Vol. 43 No. 5 May 2026 INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EMERGENCY MANAGERS

IAEM Bulletin

In This Issue

International Association of Emergency Managers

IAEM Launches New Digital Experience for Members

On June 8, 2026, the International Association of Emergency Managers will launch a new integrated technology platform designed to better connect, support, and serve emergency management professionals worldwide.

The launch includes a redesigned public website, a new member portal, and a modernized online community platform that together create a more streamlined and user-friendly experience for IAEM members.

These improvements reflect IAEM's ongoing commitment to investing in tools and resources that strengthen member engagement, simplify access to benefits, and support collaboration across the emergency management profession.

A New Public-Facing Website

The new IAEM website has been redesigned with a cleaner layout, improved navigation, and a stronger focus on helping visitors quickly find information about emergency management, IAEM programs, professional development opportunities, certification, events, and membership benefits.

To simplify the user experience, global content has been reorganized into a dedicated microsite structure, making it easier to navigate content relevant to users' interests and regions. Likewise, the IAEM Certification Program and the IAEM Annual Conference have dedicated microsites.

The updated website also improves accessibility, mobile responsiveness, and overall usability, ensuring members can more easily access IAEM resources whether they are in the office, at home, or supporting disaster operations in the field.

A Modern IAEM Community Experience

IAEM's online member community is also transitioning to a new platform that builds on the success of our current IAEMconnect format and introduces expanded collaboration features for members.

The new community platform will continue to support the main discussion forum members rely on today, while also creating dedicated spaces for:

- IAEM Regions.
- Committees.
- Caucuses.
- Commissions.
- Students.
- Member collaboration groups.

New features will include:

- File and resource sharing.
- Collaboration Boards for Committees and Caucuses.
- Virtual meeting capabilities.
- Improved member networking tools.
- Easier access to group conversations and archives.

continued on page 5

From the IAEM-USA President

Leading Through Change and Uncertainty

By Josh Morton, CEM, IAEM-USA President

If the last few months have taught us anything, it's that emergency management is entering a season of change. But one thing this profession teaches you very quickly is that situations can rapidly change when you least expect them to.

I was reminded of that in 2017 when Hurricane Irma took a turn towards my state.

Bethany and I were headed out on a cruise to celebrate our fifth wedding anniversary just as Irma was beginning to make its way across the Atlantic. When we arrived at the port, we knew the storm was likely going to impact Southern Florida while we were gone, but at the time, South Carolina did not appear to be in the path.

The cruise itinerary shifted from the eastern Caribbean to the western Caribbean, but otherwise everything seemed fine. We boarded the ship expecting a seven-day vacation and a little time disconnected from work.

A few days into the trip, however, the forecast began to change.

Suddenly, South Carolina looked like it might see impacts after all, and my assistant director, who had only been in the role for about two months, was going to have to manage an EOC activation for a hurricane.

Thankfully, every time we reached port, I was able to get enough cell service to check in, and once I purchased the ship's Wi-Fi package, we could at least text back and forth. At one point, I even gained access to the ship's satellite phone and started calling into the EOC a couple of times each day for briefings.

Meanwhile, our seven-day cruise turned into a fourteen-day cruise, and after day six, we didn't see land again. Our cabin walls were eventually covered in Post-it notes (courtesy of a pack Bethany happened to have in her purse) as I tried to keep track of updates, resource requests, phone numbers, and operational priorities from the middle of the Caribbean.

To this day, I'm fairly certain I may be the only local emergency manager to ever run an EOC activation from a cruise ship cabin!

As stressful and surreal as that experience was, it reinforced an important lesson: the plan can change at any moment. The question is never whether change is coming. It's how we respond when it arrives.

On May 7, the FEMA Review Council released its long-anticipated report outlining recommendations for the future of FEMA and the broader emergency management enterprise. While many of the recommendations will require additional discussion, legislative action, or further refinement before becoming reality, one thing is already clear: the conversation about the future of our profession is no longer theoretical. It's here.

For emergency managers across the country, that reality brings a mix of reactions. Some see opportunities for reform and modernization. Others see uncertainty and concern about what these changes could mean for state and local programs, disaster survivors, and the profession itself. Most of us probably fall somewhere in the middle.

Over the past several months, we've talked about leadership through vision, simplicity, consistency, cooperation, and workforce sustainability. This moment calls for all of those things at once.

Josh Morton, CEM, President, IAEM-USA

The FEMA Review Council report contains broad recommendations intended to streamline disaster assistance, shift more responsibility to state and local governments, and redefine the federal role in disaster management. Supporters argue the recommendations could create a more efficient and less bureaucratic system, while critics worry about whether state and local programs will have the resources and capacity needed to absorb those responsibilities.

No matter where you land on the specifics, change of this scale naturally creates uncertainty. And uncertainty has a way of affecting morale, focus, and trust.

In times like this, leadership is not about pretending to have all the answers. It's about creating stability even when the environment around us feels unsettled.

That starts with communication.

People want honesty from their leaders. They want transparency

continued on page 3

Change and Uncertainty

continued from page 2

about what is known, what is still uncertain, and what may change in the months ahead. Emergency managers are used to operating in complex environments, but speculation creates more anxiety than clarity ever will.

Leadership also means resisting the urge to overreact.

One of the great strengths of emergency management is adaptability. This profession has evolved through hurricanes, wildfires, pandemics, acts of terrorism, technological failures, and countless other challenges. Systems change. Policies evolve. Administrations come and go. But the mission remains consistent: helping communities prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate disasters.

That mission continues to anchor us, regardless of what org charts or federal policies look like in the future.

This is also a moment for cooperation.

As discussions continue around the FEMA Review Council recommendations and the FEMA Act, our profession has an opportunity to lead constructively. State, local, tribal, territorial, and federal partners all bring valuable perspectives to this conversation. Real progress will require listening to one another, sharing practical experiences, and focusing less on politics and more on outcomes.

At the local level, especially, emergency managers understand the importance of relationships. We know that disasters are solved through partnerships long before they are solved through policy documents. That same mindset should guide us now.

