



Bulletin

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Get Ready for Louisville: Registration Now Open for IAEM's 73rd Annual Conference

Louisville is calling! [Registration is now open](#) to all for the IAEM 73rd Annual Conference & EMEX, set for Nov. 14–20, 2025 in Louisville, Kentucky. Even better, [registration prices hold steady](#)—giving you maximum value at 2024 rates. Secure your spot today through the [conference portal](#).

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Louisville, Kentucky
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Get to Know Your IAEM Leadership

IAEM-USA Region 1 President

David Muse, CEM,
IAEM-USA Region 1 President

In an effort to introduce the IAEM leadership to members and recognize their hard work for the organization, the IAEM Bulletin will be providing profiles on the current IAEM leadership throughout the year. A heartfelt thanks to our volunteers whose hard work makes IAEM successful.

David currently resides in Lowell, Massachusetts, and has been an IAEM member for 10 years. You can connect with David on [LinkedIn](#) or email him at USARegion1President@iaem.com.

■ **Biographical sketch:** David is an experienced professional in emergency management and public safety. Currently, he serves as the assistant director of emergency management at UMass Lowell, leveraging over a decade of expertise in preparedness and resilience.

Previously, David was the emergency preparedness program manager for Mass General Brigham, enhancing organizational readiness, and served as the Massachusetts state exercise officer at MEMA, overseeing statewide exercise programs. He also led emergency preparedness initiatives as senior emergency preparedness manager for global security at State Street Corporation.

David began his career as an EMT, later earning his Advanced-EMT. During graduate school, he served as a U.S. park ranger, providing law enforcement, EMS, search and rescue, and incident management at Petrified Forest and Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks.

After graduating, David joined the American Red Cross as a disaster program manager, leading preparedness and response efforts across Vermont and New Hampshire and deploying to major disasters, includ-

ing Hurricane Irma and California wildfires.

A Certified Emergency Manager (CEM), he has completed the EMI Basic and Advanced Emergency Management Academies, Planning Practitioner Program, and is a FEMA Master Exercise Practitioner (MEP). He holds a Master's in Public Administration from UNH and a Bachelor's in Justice Studies from SNHU.

■ **What professional accomplishment or experience are you most proud of and/or learned the most from?**

Obtaining my CEM of course! Completion of the EMI Advanced, Basic, MEP, and Planning Practitioner Program.

■ **What are you hoping to get out of being a part of the IAEM leadership team?**

Having an opportunity to shape the EM profession and have influence outside of Region 1.

■ **What was the most unusual question you were ever asked in a college or job interview?**

How many windows are there in the City of New York?

■ **How did you get your start in emergency management?**

I started on the law enforcement track, then realized I liked the ICS-300 and 400 courses and that made me unsure and should consider a career in EM.



David Muse, CEM,
IAEM-USA Region 1 President

■ **What is the most valuable thing you receive from being a part of the association?**

The opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals.

■ **What country do you really want to visit?**

Italy.

■ **What are your favorite sports teams and what, if any, logo items or memorabilia do you have?**

The New England Patriots (Tom Brady era).

■ **What's your superpower?**

The ability to organize!

■ **What is the most exciting thing you've ever done?**

Scuba Diving.

■ **If you didn't work in emergency management, what career would you pursue?**

Likely a career in law enforcement.

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Region 1 President

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■ Is there anything you read every morning?

The headlines from Associated Press and FEMA Daily Operations Brief.

■ What is your favorite way to relax?

Riding my motorcycle or side-by-side.

■ What motto do you live by?

“Livin-the-Dream!”

■ What is your favorite restaurant?

Chick-Fil-A. ♦

IAEM's 73rd Annual Conference

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Explore the Program— Tailored for You

The [full agenda is online](#) and searchable by day, speaker, session type and focus area. With more than 250 presenters, you can build an itinerary that hits your professional sweet spot—from cutting-edge tech to community resilience.

Super-Charge Your Schedule with Training

Plan to arrive early or stay late. IAEM is offering a wide slate of [pre- and post-conference courses](#),

ranging from one-hour briefings to three-day intensives, many of them free to full conference registrants. Add selections during registration and maximize your time at the IAEM Annual Conference.

Stay Cyber-Safe— Beware of Scams

Official messages come only from @iaem.com, info@iaem.com, Mail@connectedcommunity.org or @asmii.net. Ignore offers from look-alike domains such as FavoriteStaffing.com or TravelBookingKey. Visit the IAEM website for a [current list of known phishing scams](#).

Don't miss the premiere gathering of emergency management professionals. Register today, reserve your room, and get ready for an unforgettable week in Kentucky! ♦

Bulletin Editor: [John Osborne](#), QAS

Communications Director:
[Dawn Shiley](#), MA, CAE

Chief Executive Officer:
[Elizabeth B. Armstrong](#), MAM, CAE

The *IAEM Bulletin* is published monthly by IAEM to keep members abreast of association news, government actions affecting emergency management, research, and information sources.

