to elevate EMS to its rightful place alongside other vital public services.

The historical timeline of these professions sheds light on the perception gap. Organized fire services trace their roots back millennia, and formal police forces in the United States began in the 17th century. Modern EMS, however, is a relatively young discipline, formalized in the United States only in 1966 with the publication of the "White Paper."

This difference in heritage, coupled with the pervasive portrayal of fire and police in popular culture, has fostered a deeper public understanding and appreciation for their roles.

A core issue lies in the definition of "public good." Economically, a public good is non-excludable (available to all) and non-rivalrous (one person's use doesn't diminish another's). While emergency medical care inherently fits this description—everyone in an emergency deserves treatment regardless of ability to pay—the varied operational models of EMS complicate this. Volunteer agencies, government-funded services, hospital-based systems, and private, for-profit companies all deliver EMS. The existence of for-profit entities, which base their service on insurance or direct payment, often introduces a dynamic that appears to contradict the non-excludable nature of a public good. However, the fundamental argument remains: in a medical emergency, the ethical

imperative is to treat all individuals, reinforcing the argument for EMS as a public good.

Consider the "free rider" concept, often raised to argue against universal EMS. This perspective suggests that providing care regardless of payment makes EMS financially unsustainable. Yet, this argument overlooks the inherent public benefit and ethical imperative of equitable access to emergency medical care. The reality is that the vast majority of calls to fire departments now involve EMS. In 2020, fire departments responded to nearly 27 million calls, with 64% being EMS and rescue-related. This overwhelming call volume demonstrates that EMS is not merely a supplementary service but a primary, essential response to community needs.

Globally, two main EMS operational models exist: the Franco-German "Stay and Save" and the Anglo-American "Load and Go." The "Stay and Save" model brings physicians to the patient, enabling advanced on-scene care and potentially reducing emergency department strain. However, it requires a high number of physicians, a resource often in short supply. The prevalent Anglo-American "Load and Go" model, which transports patients to hospitals, is more resource-efficient in terms of physician deployment but shifts the burden of advanced care to the emergency department. Regardless of the model, the core function—providing immediate medical intervention—remains critical.

For EMS to achieve the recognition and funding it deserves, a funda-



States That Identify EMS as an Essential Service

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## Elevating EMS

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mental shift in perception and policy is necessary. This includes widespread legal classification of EMS as an essential service across all states. Beyond legislation, a significant step could involve establishing a dedicated federal agency for EMS, potentially within the Department of Homeland Security. Such an agency would provide several critical benefits:

**Validation and Funding:** It would formally recognize EMS as an essential service, opening avenues for consistent federal funding that currently lags far behind fire and police.

**Standardized Protocols:** A federal body could develop and enforce national protocols, addressing the existing fragmentation in medical control across jurisdictional lines. This consistency is vital during mass casualty incidents or when mutual aid agreements require agencies to operate across different local standards.

**Uniform Training:** Building on

the existing National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT) curriculum, a federal agency could ensure uniform training and certification standards nationwide. This would guarantee that all EMS personnel operate at a consistent level of competence, regardless of their location.

By acknowledging EMS as an essential public service, akin to fire and law enforcement, we can ensure equitable access to quality emergency medical care for all citizens. This shift in perception, backed by policy and funding, is not just about supporting a profession; it's about strengthening the fundamental safety net of our communities. ♦

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# In Emergency Management, Respect Is the Untold Advantage

By Mike Domitrz, Speaker and Founder, The Center for Respect

**W**hen hurricanes strike or wildfires rage, emergency managers are in the spotlight: commanding logistics, coordinating agencies, and executing response plans with precision. But behind every successful operation is a force too often overlooked: respect.

Across after-action reviews and team debriefs, one theme keeps resurfacing. Teams that communicate clearly, challenge each other constructively, and stay aligned under pressure are often those where respect is a daily practice, not a corporate slogan or a bullet on a slide deck.

"Technical excellence is essential," says Mike Domitrz, Hall-of-Fame speaker and founder of The Center for Respect. "But when stress spikes and the unexpected hits, it's how leaders build trust and create space for honest dialogue that determines outcomes."

## Silence Can Be Fatal

In high-stakes environments, silence can be dangerous. Frontline responders might withhold critical observations. Field teams may hesitate to challenge flawed assumptions. Cross-agency collaboration can stall, not because of poor planning, but because someone didn't feel safe speaking up.

"One of the biggest blind spots in crisis leadership is psychological safety," Domitrz explains. "If people fear embarrassment, dismissal, or retaliation, they stay quiet. And in emergency response, that silence can be fatal."

This is not just a human resources issue; it's a readiness issue.