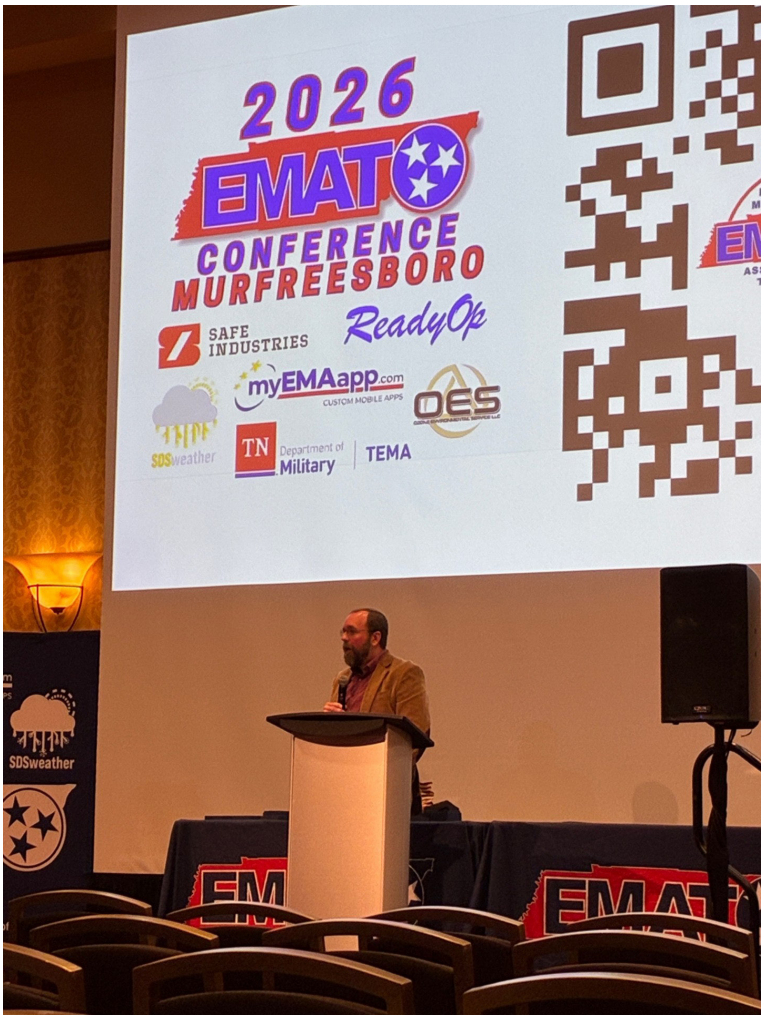
We are resilient. Not just as communities, but as a profession.

Leadership during uncertainty often looks less dramatic than people expect. Sometimes it is simply showing up consistently for your team. Sometimes it means maintaining calm when others are anxious. Sometimes it means continuing to mentor younger professionals who are wondering what the future of emergency management looks like.

Those things matter.

The coming months will likely bring continued debate, additional recommendations, and a great deal of discussion about where emergency management is headed next. But if there is one lesson this profession has taught us time and time again, it is that uncertainty does not have to become instability.

And regardless of what changes may come, the people who make up this profession, the emergency managers working every day in communities across the country, will continue to be its greatest strength. 🔷



IAEM-USA President Josh Morton, CEM, spoke at the 2026 EMAT conference on April 28 in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

IAEM News to Know

Conference

■ EMEX exhibit booths are now available: The 2026 IAEM Annual Conference & EMEX will be held in Long Beach, California, this November, and EMEX booth sales are now open. To view the floor plan, download a contract, read our quick facts, and review the exhibitor prospectus, visit our website.

■ The Call for Speakers for the EMvision Talks closes on May 29, 2026. Details can be found in the Speaker Guidance.

■ Plan to join IAEM as we chart a course to Long Beach - the 2026 IAEM Wellness Campaign:

- The competition will be started in July.
- More details, as well as registration procedures, will be made available soon.

Certification

■ The certification program is seeking dedicated professionals to serve as Commissioners. This is a valuable chance to share your expertise, collaborate with peers, and play a key role in maintaining the credibility and excellence of the certification process.

- Interested candidates are encouraged to visit the IAEM website for full details on responsibilities, eligibility, and the application process. Don't miss this opportunity! Applications are due by June 1.

Awards

■ Nominations for IAEM Awards will open on June 8, 2026. Details will be available on the IAEM website soon.

IAEM Fees Will Increase on June 1

As IAEM continues to support and advance the emergency management profession worldwide, we will update select membership, certification, and event fees beginning June 1, 2026. These adjustments reflect rising operational and event-related costs across the association industry and will help IAEM continue to deliver the programs, resources, and professional opportunities that members rely on every day.

IAEM remains committed to providing strong value for emergency managers at every stage of their careers. Membership offers access to a global network of professionals, professional development opportunities, certification support, advocacy efforts, leadership pathways, publications, webinars, training resources, and discounted event registration. Whether you are building foundational skills, pursuing certification, expanding your network, or staying informed on emerging risks and best practices, IAEM membership is an investment in your long-term career growth and resilience.

The changes come after many IAEM dues and registration rates had remained unchanged for several years despite significant increases in technology, meeting, insurance, staffing, and operational costs across the association sector. The updated rates will help IAEM improve member services, maintain high-quality educational programming, support certification initiatives, and deliver valuable networking experiences through conferences and events.

Emergency management continues to evolve rapidly, and IAEM remains focused on supporting professionals through collaboration, education, advocacy, and leadership development. By remaining engaged and participating in the association, members strengthen not only their own careers but also the broader emergency management profession and the communities they serve. 🔷

New Digital Experience

continued from page 1

The upgraded community experience is designed to strengthen peer-to-peer engagement and make it easier for members to share knowledge, ask questions, exchange resources, and collaborate across disciplines and geographic boundaries.

A New IAEM Member Portal

Members will also gain access to a new IAEM Portal that provides greater control over their membership experience and personal information.

Through the new portal, members will be able to:

- Update and manage their profile information.
- Access their membership certificate.
- Set communication preferences.
- Manage event registrations and transactions.
- Gain access to special member offers and discounts.

The portal creates a more self-service, efficient experience while improving the accuracy and accessibility of member information.

Investing in the Future of Member Engagement

Technology continues to shape how associations communicate, educate, and connect with their members. These new platforms represent a significant investment in the future of IAEM and the emergency management profession.