The publication also is intended to serve as a way for emergency managers to exchange information on programs and ideas. Past issues are available in the members-only [IAEM Bulletin Archives](#).

Publishing an article in the *IAEM Bulletin* may help you to meet IAEM's certification requirements. Check out the [author's guidelines](#).

Articles should be submitted to Bulletin Editor John Osborne via email at john@iaem.com.

DISCLAIMER

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IAEM in Action



IAEM Director of Government Affairs Thad Huguley visited Mobile, Alabama, for the 2025 Alabama Emergency Management Association conference. He is pictured with Alabama State Director Jeff Smitherman and Alabama Emergency Management Association President Keith Barnett.

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<https://www.iaem.org/Events/IAEM-USA-Region-9-Symposium-2025-registration>

IAEM News to Know

Certification

■ The IAEM Certification Program Ask Me Anything (AMA) is scheduled for Aug. 13, at 2:00 p.m. EDT.

- Join the IAEM Certification Commission for a [live 'Ask Me Anything' webinar](#)—this is your chance to get answers and insider tips directly from the experts. Register [here!](#)

■ IAEM has partnered with Cloud Generation to begin developing a new, streamlined certification portal.

- The new portal can be expected to be running Fall 2025 with additional information to come as it is further developed.

- News on the new portal will be circulated through email and IAEM social accounts so make sure you are connected with us to receive the most up to date information.

IAEM-USA Elections

■ The IAEM-USA Call for nominations for IAEM-USA second vice president and treasurer are open until **5:00 p.m. EDT, July 7, 2025.**

- Members are encouraged to submit nominations to IAEM Headquarters via email to info@iaem.com.

- To be a candidate for national office, the member must meet the criteria in the [IAEM-USA Administrative Policies & Procedures](#).

■ View the webinar "[Why be an IAEM-USA Leader?](#)" from last year, which highlights serving on the IAEM-USA Board of Directors.

■ The Regional Elections Call for Nominations is open until **5:00 p.m. EDT, July 7, 2025.**

- Nine regions (IAEM-USA Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) are holding elections concurrent with the IAEM-USA Council elections.

- All nominations must be submitted to [Rebecca Campbell](#).

- Information may be found in the Regional Bylaws. Any questions can be directed to [Rebecca Campbell](#). ♦



The poster features a dark red background with a subtle vertical pleated texture, reminiscent of a stage curtain. At the top center is a gold laurel wreath with a ribbon. Below it, the text "2025 IAEM AWARDS PROGRAM" is written in large, white, serif capital letters. The text is flanked by two horizontal gold lines with diamond-shaped center ornaments. Below the main title, a white-bordered box contains the heading "AWARD CATEGORIES:" in bold, serif capital letters. Underneath this box is a bulleted list of award categories in white serif font. At the bottom of the poster, the text "NOMINATE BY JUNE 30" is written in a white, italicized serif font. In the bottom right corner is the IAEM logo, which includes the acronym "IAEM" and the full name "International Association of Emergency Managers" in a smaller font.

2025 IAEM AWARDS PROGRAM

AWARD CATEGORIES:

- Programmatic Awards
- Public/Private Sector Awards
- Individual Awards
- Lifetime Achievement Awards
- Student Awards
- Volunteer Awards
- Uniformed Services Awards

NOMINATE BY JUNE 30

IAEM
International Association of
Emergency Managers

General Focus Articles:

Cyber Ready Community Game: Revitalizing an Existing Resource to Enhance Community Cyber Preparedness, Presented at the 2025 Washington Cybersecurity Conference

by Alexis Mee, Assessments and Preparedness Specialist, King County Office of Emergency Management; and Audrey Hoen, Cybersecurity Preparedness Specialist, King County Office of Emergency Management 7

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From Shelter to Stability: Rethinking the First Steps of Disaster Recovery

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The “Messy Space”: When Emergency Management Meets the Improbable

by Kevin Robins, Spokane Colleges, Emergency Management Specialist, Office of Campus Security 15

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](#).

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Cyber Ready Community Game: Revitalizing an Existing Resource to Enhance Community Cyber Preparedness, Presented at the 2025 Washinton Cybersecurity Conference

By Alexis Mee, Assessments and Preparedness Specialist, King County Office of Emergency Management; and Audrey Hoen, Cybersecurity Preparedness Specialist, King County Office of Emergency Management

In recent research, both gamified learning and tabletop exercises have been shown to be effective methods of instruction, elevating collaboration, motivation, and peer-to-peer learning. The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) National Exercise Division (NED), in coordination with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), developed the original Cyber Ready Community Game in 2020. King County Office of Emergency Management (KCOEM) acquired copies of the game from CISA in hopes of facilitating it at the 2025 Washington Statewide Cybersecurity Conference. This conference was a three-day event aimed primarily at response partners such as emergency management (EM) professionals and critical infrastructure sector personnel, but it also welcomed those with more technical roles in cybersecurity.