## Respect Is Operational

Emergency managers are placing sharper focus on the human element. What sustains a team through the exhaustion of a multi-week deployment? What bridges silos between local, state, and federal partners? What ensures that every member, regardless of title or rank, knows their voice matters?

"Respect isn't about being nice," Domitrz says. "It's operational. It's tactical. It's how leaders ensure their teams stay aligned under pressure, adapt to change in real time, and respond with clarity, not chaos."

Respect-driven leadership is built on seven foundational principles from Domitrz's "Stairway to Mutually Amazing Relationships" model:

- **Respect** - The non-negotiable foundation.
- **Alignment** - Shared values and mission clarity.
- **Knowledge** - Replacing assumptions with understanding.
- **Trust** - Built through consistency and earned feedback.
- **Safety** - Emotional and psychological, not just physical.
- **Mutuality** - Collaboration over control.
- **Oral Communication** - Courageous conversations, not filtered compliance.

When one of these rungs is skipped, things break down. Fast.

## The Consequences of Skipping Steps

Skip respect, and people disengage. Skip alignment, and teams pull in opposite directions. Skip knowledge, and leaders operate on flawed assumptions. Skip trust or safety, and

people go silent, or worse, pretend to agree.

"When leaders bulldoze, interrupt, dismiss, or ignore voices based on age, background, or identity, the results aren't just cultural, they're operational failures," says Domitrz. "That kind of culture breaks under pressure."

Domitrz's work across the corporate, education, and military sectors shows that teams perform better when leadership is rooted in dignity and trust. "You can't demand trust," he says. "You earn it through consistent action, by creating a space where people are respected first, not after they've proven themselves."

## Respect in the Field

For emergency managers, respect shows up in the smallest behaviors:

- Not interrupting during briefings.
- Seeking diverse input without bias.
- De-escalating without diminishing.
- Holding space for grief, exhaustion, and conflicting emotions without judgment.

Domitrz teaches leaders how to script high-stress conversations, how to lead feedback loops, and how to pause without paralysis. These are practical, field-tested tools he's refined over decades.

He also shares the "7 Daily Displays of Disrespect" and their antidotes: the "7 Daily Choices for Respect":

- **Silence** - Share You Need Time.
- **Dictating** - Build Mutuality.

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## Respect

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- **Distracted** - Pause and Focus.
- **Degrading** - Explore with Curiosity.
- **Interrupting** - Listen with Patience.
- **Dismissing** - Empower and Trust.
- **Excluding** - Include with Consistency.

Each of these is actionable in field conditions; they build cultures where people feel seen, heard, and valued, regardless of their uniform, title, or tenure.

### When Respect Is Missing

"Disrespect isn't always loud," Domitrz reminds us. "It's often silent. Averted eyes. No acknowledgment. The small ways people feel unseen or

unvalued."

In emergency management, these micro-moments become mission risks.

An overlooked responder doesn't speak up about a hazard. A partner agency doesn't share key intel because they felt dismissed. And the compound effect? Trust erodes, innovation stalls, and worst of all, people get hurt.

### Respect Is a Command Multiplier

"In today's world of increasing climate events, disinformation, and burnout, emergency managers need more than plans," says Domitrz. "They need presence. And respect gives them that."

Respect empowers people to speak, share, challenge, and co-lead. It turns chain-of-command into a chain of trust.

"Respect isn't the reward, it's the requirement." And in emergency response, it's not just good practice, it's life-saving strategy.