By modernizing its digital infrastructure, IAEM is creating a more connected and accessible experience that supports collaboration, professional growth, and member value across all emergency management sectors.

Additional information and member guidance will be shared leading up to the launch date. 🔷

General Focus Articles: Workforce Sustainability

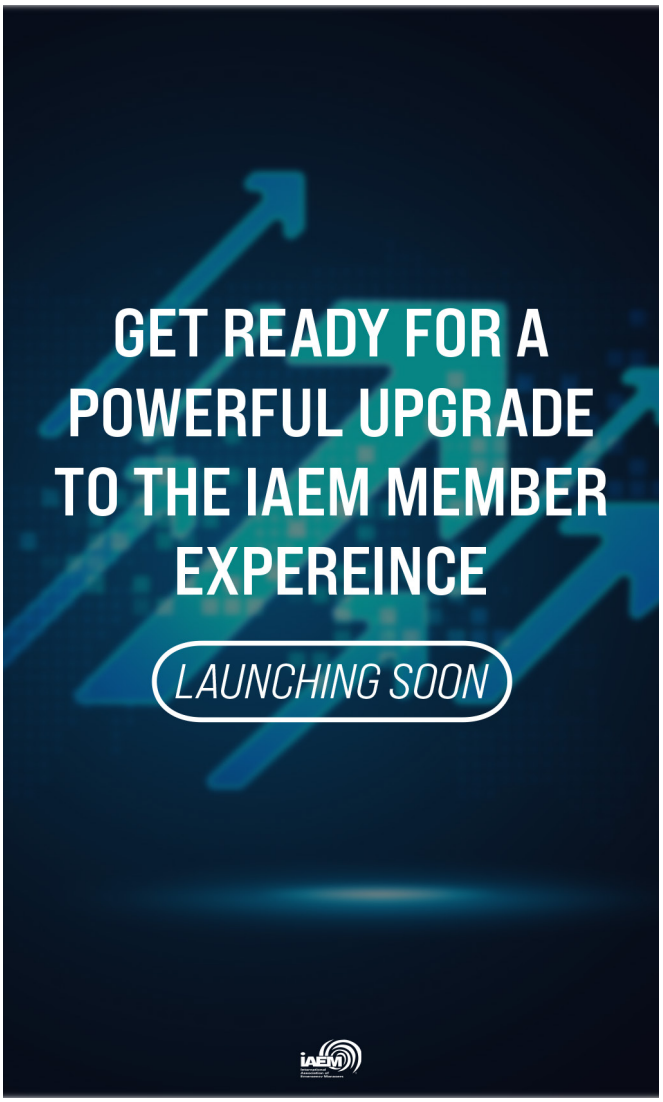
Submit an Article for the IAEM Bulletin

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.

Special focus topics for the year include:

- April: Workforce Sustainability.
- June: Lessons Learned by Local Emergency Managers.
- August: Evolving and Emerging Risks.
- October: IAEM 2026: Charting through Preparedness Anchored in Resilience

- **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.



From Concept to Crisis: Validating the Cleveland Clinic Healthcare Lifelines Framework in a Real-World Disaster

By Phillip J. McHugh, MS, CPP, CHEP, AEM, Senior Emergency Management Program Manager, Cleveland Clinic Department of Emergency Management, and Luke A. Hall, CHEP, Emergency Management Program Manager, Cleveland Clinic Department of Emergency Management

Earlier this year, the Cleveland Clinic Department of Emergency Management published an article in the IAEM Bulletin introducing the Cleveland Clinic Healthcare Lifelines Framework, a hospital-specific adaptation of FEMA's Community Lifelines model. The framework was designed to translate FEMA's community-level construct into a structure that reflects the uniquely complex operational realities of healthcare systems.

At the time of publication, the model had not yet been tested during a real-world disaster.

That changed on Feb. 7, 2026.

In the early morning hours, a catastrophic municipal water main failure outside Cleveland Clinic Akron General Hospital (Akron, Ohio) caused rapid flooding of critical infrastructure spaces within the hospital. For one hour and 26 minutes, the 12-inch main poured approximately 200,000 gallons of water into the facility, filling ground-level and first-floor infrastructure areas.

The facility, a 500+ bed Level I trauma center serving a regional population of more than two million residents, experienced simultaneous disruption to multiple operational systems essential to patient care.

Within minutes, the hospital activated its emergency operations plan and implemented the Hospital Incident Command System. Over the next 9.5 days, a multidisciplinary Incident Management Team coordinated response and recovery operations across clinical, operational, and infrastructure domains while maintaining continuity of patient care.

The incident ultimately became one of the costliest infrastructure disasters in Cleveland Clinic's history. Despite the scale of the infrastructure failure, no patients or caregivers were injured, and no patients required relocation to other hospitals.

The experience offered an opportunity to evaluate whether the model could function as a practical decision-making tool during a complex hospital disaster.

The Challenge of Cascading Infrastructure Failure

Hospitals operate as tightly integrated systems. When one critical infrastructure component fails, cascading operational consequences follow.

During the water intrusion incident, flooding impacted several key operational domains simultaneously. Infrastructure damage affected elevator systems, sterile processing, pharmacy, imaging capability, food service operations, and supplies. The event immediately created operational uncertainty and required rapid prioritization of response efforts.

Traditional reporting structures often struggle to convey the full operational picture during such incidents. Department-based reporting can produce fragmented situational awareness, while narrative updates may obscure the functional dependencies that determine whether a hospital can safely sustain patient care. This is precisely the gap the Healthcare Lifelines Framework was designed to address.

Creating a Shared Operational Picture

The Cleveland Clinic Healthcare Lifelines Framework organizes hospital operations into seven core lifelines necessary to sustain patient care:

- Clinical Care Delivery.
- Clinical Support Services.
- Infrastructure and Utilities.
- Supply Chain and Logistics.
- Communications.
- Security and Safety.
- Food and Hydration.

The framework is now fully embedded within Emergency Operations Plans at all Cleveland Clinic domestic hospitals across Ohio and Florida.

Each lifeline is assessed using a simple red/yellow/green status model through the Impact and Damage Assessment Report (IDAR), allowing leaders to quickly understand the functional health of the organization.