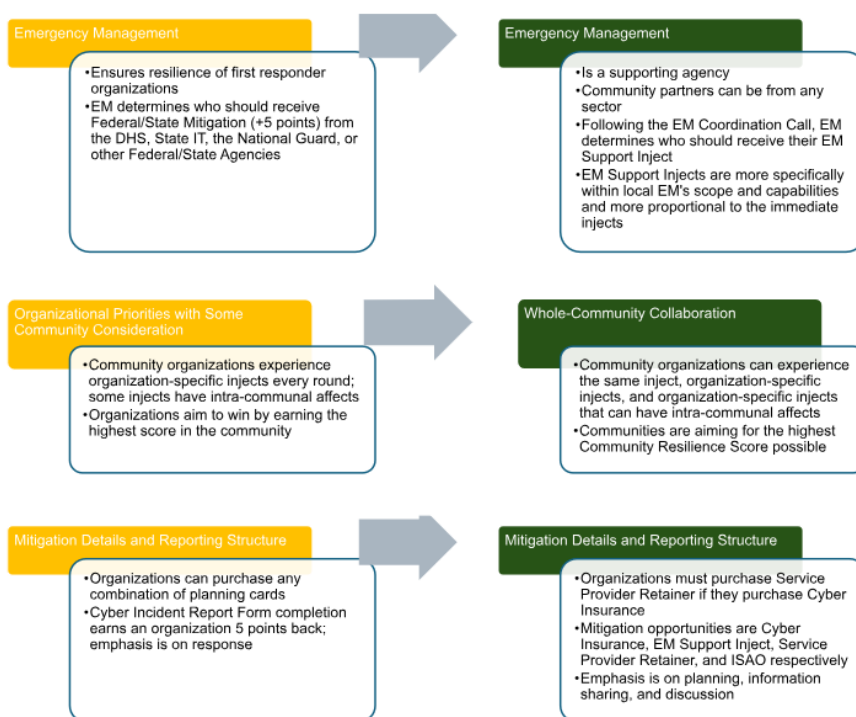
Facilitating the game in this diverse setting would allow Information Technology (IT) professionals and response partners who rarely exercise together to engage in an interactive and more personal manner, thinking about and discussing basic cybersecurity principles in their organizations. However, initial internal play uncovered the need for key changes to the structure of gameplay ahead of the conference, prompting KCOEM to lead the Seattle Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) re-write of the board game. Changes were necessary to align the NIST 2.0 Framework with the

creation of a "Gamified Tabletop" version playable with conference participants. Read on to learn about the most significant changes made to the game and how they enhanced cross-sector collaboration and participant learning experience.

Original Game Overview

The original game contains a set of six gameboards, each representing a different community organization: emergency management, local government, local utility provider, community hospital, community

bank, and private sector business. Each organization has its own deck of inject cards that target their score depending on the planning cards they chose to invest in at the beginning of the game. Organizations can utilize potential mitigation through their cyber insurance, service provider retainer, information sharing and analysis organization (ISAO) membership, or federal/state mitigation cards granted by the emergency management organization. The organization with the highest total points at the end wins the game, and if the community resil-



Summary of significant high-level changes to the roles and structure of the game

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Cyber Ready Community Game

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ience score (the average of the total points among participating organizations, at the end of the four rounds) is over 90 and the community does not lose critical business services (CBS) in more than half its participating organizations, the community is considered cyber-ready.

Most Significant Changes to the Game

To better achieve our goal of promoting cross-sector collaboration and discussion, KCOEM and UASI partners incorporated three primary changes to the game which then effectuated smaller changes in game mechanics.

■ Adjusting the Definition and Role of the Emergency Management Organization:

- Original: “Emergency Management: Coordinates with and ensures resilience of the critical business services of police, corrections, fire, and emergency medical services.”

The scope of EM practice does not and cannot include ensuring resilience of the critical business services of these agencies, and emergency management operations are not siloed to coordinating only with police, corrections, fire, and emergency medical services. The role of EM entails supporting the whole community through duties that include developing and maintaining mutual aid agreements, coordinating response requests, informing local officials and the public, conducting exercises identifying areas for improvement, and helping ensure the continuation of essential services (FEMA, 2019). A correct and comprehensive definition highlights the value of EM and their role in the community.