### Final Word for EM Leaders

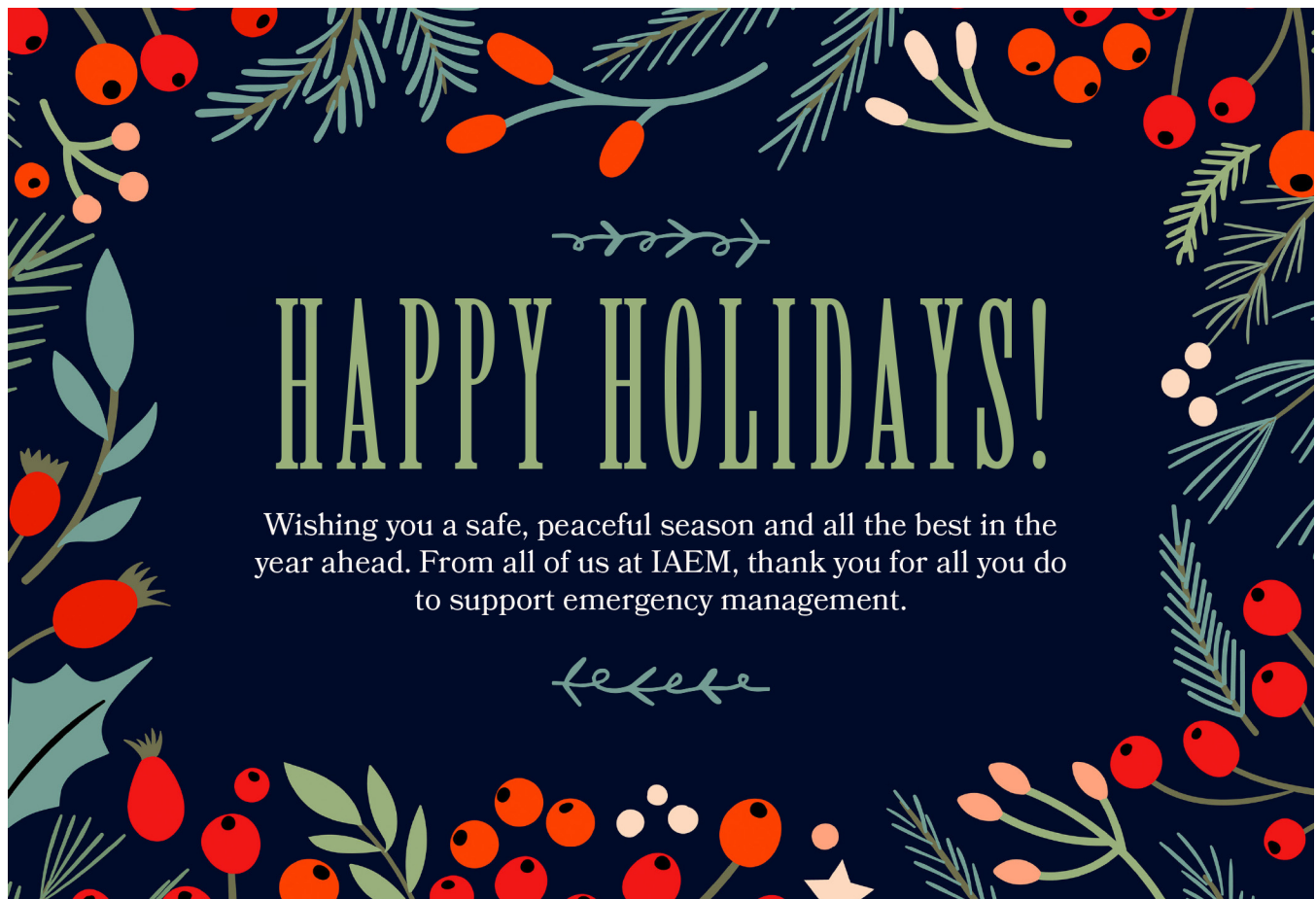
Respect isn't an add-on. It's the framework under every decision, every protocol, every response. In a crisis, you don't have time to build culture. You rely on the culture you've already built.

Let that culture be one where every person, regardless of role, is empowered to speak, lead, and be heard.

Because in emergency management, the most enduring resource you have isn't your trucks, tools, or tactical playbooks.

It's the trust your people have in each other.

And that trust? Starts with respect. ♦



# Bridging the Divide: Realigning Emergency Management and Resilience for Unified Community Safety

By Ashley Hatcher, M.S. in Emergency Management, Jacksonville State University

In recent years, the concept of resilience has become a cornerstone across public safety, climate adaptation, and urban planning disciplines. As someone who has worked at the heart of disaster response—from answering frantic 911 calls during COVID-19 to planning large-scale emergency operations at a major airport—I’ve often observed that resilience initiatives and emergency management strategies, while rooted in similar goals, often operate in isolation. These silos, while perhaps unintentional, can weaken both fields’ effectiveness in preparing for and recovering from disasters.

To be clear, emergency management professionals have built a structured and reliable system for dealing with acute hazards. Likewise, resilience planners focus on long-term systems change and community health. Both approaches are valuable and have their strengths. Yet in today’s era of cascading disasters and prolonged recovery periods, their separation increasingly feels like a missed opportunity. This essay argues that a more deliberate and collaborative integration of resilience frameworks into the emergency management profession is necessary. By aligning the long-term, systems-oriented lens of resilience with emergency management’s operational expertise, we can move beyond reactive models and toward proactive, community-focused strategies that are both responsive and regenerative.

## Defining Disaster Resilience and Emergency Management

Disaster resilience refers to the capacity of individuals, communi-

ties, and systems to prepare for, absorb, recover from, and adapt to adverse events (Cutter et al., 2010). It involves more than physical fortitude—it encompasses economic sustainability, public health, mental well-being, and social cohesion. Emergency management, by contrast, is traditionally centered on the coordination of preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation functions before, during, and after disasters (FEMA, 2021). It is operational, highly structured, and often focused on continuity, command, and resource deployment.