Within the first hour of this incident, the IDAR was displayed in the Hospital Command Center and used to brief the team. Rather than reviewing multiple departmental reports, the Incident Management Team could immediately see which systems were degraded, which were stable, and where cascading risks were emerging.

This shared visual framework proved critical to maintaining a common operating picture. Instead of debating individual operational issues, leaders could focus immediately on restoring degraded lifelines and preventing further system deterioration.

continued on page 8

Cleveland Clinic Healthcare Lifelines

continued from page 7

An Intuitive Framework Under Pressure

What makes the real-world adoption of the model particularly notable is that leaders had not yet received formal training on the framework, as training sessions were scheduled later in the quarter. When the incident occurred, many operational leaders were seeing the model for the first time.

Despite this, the framework was adopted immediately and intuitively.

The red-yellow-green status language required almost no explanation. Clinical leaders, facilities personnel, supply chain managers, executive leadership, and frontline supervisors all immediately understood what they were seeing on the IDAR.

Within the first operational period, the lifelines dashboard became the shared language of the response. Every formal briefing began with a review of lifeline status and ended with confirmation of updates to the model.

What began as a reporting tool quickly became the organizing structure for the response.

Improving Operational Prioritization

One of the most valuable aspects of the Healthcare Lifelines Framework during the incident was its ability to guide disciplined prioritization.

Infrastructure restoration alone involved dozens of simultaneous technical projects. By evaluating impacts through the lens of lifelines, the Incident Management Team was able to align restoration sequencing with patient care priorities.

Photographs of water main break – 04:15 hours Feb. 7, 2026.

For example, restoring vertical patient transport systems, maintaining medication availability, and sustaining sterile processing capacity were recognized early as pacing factors for clinical operations. These priorities shaped resource allocation decisions and focused both internal teams and external contractors on the systems most critical to sustaining hospital function.

The framework effectively shifted the discussion from "What is broken?" to "What must be restored first to protect patient care?" That distinction significantly improved operational clarity.

Turning Systems from Red to Green

During the response, a clear operational focus quickly emerged inside the Command Center as teams naturally rallied around the framework.

Turning systems from red to yellow, and eventually from yellow to green, became the unifying mission.

Hospital operations are highly technical and complex. Leaders oversee specialized areas, and while they are experts within their own domains, they may have limited understanding of the intricacies of other operational systems.

But everyone understood the colors. They knew that red meant instability and risk. They knew that yellow meant partial functionality. And they knew the objective was to move systems to green.

This clarity allowed leaders outside a given specialty to grasp system urgency, align priorities, and support stabilization efforts without requiring technical depth or discussion in every operational domain. That is the essence of a common operating picture in a highly complex environment.

An Unexpected Morale Effect

One of the most surprising outcomes of the framework's use was its impact on team morale.

Disaster responses require sustained leadership engagement under high stress. During prolonged activations, fatigue and uncertainty can easily erode focus. The Healthcare Lifelines dashboard helped counter this dynamic.

As systems stabilized and colors changed, teams could see the organization improving in real time.

continued on page 9

Cleveland Clinic Healthcare Lifelines

continued from page 8

Each transition from red to yellow or yellow to green represented tangible progress.

The act of "turning something green" became symbolic of forward momentum. And it often resulted in cheers, clapping, and high-fives.

In a prolonged response where the scale of the infrastructure failure could have felt overwhelming, these visible indicators of progress reinforced confidence and helped sustain team cohesion.

The framework did not eliminate complexity, but it made complexity understandable.

Enhancing Executive Decision-Making

The framework also proved highly effective during executive briefings. Hospital disasters often require senior leaders to make rapid, high-consequence decisions. Translating complex operational conditions into a clear executive-level understanding can be difficult. The lifelines visualization simplified that challenge.

Instead of receiving fragmented departmental updates, executive leaders were presented with a unified operational picture organized around core hospital lifelines.

This allowed leaders to quickly understand where risk remained, where progress had been made, and where additional support might be required.

Over the course of the activation, the Healthcare Lifelines Framework became the expected format for status updates during executive briefings.

Supporting Recovery Governance

Approximately forty-eight hours after the initial incident, the response shifted from acute stabilization to recovery planning. It was here, in the often-unstructured area of recovery, that the lifelines model again proved its value.

At this stage, the lifelines model continued to provide a clear method for tracking restoration progress. By evaluating the functional status of each lifeline daily, leaders could identify which operational domains had stabilized and which remained pacing factors for recovery.

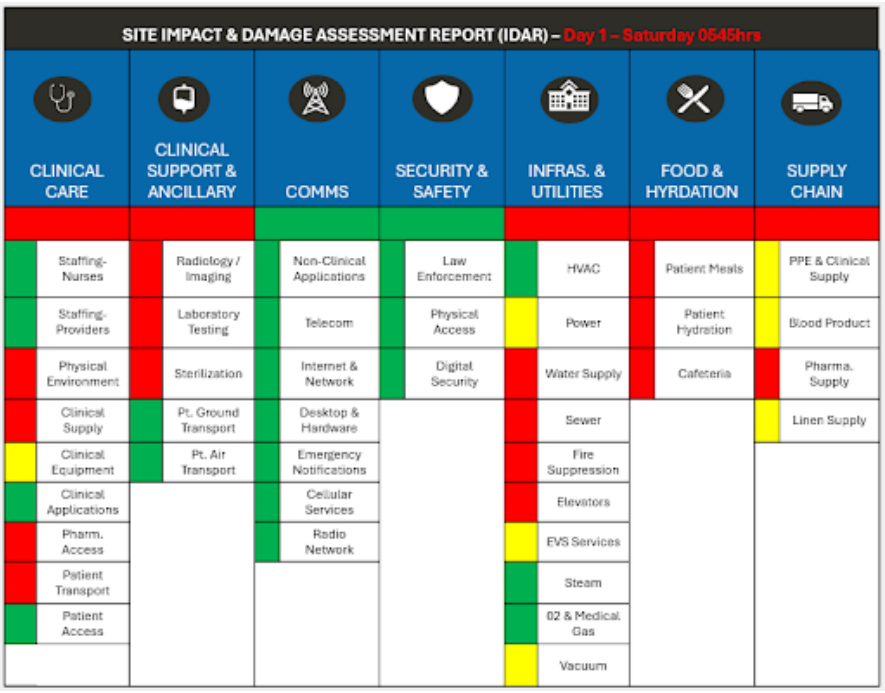
The framework remained the strategic executive dashboard, while more detailed project tracking tools supported tactical recovery management. This layered approach preserved the lifelines model as the organization's common operating picture while enabling detailed reconstruction planning to proceed simultaneously.