Another aspect of the game that had to be reexamined was the Federal/State Mitigation Cards originally given out by emergency management. As emergency management’s ability to deliver resources from DHS, state IT, the National Guard, or other federal/state agencies was not proportional to many of the injects. Therefore, these cards were not used in the final game design and were instead replaced by emergency management support injects—cyber workshop, cyber exercise, COOP workshop, resource request, and mutual aid agreement—to more accurately reflect the types of support EM regularly provides.

- New: “Emergency Management: Coordinates with and helps ensure resilience of all organizations and their critical business services across the community.”

■ Changing the competition structure to a whole-community approach:

In order to enhance the collaboration component of the game, the decision was made to emphasize the importance of organizations working together as a community rather than playing against each other. This models a coordinated emergency response emphasizing partnership on the emergency management coordination call. Thus, the structure was shifted from an organization versus. organization configuration to a collaborative community game, leading to a heightened sense of camaraderie and attempts at strategic alignment.

■ Adjusting mitigation details and reporting structure:

To increase realism in the game, organizations that purchase cyber insurance must now also purchase the service provider retainer. Most insurance companies prefer immediate notification; notifying an insurer early may help maximize coverage and obtain quicker approvals for

specialized resources (Cowbell, 2024). Cyber insurance needed to be used as the first-line mitigation for response in the game flow. The emergency management coordination call then occurs, and their support is given in the form of the emergency management support inject. Only then can the service provider retainer be utilized (on a first-come, first serve basis). Lastly, the ISAO members negotiate on who receives the ISAO’s support.

Gameplay in the Conference Setting: From Boardgame to Gamified Tabletop

The game format was adjusted to suit conference needs, leading to a game-exercise hybrid. Injects were pre-drawn and inserted into PowerPoint slides displayed in the room. The last round consisted of organization-specific CBS injects, adding more complexity to the game. Discussion questions were tweaked, delving into specifics of real-world impacts of cyber incidents such as those described by the game. A newly designed “situational awareness board” built in an Excel table with color coding and auto-sum formulas served as the scoreboard.

KCOEM included a running discussion question throughout all rounds: “What situation in this round concerned you the most? Does your real-life organization have this capability or mitigation for this concern?” This question allowed participants to verbalize what each situation highlighted about gaps in their organizations. During practice runs, KCOEM found that connecting the play from each round to their real-life experiences and roles helped ground participants and guide their thinking. Many participants commented that the game brought a knowledgeable group together

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Cyber Ready Community Game

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around the table when they would not have been sure who to turn to otherwise. Still, some discussion questions had answers that no one in the room was privy to. Facilitators encouraged these players that their questions were important and to turn to their organization, CISA representative, or other appropriate subject matter expert for more information after the game was over.

Participant Experience

The overall consensus amongst participants was the gamified tabletop was an engaging way to learn more about cybersecurity preparedness for individuals who are otherwise not cybersecurity experts. While the gamification was enjoyable and the injects were surprising, it was the peer-to-peer interaction that provided participants with the most valuable insight. This experience supported the notion that leveraging others' knowledge and past experiences in a collaborative game with common rather than competing objectives is beneficial to participants' learning process.

Boardgame boxes were available for participants or other conference attendees to take with the intention of playing with their organization or partners, using the new instructions. By the end of the second day, more than 15 physical copies of the boxed sets were taken by partners in a variety of sectors.

Future Considerations

KCOEM is grateful for the opportunity to work on this project and share the product with partners in the community. As we navigate ever-changing financial circum-

stances in EM, this project allowed us to practice resourcefulness by leveraging existing materials rather than funding an entirely new product. Additionally, cybersecurity education is an evolving field that touches us all; accurately reflecting our technological and interagency capabilities is of tantamount importance during cybersecurity exercises.

Current initiatives are underway to further the reach of the updated game into the community, such as facilitating it at partner organizations and sharing the new game documents. As new data comes out on gamification, exercises, and the learning process, KCOEM looks forward to evolving the way we bring partners together to build capability and a more resilient community for all.

Find the new Cyber Ready Community Game materials [here](#). For questions and inquiries email alswanson@kingcounty.gov. ♦

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Emergency Management of Biosurveillance

By George Lane, Research Director, SafeR3 Corporation

Biosensors were deployed in thirty major United States cities as emergency management of biosurveillance to respond to the 2001 Anthrax attacks.

However, biosensors at “Ground Zero” on “9/11” did not detect contamination until the third day. The reason was that the wind had changed direction, pushing contaminants towards the biosensors. Biosensors alone do not provide emergency management of biosurveillance.

To prepare for biowarfare, three critical questions must be answered:

- Can “non-state actors” produce and deliver biological weapons? (Capability)
- Do terrorists plan to use biological weapons? (Intent)
- Would using biological weapons produce the intended effects? (Vulnerability and consequences).

History of Biowarfare

Biowarfare and the first need for biosurveillance in this country came in 1763 when Native Americans were intentionally exposed to a virulent strain of smallpox in infected blankets provided by British General Lord Jeffery Amherst (1). Knowing this, in 1777 George Washington inoculated the Continental Army against smallpox, the first known biodefense measures.