These differences are not flaws; they are products of each discipline’s origins and mandates. However, they create challenges in integration. Resilience planning often operates through public health, sustainability, or planning departments with a forward-looking lens. Emergency management, meanwhile, tends to focus on immediate threats and response capacity. The result is a temporal and philosophical gap—where resilience envisions systemic improvement and emergency management ensures immediate survival.

## Parallel Tracks: The Reality and Reason Behind Separation

The separation between resilience and emergency management is not without rationale. Emergency managers are tasked with protecting lives and property in high-stakes, time-sensitive environments. Introducing broad, long-term frameworks can seem misaligned with the urgency of disaster response. Additionally, resilience planning is sometimes perceived as abstract or lacking in operational clarity.

During my tenure as an emergency management coordinator at Midway International Airport, I often focused on functional annexes, inter-agency drills, and COOP implementation—tangible, measurable tasks. At the same time, I saw city departments advancing resilience plans in areas like green infrastructure and climate adaptation, yet these efforts rarely intersected with emergency operations planning. While both sides were doing meaningful work, the lack of collaboration led to inefficiencies and missed opportunities for synergy.

This separation is not unique to Chicago. McCreight and Mayer (2021) reflect on the tumultuous events of 2020—COVID-19, hurricanes, wildfires, civil unrest—and conclude that traditional, siloed responses are no longer adequate. Today’s crises are interconnected, and the systems managing them must be as well.

## Where They Intersect—and Why Integration Matters

Despite their operational differences, resilience and emergency management are united by their core mission: to reduce harm and help communities recover. This shared foundation offers a compelling case for integration.

Programs like FEMA’s Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) show the benefits of this alignment by funding hazard mitigation projects with long-term benefits. However, without active involvement from emergency managers, these projects may fail to account for

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## Bridging the Divide

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real-world operational needs (FEMA, 2021). Conversely, emergency operations plans that lack a resilience lens may overlook social vulnerabilities, community input, or long-term adaptability.

My work as a 911 dispatcher during the COVID-19 pandemic exposed how essential emotional and psychological resilience is to disaster response. I handled countless calls from people grappling with fear, grief, and uncertainty. Yet, there were no formal support systems in place for dispatchers or callers beyond the crisis itself. Later, as a 988 Lifeline counselor, I spoke with disaster survivors who had endured immense loss but never received mental health support. These experiences reinforced that resilience must go beyond infrastructure and include behavioral health and human recovery.

The National Academies (2019) support this view, urging recovery strategies that improve mental health, social equity, and trust. Their earlier report (2015) emphasized that recovery should not be a return to pre-disaster conditions, especially when those conditions included systemic inequality or inadequate healthcare. In this light, resilience is not a luxury but a public safety imperative—and emergency management must help champion it.

## Policy and Practice Recommendations

To close the gap between resilience and emergency management, intentional efforts must be made to institutionalize collaboration, mutual learning, and shared accountability:

■ **Mandate Cross-Sector Planning:** Emergency management and resilience offices should co-lead

strategic planning efforts, integrating resilience metrics into emergency operations plans and vice versa.

■ **Align Funding and Project**

**Evaluation:** Federal grants (e.g., BRIC, HMGP) should reward projects that demonstrate meaningful collaboration between operational EM teams and resilience practitioners.

■ **Incorporate Vulnerability Indicators:**

Emergency managers should use tools like the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) to inform hazard assessments and recovery priorities, ensuring equity is central.

■ **Prioritize Behavioral Health:**

Resilience must include mental health systems and trauma-informed care for both responders and the public. Partnerships with behavioral health agencies should be embedded in EOPs.

■ **Cross-Train Professionals:**

Resilience professionals should learn ICS and emergency operations, while EMs should be trained in systems-thinking, equity, and sustainability frameworks.

These steps honor the strengths of each field while creating the shared language and structure necessary for long-term success.

## Conclusion

The question is not whether resilience and emergency management should integrate, but how quickly and effectively we can make it happen. The challenges we face today—climate change, pandemics, social fragmentation—demand more than isolated strategies. They demand connected systems, shared learning, and inclusive recovery.

From the emotional toll of answering crisis calls to coordinating emergency operations for a major airport, I have witnessed the consequences of disjointed efforts. I have also seen the power of holistic, human-centered approaches. Emergency managers are not being

asked to abandon their core practices. Rather, we are being invited to expand them—to embrace resilience not as an add-on, but as an evolution of our mission.

When resilience and emergency management work in concert, communities are not just protected—they are transformed. That is the future we must build together.

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Jan. 15	Tips for a Successful Breakout Speaker Proposal Webinar
Feb. 13	2026 IAEM Call for Speakers Closes
Feb. 9-12	IAEM-USA Region 6 Symposium, Webster, Texas
May 10-15	Governor's Hurricane Conference Palm Beach, Florida
May 26-29	TDEM Conference Fort Worth, Texas
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