Lessons for Emergency Management

The February 2026 flood event provided an unplanned but valuable opportunity to validate the Healthcare Lifelines Framework during a complex hospital disaster.

Several key lessons emerged:

- **Functional frameworks improve situational awareness**: Organizing hospital operations around lifelines provided a clearer understanding of system health than traditional departmental reporting.
- **Visual status models accelerate decision-making**: The red/yellow/green IDAR model allowed leaders to quickly understand operational priorities during rapidly evolving conditions.
- **Lifelines support cross-disciplinary coordination**: By focusing on shared functional systems rather than departments, the model encouraged collaboration across clinical, operational, and infrastructure teams.
- **The framework supports both response and recovery**: Lifelines re-



Initial Impact and Damage Assessment Report (IDAR) – 05:45 hours, Feb. 7, 2026.

continued on page 10

Cleveland Clinic Healthcare Lifelines

continued from page 9

mained relevant not only during the initial incident response but throughout the recovery phase.

Moving Forward

For the Cleveland Clinic Department of Emergency Management, the February 2026 incident reinforced the fundamental principle of healthcare emergency management: patient care and safety must always come first.

When hospitals face cascading disruption, the most important question is not which department is affected. The most important question is whether the systems that sustain safe patient care are still functioning – and if they are not, how response efforts must be prioritized to restore stability.

The Healthcare Lifelines Framework helps answer that question. By translating complex operational degradation into a common operating picture, the framework allows leaders from across clinical, operational, and infrastructure domains to quickly understand system risk and rally around restoration priorities.

The event also reinforced the value of healthcare emergency management. When disaster strikes, emergency management provides the structure, situational awareness, and coordination necessary to stabilize operations and guide institutions through periods of profound disruption. In environments where highly specialized systems intersect, disciplined incident command and clear operational frameworks become essential to protecting patients and supporting caregivers.

Despite simultaneous disruption to multiple critical systems, no patients or caregivers were harmed, and no patients required relocation to other hospitals. That outcome reflects not only the dedication of clinical and operational teams, but also the value of structured emergency management and shared situational awareness during crisis.

As healthcare systems face increasingly complex operational risks, the need for a clear, system-level understanding during emergencies will only grow. Tools that transform complexity into clarity are essential.

Healthcare lifelines offer one way to do exactly that. 🔷

From SMART to BOSS: Restoring Strategic Intent to Incident Objectives

By Lushan A. Hannah, CEM, CBCP, Captain (Ret.), U.S. Coast Guard, and Marc Pellegrino, CEM, MEPP, ICT3, PSC3, Director, Public Sector Operations, Emergency Management Services International, Inc.

Incident management doctrine emphasizes the importance of clearly articulated objectives, strategies, and tactics. Yet in practice, these elements often blur together during operational planning. For example, an objective such as "deploy six strike teams to conduct primary search operations in Division A by 1800 hours" is not truly an objective; it is already a tactical assignment. This blurring of roles creates friction within the Incident Command System (ICS) planning process. Incident objectives should communicate command intent and establish priorities for the operational period. The operations section chief and subordinate leaders are responsible for determining how those objectives will be accomplished. When objectives become overly prescriptive, the planning process becomes constrained before it begins. Operational leaders have less room to adapt to changing conditions or propose innovative approaches. Incident objectives should therefore remain intentionally broad and outcome-focused, leaving the development of specific approaches to the operational planning process. To support this shift, this article proposes a framework:

Overview of SMART vs. BOSS.

Broad Objectives, Specific Strategies (BOSS)

With a BOSS approach, incident objectives define the outcomes that must be achieved: protecting life safety, stabilizing a hazardous release, keeping stakeholders informed, maintaining safety and security zone, etc. Conversely, strategies developed by the Operations

continued on page 12

From SMART to BOSS

continued from page 11

Section would provide more details and follow the SMART model (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound). The BOSS framework would help emphasize to all ICS practitioners what ICS doctrine already intends: command establishes intent, operations develops strategies and tactics, and responders execute the plan.

The Problem with SMART Objectives in Incident Command

Some Incident Commanders write objectives that slip into tactics by following the guidance in the United States Coast Guard Incident Management Handbook (CG-IMH) to frame incident objectives. This guidance should be reconsidered. The CG-IMH defines incident objectives as "statements of guidance and direction" that support strategy selection and resource direction based on realistic expectations of what can be accomplished with available resources. At the same time, the handbook states that objectives should follow the SMART model or a similar approach.[1]

In practice, this can unintentionally encourage incident commanders to write objectives that are overly specific or time-constrained. When applied too literally, the SMART framework can push command-level objectives toward operational detail. Instead of communicating intent, objectives begin to resemble tactical instructions. This tension becomes evident when compared with the example objectives included throughout the CG-IMH incident annexes. Many of those examples are written broadly and require only minimal customization (e.g., location, hazard, etc.) to fit a specific incident. These examples preserve command intent while leaving tactical planning to the Operations Section during the Planning P.[1] FEMA guidance associated with the ICS-202 form also supports this interpretation by emphasizing clear objectives for the operational period rather than detailed operational instructions.[2]

Implications for Incident Command Leadership.

Strategy, Tactics, and the Planning P

Current ICS doctrine distinguishes the roles of objectives, strategies, and tactics within incident management.

Within the ICS planning cycle,

continued on page 13

From SMART to BOSS

continued from page 12

the Incident Commander or Unified Command establishes incident objectives during the Objectives Meeting. Command and General Staff then review those objectives and identify priorities, constraints, and strategic considerations during the Strategy Meeting. ICS guidance defines strategy as the overall operational approach describing how the incident will be managed in general terms, while tactics represent the specific actions responders take to implement that strategy.[3]

Following the establishment of objectives, the operations section chief evaluates potential strategies to achieve those outcomes, supported by analysis and facilitation from the Planning Section. This work occurs during the command and general staff (Strategy) meeting and the "Prepare for Tactics" phase of the Planning P. Selected strategies are then translated into tactics, resource assignments, and safety measures during the Prepare for Tactics phase and the Tactics Meeting.[4]

Despite this structured process, the use of SMART-style objectives can compress the hierarchy between objectives, strategies, and tactics. When objectives include detailed timelines, resource counts, or operational outputs, they may effectively pre-select a tactical approach before the strategy and tactics meetings occur.