Biowarfare in Japan

The Japanese used biowarfare in World War II when they attacked China with “Unit 731”, a biological and chemical warfare unit of the Japanese Army that conducted human experimentation during World War II (2).

The Japanese recognized that it was more effective to wound an opponent rather than to kill him because of the costs and manpower required to care for the wounded. At end of the World War II, “Unit 731” leaders offered themselves and their research to the Soviet Union to avoid prosecution by the Allies.

KGB biowarfare using Ricin

In 1978, a Soviet KGB agent stabbed a Bulgarian exile, Georgi Markov, using a spring-loaded umbrella with pellets filled with Ricin while both were crossing the Thames in London (3). The umbrella injected a small amount of the deadly chemical warfare agent (CWA) Ricin.

The Bulgarian exile died three days later from exposure to Ricin, a toxic bioweapon derived from the castor oil plant, “*Ricinus communis*.” Ricin inhibits the synthesis of protein cells in the body. No antidote exists for Ricin.

Release of Anthrax in the Soviet Union

In 1979 a release of Anthrax killed 70 people in the Soviet Union (4). The Soviets claimed that the Anthrax came from contaminated meat. However, it was later determined that the source of the Anthrax was a secret Soviet weapons lab located in Sverdlovsk that had used bioweapons technology originally developed by Japanese “Unit 731” scientists.

Anthrax

Anthrax is not infectious. It is a non-contagious bacterium, “*Bacillus anthracis*”. Anthrax is carried by farm animals and is “zoonotic,” meaning

it can be transmitted by animals to humans with open wounds.

Anthrax is described in the book of Exodus. The word “Anthrax” is derived from the Greek word, “Anthrakis”, meaning “coal.” It refers to the black color of skin caused by Anthrax. Anthrax was the first disease associated with a specific bacterium.

Bioterrorism in the United States Anthrax attacks of 2001

After the September 11th attacks, letters containing Anthrax were mailed to NBC news anchor Tom Brokaw in New York City, the New York Post, and Senator Tom Daschle in Washington D.C., in October (5). These Anthrax biowarfare attacks dramatically illustrated the need for emergency management using biosurveillance in America.

In December 2001, former Soviet bioweapons expert Dr. Kenneth Alibek told the Senate Committee on International Relations, “The Anthrax attack was not a biological weapons attack, it was a psychological economic attack using biological agents.”

Response to Anthrax Attacks

Dr. Stephen Hatfill is an FBI bioterrorism expert who responded to the Anthrax attacks whom I met at LSU’s National Center for Biomedical Research and Training (NCBRT) in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, while I was conducting biosurveillance research.

The history of the Anthrax investigation highlights problems at the FBI, its insufficient preparation for biowarfare criminal investigations, and its lack of formalized processes in emergency management of biological investigations (6).

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Emergency Management of Biosurveillance

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From “Weapons of Mass Destruction” to “Weapons of Mass Disruption”

In the 21st Century, large-scale political conflicts will not be limited to armed military struggles but will encompass all of society. Conflicts of disruption will escalate, while destructive warfare incidents may become rare.

What is and what is not biowarfare will be increasingly difficult to determine in the future. It will be difficult to determine the reason for biological releases, often occurring in the gray area between accidents and war.

Summary

Nowhere has confusion been more prominent than in today's conflicts involving biowarfare, making it difficult to discern incidents involving the use of biological agents from intentional criminal activity or accidental events.

In a future where sophisticated biology can be used as biowarfare, I believe that biosensors will be an essential element of emergency management of biosurveillance. ♦

References

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2. “Unit 731 and the Japanese Imperial Army’s Biological Warfare Program”; <https://apjif.org/tsuneishi-keiichi/2194/article>
3. “Georgi Markov assassination”; <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/law/georgi-markov-assassination>
4. “The 1979 Anthrax Leak in Sverdlovsk”; <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/plague/sverdlovsk/>
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From Shelter to Stability: Rethinking the First Steps of Disaster Recovery

By Mark A. Cooper, MPA, Chief Strategy Officer, National Emergency Management and Response;
and Lauren Maher, Ph.D. student, Texas Tech University

Emergency shelters serve as essential short-term interventions during disasters, but they are not designed to support displaced populations over extended periods. With daily operational costs ranging from \$123 to \$387 per person depending on the location and services provided (McCarthy & Crane, 2024), long-term sheltering places substantial financial and logistical strain on communities. Beyond these resource implications, extended stays in emergency shelters have been linked to increased emotional distress, overcrowding, and deteriorating health and safety conditions, which can hinder both individual recovery and broader community resilience.

In addition to these human and economic costs, prolonged sheltering can also erode trust between government agencies and the public. When evacuees perceive that there is no end in sight (or worse, no one is actively working on their behalf to find one) feelings of abandonment and helplessness increase. This erosion of confidence can lead to a cycle of disengagement, where residents stop participating in programs meant to help them transition, and agencies face even greater difficulty implementing recovery plans (Laughter, 2025). Proactive communication and visible action are therefore as important as logistical planning in maintaining morale and encouraging evacuee cooperation.

Consider the too-familiar scenario in which a government entity activated a state-run shelter after an incident to house displaced individuals. Four months later, over 113

evacuees remained in temporary shelters with no structured plan for transition, no embedded resource navigators, and no coordinated exit strategy. The result: unsustainable costs, growing frustration, and rising concern among both residents and public officials. Despite repeated internal discussions, solutions failed to materialize. Had resource navigators and structured transition planning been integrated from the outset, the prolonged sheltering, political pressure, and financial strain might have been avoided altogether. Early action would not only have supported a smoother path from shelter to stability but also saved the jurisdiction over \$3.46M.

When Staying Becomes Stuck

One critical challenge in shelter management is the assumption that emergency shelters alone are sufficient during large-scale displacement events. In practice, without structured plans for transition and recovery, evacuees may remain in temporary shelters far longer than intended, compounding unmet needs and increasing pressure on overstretched systems. For example, in North Carolina during fiscal year 2017, the average length of stay in emergency shelters reached 77 days (Morton et al., 2019).

Planning the Exit on Day One

National EMR offers an alternative model by reframing emergency sheltering as the starting point of recovery—not a pause in it. Their approach introduces Resource Navigators into shelters as soon as they are activated. These navigators arrive equipped with mobile technology and knowledge of local, state, and national services, enabling them to begin client-centered support immediately—even before the first evacuee is registered.