Strengthening ICS Doctrine and Training

The solution is straightforward: maintain the CG-IMH's emphasis on outcome-focused objectives while reconsidering the recommendation that they follow the SMART model. The goal is not to remove clarity or accountability, but to ensure that command communicates what must be achieved, without prematurely determining how it must be done.

The BOSS framework restores the hierarchy between command intent, operational strategy, and tactical execution that ICS doctrine already implies but that SMART-style objectives sometimes obscure. Under BOSS, incident objectives remain broad, outcome-oriented statements describing what must be accomplished. For example: *Protect environmentally sensitive shoreline and populated coastal areas from oil contamination.*

Such objectives establish priorities and desired outcomes without prescribing how those outcomes will be achieved. Once objectives are set, responsibility shifts to the Operations Section Chief to develop operational strategies. Within the BOSS framework, specific strategies should be precise enough to guide tactical planning and allow evaluation of progress, while remaining general enough to avoid dictating individual assignments. An example strategy that could be linked to the objective above: *Deploy offshore containment and recovery assets at the harbor entrance to intercept the advancing oil slick and prevent shoreline impact within the next operational period.*

This statement describes the operational approach and intended outcome while leaving detailed implementation decisions to the tactical level. It is also consistent with the SMART framework because it identifies a specific action and location (deploy assets at the harbor entrance), a measurable outcome (intercepting the slick and preventing shoreline impact), and a defined timeframe (within the next operational period).

In practice, however, writing operational strategy is often the least developed competency in incident management training. Many ICS courses emphasize forms, planning processes, and tactical coordination but provide limited instruction on how staff should translate command intent into coherent operational strategies. As a result, strategies are frequently implied, poorly written, embedded within tactical assignments, or omitted altogether. ICS doctrine assumes that incident management team members can design and articulate strategy, yet this capability is rarely taught directly in ICS training programs. Strengthening this skill should therefore become a priority within ICS curriculum. Training programs should place greater emphasis on teaching incident management staff how to develop strategies that clearly support incident objectives and guide tactical planning.

Applying the BOSS framework in ICS training can help restore this progression and strengthen the ability of incident management teams to translate strategic intent into coordinated operational action.

Case Example: Applying BOSS in a Major Incident

Consider a large urban wildfire threatening a populated hillside community during a period of extreme wind and drought conditions. Multiple structures are already burning, and forecasted winds are expected to push the fire toward densely populated neighborhoods within the next operational period. Under a SMART-oriented approach, incident objectives can quickly become prescriptive. For example: *Deploy four engine strike teams to Division Alpha to establish structure protection by 1800 hours.*

While operationally useful, this statement embeds tactical direction within the objective rather than expressing command intent. Using the BOSS framework, Unified Command would instead establish a broader objective: *Protect life and prevent wildfire spread into populated residential areas.*

continued on page 14

From SMART to BOSS

continued from page 13

The Operations Section Chief would then evaluate potential strategies to achieve this objective. One strategy might be: *Establish a defensive containment line along Ridge Road and conduct coordinated structure protection operations to prevent fire spread into the residential subdivision during the next operational period.*

This strategy also aligns with the SMART framework because it specifies a clear operational approach and geographic focus (Ridge Road and the residential subdivision), defines a measurable outcome (preventing fire spread into the subdivision), and establishes a time boundary (during the next operational period). Other operational approached approaches might include removing fuels ahead of the advancing fire front or prioritizing aerial suppression to slow the fire's forward spread.

During the prepare for tactics phase and tactics meeting, this strategy would be translated into tactical assignments. These might include deploying engine strike teams to structure protection groups, assigning hand crews and dozers to construct containment lines, coordinating aerial resources for water and retardant drops, or establishing staging areas for incoming mutual aid resources. These tactical assignments would then be captured in the Incident Action Plan through assignment lists and operational briefings. The BOSS framework helps preserve this separation, ensuring that incident objectives express strategic intent while operational strategies guide coordinated tactical action.

Reinforcing Strategic Thinking in Incident Command

The BOSS framework is ultimately about leadership. Incident Commanders and Unified Command members must operate at the strategic level of a crisis. Their role is to define priorities and provide the intent that guides operational decision-making.

When objectives contain tactical specificity, this strategic role becomes diluted. Command begins directing how the response should be carried out rather than what the response must achieve. This can limit the ability of the Operations Section Chief and subordinate leaders to adapt to evolving conditions and develop innovative solutions. Effective incident leadership requires a clear separation between intent and execution. Incident objectives should describe what success looks like, while operational leaders determine how to achieve it within the constraints established by command.

Complex incidents rarely unfold exactly as planned. Weather changes, political pressure, asset casualties, community outrage, misinformation, short staffing—this list is endless. In these environments, a command philosophy that emphasizes broad objectives and clearly articulated strategies allows incident management teams to adapt more effectively as conditions change.

Ultimately, the goal of incident management is not simply to produce a well-written Incident Action Plan. The goal is to enable leaders at every level of the organization to make sound decisions under pressure. By restoring the distinction between objectives, strategies, and tactics, the BOSS framework helps ensure that the ICS planning process supports that mission. 🔷

Resources

- U.S. Coast Guard, Incident Management Handbook, COMDTPUB P3120.17C (Washington, DC: U.S. Coast Guard, 2025), 5-4–5-5.
- Federal Emergency Management Agency, Incident Objectives (ICS 202), Version 3.1 (Washington, DC: FEMA, 2010).
- Federal Emergency Management Agency, NIMS ICS All-Hazards Operations Section Chief Course (E/L 0958), Unit 3: Strategy and Tactics – Managing the Initial Phase (Washington, DC: FEMA, 2025).