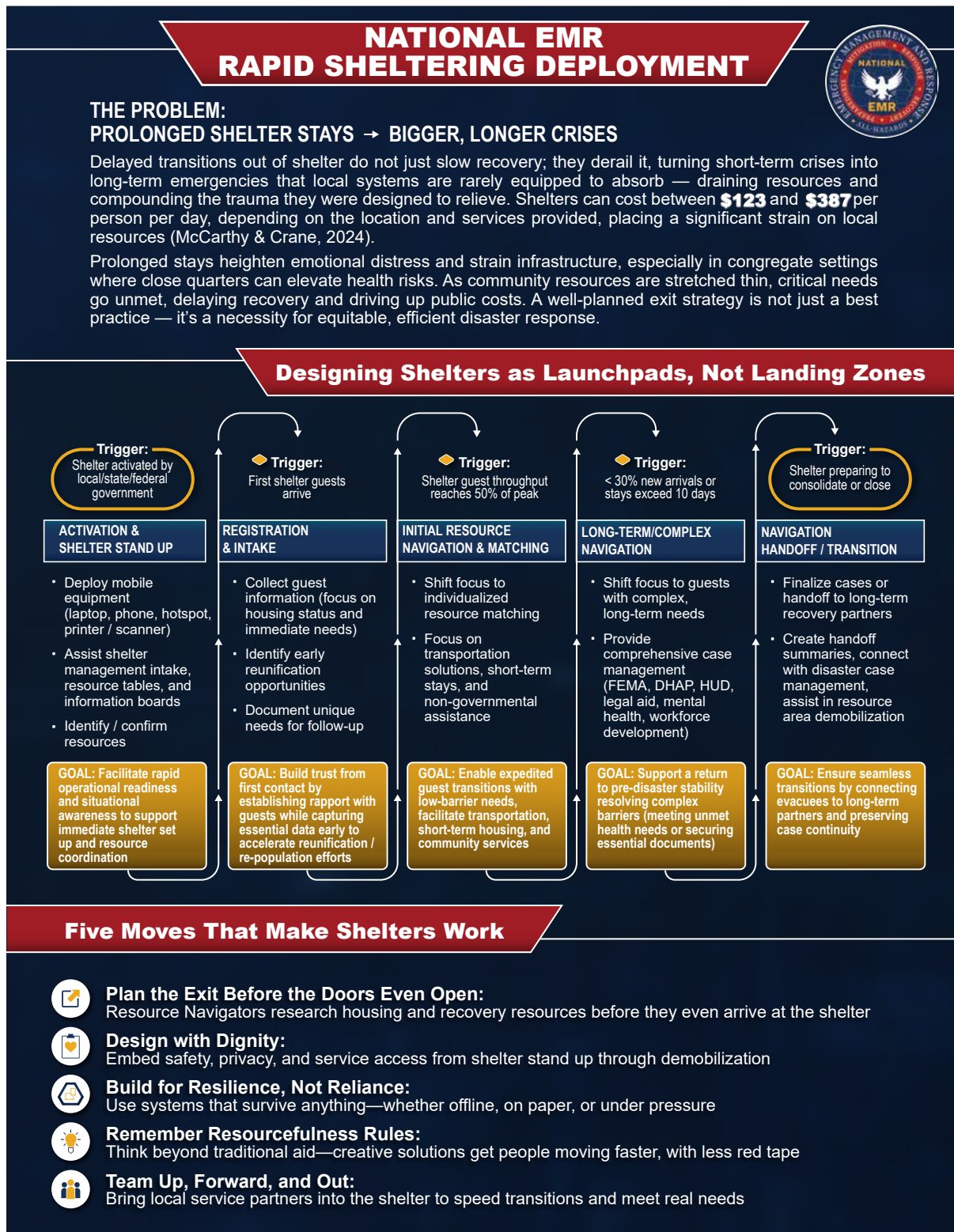
Navigation Before Need Escalates

From the outset, Resource Navigators document evacuee needs, assist with reunification efforts and initiate resource matching to avoid unnecessary delays. Individuals with low-barrier needs—such as those who simply require transportation, documentation support, or short-term housing—can often exit the shelter system quickly when guided early. This front-loading of support helps reduce the average length of stay and eases the load on local systems.

Navigators also play a vital role in data collection and trend identification, offering real-time insights into evolving needs and service gaps. By identifying patterns early, such as rising mental health concerns or housing bottlenecks, navigators enable emergency managers to adjust strategy on the fly, strengthening situational awareness and agility.

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Funding for Higher Education

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From Shelter to Stability

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From Complex Cases to Coordinated Care

As shelters stabilize and more complex cases emerge, navigators shift their efforts to sustained case management. They work with individuals facing deeper barriers (e.g., lack of identification, healthcare access, pending benefits, or housing ineligibility) and coordinate across multiple sectors, including legal aid, behavioral health, and long-term housing programs.

A Smarter Start to Recovery

This model illustrates a broader evolution in emergency management: from reactive response to anticipatory recovery planning. As Dupont (2020) notes, the field is moving toward managing risks with adaptive, human-centered systems. National EMR's shelter navigation framework offers a compelling example of this shift, turning shelters into engines of early recovery.

By embedding navigators into shelter operations from the start, communities can transform the sheltering experience from one of stagnation to one of momentum. This evolution signals more than just a tactical improvement. It represents a philosophical shift in how communities value and support disaster survivors. Rather than viewing sheltering as a holding pattern, this model repositions it as the first phase of a structured, dignified recovery journey. Embedding Resource Navigators early fosters agency among evacuees encourages cross-sector collaboration, and builds system-wide resilience by identifying and addressing barriers before they become entrenched. As public scrutiny of government spending and operational efficiency continues to grow, models like this demonstrate a smarter use of limited resources. They not only improve individual outcomes but also enhance the credibility and effectiveness of government response systems. ♦

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The “Messy Space”: When Emergency Management Meets the Improbable

By Kevin Robins, Spokane Colleges, Emergency Management Specialist, Office of Campus Security

Welcome to the “messy space”—that uncomfortable, unpredictable, and often underappreciated zone where emergency management professionals live and breathe. It’s the gap between best-case planning and worst-case reality, where we’re expected to be equal parts clairvoyant, crisis counselor, drill sergeant, and miracle worker. And nowhere is this paradox more pronounced than in planning for an active shooter event.

We train. We drill. We preach the gospel of Run. Hide. Fight. We hand out wallet cards, paste QR codes on walls, and push out 90-second YouTube videos that (hopefully) don’t get muted after five seconds. We do everything short of passing out Kevlar hoodies in the quad.

But here’s the catch—we know that even with all of this, the likelihood of walking away from an active shooter event with zero victims is... well, let’s just say it’s in the same statistical neighborhood as winning the lottery while being struck by lightning.

And this is the “messy space”—where practitioners must sell safety while silently accepting the limitations of the response playbook. We’re stuck trying to make the impossible sound probable, all while keeping a straight face and a tone of empowerment. Because saying, “We’ll do our best, but honestly, it’s going to be bad,” just doesn’t fit on a campaign poster.

The Language of Control in a World of Chaos

One of our favorite industry buzzwords is resilience, and it sounds great on paper. It conjures images of rising like a phoenix from the ashes, which is much more palatable than the real-world equivalent: sobbing on the curb after sprinting barefoot across broken glass. Resilience, preparedness, situational awareness—we wield these like magical talismans, hoping they’ll ward off chaos. But active shooter events are chaos incarnate. And chaos, by nature, doesn’t follow checklists.

We spend countless hours teaching faculty and staff how to lock doors, barricade with office chairs, and improvise weapons using whiteboard markers and coffee mugs. And while this training is vital and can absolutely save lives, we also quietly carry the knowledge that violence is fast, unpredictable, and devastating. Outcomes hinge on timing, location, mindset, and pure dumb luck.

We know that even well-trained individuals might freeze, take the wrong action, or be caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. And yet, we return to the front of the classroom, the staff meeting, or the policy review to deliver the same message: your actions matter, even if they can’t guarantee survival. That’s a heavy truth to carry in a world that prefers quick fixes and clear outcomes.

The Expectation Gap

The public, and often our leadership, want assurances. They want to know that if we plan well enough, if we communicate clearly, and if we drill regularly—no one will die. It’s an understandable desire. We all want to believe that tragedy is preventable with just enough preparation.

But in truth, the goal of active shooter preparedness isn’t zero casualties—it’s minimizing harm. It’s about helping people react faster, act smarter, and increase their odds of survival in an inherently impossible situation.

And therein lies the moral strain: we’re forced to sell a promise we can’t guarantee. Our value gets measured by how unmessy we can make the mess look. We’re not judged by how many lives were saved—but by how many were lost.

Embracing the Mess

So, what do we do? We lean into the messy space. We acknowledge it. We humanize it. We keep teaching, keep refining, and keep showing up. We remember that every extra second someone has to run, every improved sheltering space, every person who remembers not to pull the fire alarm during a lockdown—that’s a win.

We should also stop pretending that tactical perfection is the standard. Let’s trade the glossy “perfect response” narrative for a more authentic message: this is hard, terrifying, and unfair—but we’re going

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Messy Space

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to give you every tool we can to stack the odds in your favor.

If that message doesn't make it into a promotional video, so be it. The people who get it—your instructors, your security team, your dispatchers—know that real preparedness isn't pretty. It's gritty, confusing, and sometimes as simple as locking the right door one second sooner than last time.

Call It What It Is

The messy space is not a failure of emergency management—it's the nature of violent events. Plans help, but they don't equal immunity. We can build a culture of preparedness without promising invincibility. We just need to be brave enough to tell

the truth, clever enough to make it stick, and persistent enough to keep pushing forward.

And when in doubt, remember: even in the darkest chaos, your emergency guide flipchart might just be the best blunt-force object in reach. Use what you've got. That's what preparedness is really about.

Lessons Learned: Time and Distance Save Lives

In the messy space of active shooter response, one principle stands out above the rest: Survival often hinges on time and distance. The more of both you can create between yourself and the attacker, the greater your chances.

What We've learned

■ Locking a door buys seconds. A study by the FBI found that many shooters bypass locked or barricaded doors in favor of easier targets. Time is your shield.

■ Distance reduces risk. The farther you are from the threat, the harder you are to hit—literally. Run if you can and run far.

■ Quick decisions beat perfect ones. Hesitation costs lives. Acting decisively—whether it's running, hiding, or fighting—can turn chaos into survival.

■ Barriers matter. Whether it's a solid-core door or a flipped table, any obstacle between you and the attacker slows their progress and improves yours.

You don't need a black belt or a superhero cape to survive. You just need to move, think, and create a little space between you and the worst moment of your life. ♦



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Nov. 14-20	2025 IAEM Annual Conference Louisville, Kentucky

IAEM Staff

Client Services Director
Barbara Arango, CAE, MBA
barango@iaem.com

Chief Executive Officer
Elizabeth B. Armstrong, MAM, CAE
beth@iaem.com

Contracts Specialist
Mariama Bah
mbah@asmii.net

Communications and Project Coordinator
Lexi Baird, QAS
lexi@iaem.com

IAEM-USA Director of Government Affairs
Thad Huguley
thad@iaem.com

Conference Director
Julie Husk, JD, QAS
julie@iaem.com

Membership Manager/Registrar
Sharon L. Kelly, QAS
sharon@iaem.com

Project Manager
Terry Lightheart-Sadler, CEM, QAS
terry@iaem.com

Program Manager
Kate W. McClimans, IOM, QAS
kate@iaem.com

Editor
John T. Osborne, QAS
john@iaem.com

Meetings Director
Michelle Savoie, CMP, QAS
michelle@iaem.com

Sponsor Manager
Katie Schlesinger
katie@iaem.com

Communications & Marketing Director / Scholarship Program Director
Dawn M. Shiley, CAE
dawn@iaem.com

Assistant Executive Director
Chelsea F. Steadman, QAS
chelsea@iaem.com

Member Relations Coordinator
Carol Tagliaferri, QAS
Carol@iaem.com

**Deputy Executive Director
EMEX Exhibit Manager**
Clay D. Tyeryar, MAM, CAE
clay@iaem.com

Certification Services Coordinator
Albon Yowell, QAS
albon@iaem.com

info@iaem.com | www.iaem.org

Visit the [IAEM staff webpage](#).