FEMA Reforms: Retiring the Great White Horse Theory

By Jerone "Keith" Thomas, MPH, MA, CEM, NRP, Emergency Manager, Southern Technical Aquatic Resource and Rescue

Emergency management is always changing, evolving, which, when done correctly, can slowly be a good thing. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina uncovered some major issues with how the emergency management profession handled disasters. The days of the 'Great White Horse,' of the federal government coming to the rescue, were over, and a systematic approach was developed to reduce delays, whereby enhancing response. Implementation of the Incident Command System, National Incident Management System, Incident Action Plans, the Planning "P", of course, the main principles of emergency management: prepare for, mitigate against, respond to, and recover from.

Moving into the twenty-first century, the emergency management profession is still trying to gain its footing and undergo more major changes. However, the motivation behind these changes is being driven by the wrong words, such as more natural and man-made disasters, more powerful, destructive, and expensive disasters, and finally, more people and communities are being affected. Now, these changes with the recent Federal Emergency Management Agency Reforms, places that same wrong motivational word "more" onto public-safety agencies across the United States, wanting more response capabilities from public service agencies, more resources from public service agencies, more preparedness from those public service agencies, and without more funding, training, or personnel.

From the years of 1980 to 2024, the United States alone experienced over 400 weather and climate-related disasters, which caused more than $2.9 trillion in damages. In 2023, nearly 850 counties across the United States saw at least one federally declared disaster, and in 2024, over 970 counties across the country saw at least one federally declared disaster. This number continues to increase in 2025 with a total of over $115 billion in damage, which further proves the widespread impacts caused by natural disasters.

Over the past year, FEMA has been addressing and even recalibrating its path towards how both natural and man-made disasters are addressed. One area of focus, according to the Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI), has been through the United States Fire Administration, whereas the Department of Homeland Security has recognized that fire and emergency services are part of the nation's critical infrastructures. Although this would seem to be a great partnership between FEMA, CFSI, and the USFA, it also raises some serious concerns.

What has not been considered going into the twenty-first century and 2025 FEMA reforms is another motivational word – "decline." Since 2015, the number of fire and emergency services calls has increased by 70% in the United States. While approximately 85% of all fire and emergency services are volunteer-based, with 24% being considered part-paid / part-volunteer type fire and emergency services, and 9% of the fire and emergency services are considered all paid. Just in the last 10 years, there has been a significant decline in the number of personnel in both paid and volunteer services, reaching approximately 25%. This is expected to continue decreasing at a rate of 6 to 10% per year for the next 5 years. Meanwhile, the FEMA reforms being implemented continue to point out that fire and EMS services will enhance the search and rescue capabilities of these agencies during a disaster.

Furthermore, as fire and emergency services financial budgets continue to decline, these public service agencies focus more than 90% of their annual budget on salaries and benefits. This leaves little room for replacement equipment and even less funding for specialized training such as land search and rescue, water rescue, or hazardous materials spills. Of course, there are federal grants like the Assistance to Firefighters Grant and SAFER Grants, but when public services receive these grants, it is used to supplement the decline in funding from either the county and/or state and not specifically used for specialized training.

For example, to put one individual through a basic fire academy costs over $8,000, with an additional cost of nearly $35,000 in equipment, while comprehensive training, such as emergency medical technician training, can reach over $6,000. Therefore, one properly trained, equipped fire service personnel can cost an agency nearly $50,000 in the first year of service. Now add the cost of gaining a hazardous materials technician ($4,000), Confined space technician ($1,200), rope Rescue technician ($1,500), structural collapse technician ($1,500), rescue boat operations ($2,900.00), and swift water technician ($1,200) which will cost more than $12,000 per individual in tuition and take over another 40 weeks to obtain.

continued on page 17

Planning for the FIFA World Cup 2026: Three Things Emergency Managers Need to Know

By Irish Hancock, Emergency Management Administrator, City of Arlington, Texas

In summer 2026, the FIFA World Cup—the world's biggest sporting event—will take over North America. With 48 teams, 16 host cities, and billions of viewers, the tournament will bring millions of fans, tourists, and media representatives to the United States. Out of the 104 matches planned, 78 will occur in 11 United States cities, creating unprecedented operational demands on the communities and first responders that live there.

Here in Texas, Arlington, and the greater Dallas–Fort Worth region, we will host nine matches to include a semifinal, more than any other FIFA World Cup 2026 Host City. As Arlington's emergency management administrator, I've led planning for major events like the Super Bowl, the Final Four, the World Series, the NBA All-Star game, the College Football Championship, and the Major League Baseball All-Star Game, but the World Cup is on another level. Based on past lessons learned and planning efforts for FIFA World Cup 2026, there are three best practices I think every emergency manager should know as they prepare for this summer.

Plan for Scale and Duration, Not Just Game Day

Imagine hosting nine Super Bowls in four weeks — that's the World Cup. Unlike single-day championships, this tournament spans weeks and requires sustained coordination across jurisdictions. Resources, personnel, and systems will be under pressure for months, not just match days.

In the North Central Texas region, the City of Dallas is hosting the International Broadcasting Center. That means we will have a sustained international presence before the tournament starts and even when games are outside our area. We also expect fans to move fluidly across jurisdictions, expanding our footprint beyond city limits. We're partnering regionally with cities and counties, as well as with the state and federal government, to share resources and maintain situational awareness for the entire operational window. This includes sharing state and federal resources that are normally concentrated on one city for events we traditionally handle. In addition, we have broadened our coordination and planning to include information sharing with transportation authorities and airports across North Texas as visitors flood our area from around the world. With an expanded local effort, we can maximize our joint capabilities and diversify resources, spreading the pressure out and reducing resource fatigue.

Ensure Interoperable Communications Early

With thousands of responders and multiple agencies involved, communication failures are not an option. Unlike the Super Bowl, which concentrates federal resources in one city, the World Cup spreads assets across 11 U.S. locations — sometimes with simultaneous matches. Communities should ensure they have an interoperable communications system in place — ideally one that offers data capabilities for more advanced response operations.

In Arlington, we're using FirstNet, the nationwide public safety broadband network, for the event. We chose FirstNet because it offers reliable coverage in our area, prioritizes public safety communications over commercial traffic, and is backed by the federal government.

We have worked with the First Responder Network Authority — the federal agency that oversees FirstNet — for several months to plan, prepare, and practice for the World Cup. During these planning sessions, we discuss anticipated communications challenges and work to find solutions, such as on-site FirstNet deployable assets — mobile cell sites that will help strengthen the broadband signal and provide redundancy.

In the months ahead of the event, we are also training and exercising with our public safety partners. Our goal is to ensure seamless communications throughout the World Cup, and much of that depends on interoperable communications. With all of our partners on FirstNet, we know that we can communicate across devices. By training together, we ensure that the equipment works, the procedures are in place, and we can successfully communicate throughout the events.

Prepare for Global Fandom and Its Risks

Few events spark passion like the World Cup. Millions of international fans, including celebrities and dignitaries, bring cultural, linguistic, and geopolitical complexities. Rivalries can escalate tensions, and spontaneous celebrations or protests

continued on page 17

FIFA World Cup 2026

continued from page 16

may occur. We are going to assess any risk factors that may affect our game-day experiences and prepare for the unique energy a global event like FIFA World Cup 2026 will bring to our city.

Coordination Is the Game Plan

The FIFA World Cup 2026 will challenge every aspect of emergency management — from planning and communications to public health and diplomacy. Success depends on early coordination, seamless communications, and flexible planning. Now is the time to prepare and strengthen relationships, test systems, and refine operations — so when the world comes to town, you're ready. 🔷

FEMA Reforms

continued from page 15

This again affects the declining staffing numbers while increasing costs in overtime to allow individuals to take these training programs. Ironically, specialized equipment needed that will be needed for the added response capabilities of the fire and emergency services, due to the FEMA reforms, will exceed over $104,000 per certified individual.

Although the reform recommends the USFA assume a more visible role within FEMA, how will this help the fire and EMS services as their personnel numbers continue to decline at the current rate? It would appear the current FEMA reforms did not consider the large decline in both the fire and emergency services professions, as most agencies are struggling to just maintain an adequate number of trained staff and required equipment, either mandated by the ISO or Insurance Rating Bureaus. For instance, the average fire apparatus has a service time of approximately 10 years, with a cost of over $1 million for standard apparatus and over $2 million for specialized apparatus, which has a delivery time between two and four and a half years.

We all can agree that FEMA needed reform, the emergency management profession must move in a positive manner, implementing more proactive, collective, and collaborative insight, but not at the expense of causing a catastrophic failure within the fire and emergency service agencies. As new hazards, threats, and disasters emerge, we must consider how these new reforms will truly affect our fire and emergency service agencies and the public we are supposed to protect. Since 2005, the emergency management profession has seen the gaps and downfalls through various incidents within those emergency management principles: prepare for, mitigate against, respond to, and recover from. What we do from here as an emergency management profession is completely in our hands moving forward into the future. 🔷

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It's Not AI, It's U: Perpetual Negativity and AI-Driven Information Seeking

By Jon Bakkedahl. MS, CEM, NVEM, Emergency Manager, Carson City Emergency Management, Carson City, Nevada

During emergencies, the quality and framing of information significantly influence public behavior and emotional response. Artificial intelligence (AI) search tools increasingly function as primary gateways to crisis-related information. For users predisposed toward negative thoughts and interpretation, these tools may inadvertently intensify perceived risks. Research on cognitive distortions (Beck, 1976; Burns, 1980), negativity bias (Rozin & Royzman, 2001), and algorithmic feedback loops (Noble, 2018; O'Neil, 2016) suggests that individuals with a negative orientation may encounter disproportionate exposure to negatively driven content when interacting with AI systems.

This article integrates interdisciplinary findings to examine the interaction between user negativity and AI outputs, with a specific emphasis on the implications for emergency communication, risk perception, and public information strategies. This process ultimately demonstrates the common denominator: It's not AI, it's U.

Persistent Negative Thoughts and Risk Perception

Individuals with chronic negative thoughts exhibit behaviors that heighten perception of danger and uncertainty. Beck's foundational work describes how negative thoughts distort assessment, leading to catastrophizing and selective attention to threat cues (Beck, 1976). Such tendencies are relevant to emergency management, as research shows that negative situations and pessimism can influence risk interpretation and protective behaviors.

Key traits include:

- **Catastrophizing**: inflating the severity or likelihood of adverse events (Beck, 1979).
- **Selective abstraction**: prioritizing threatening information even when neutral data is available (Clark & Beck, 2010).
- **Rumination**: sustained focus on negative possibilities, which can impair decision-making (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000).

These patterns shape how individuals search for, interpret, and act upon emergency information.

Case Context: The Negativity-Oriented Information Seeker

To illustrate, consider a representative user who is predisposed toward negatively framed information seeking. In daily life, he or she may interpret minor disruptions as systemic threats. In a crisis event, one is more likely to initiate AI queries framed pessimistically (e.g., "How bad could this disaster get?" or "Why do emergency systems always fail in severe winds?"). Such queries predict content aligned with their framing, shaping perception and potentially influencing emergency-related decision behavior.

The result is a psychological predisposition that interacts with technology to magnify perceived risk.

AI Search Dynamics and Algorithmic Reinforcement

AI systems typically respond directly to the user's semantic framing. Negative queries will deliver negatively-toned results, reinforcing the user's preconceived notion of threat. Modern search systems use behavioral modeling to tailor results (Mitchell, 2019). Repeated negative questioning signals a preference for threat-oriented content, initiating a cycle of reinforcement similar to the dynamics described by Noble (2018) and Pasquale (2015).

This cycle parallels confirmation bias (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) but becomes intensified through automated curation:

Negative cognition leads to—*Negatively framed* query leads to—*Threat-oriented AI results* lead to—*Heightened threat perception* leads to—*More negative queries*.

Evidence from risk communication research shows that exposure to threat-focused content can amplify fear and distort accurate risk assessment, especially during crisis periods (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). If AI tools repeatedly validate catastrophic expectations, users like Karen may overestimate danger, distrust official sources, or engage in negative behaviors.

Implications for Emergency Management

- **Accuracy of Public Risk Perception**:Emergency managers rely on public compliance with guidance. AI-driven amplification of pessimistic interpretations may be detrimental to this through:
  - Inflated threat perception.
  - Distrust of official information.
  - Overreliance on speculative or worst-case interpretations.

continued on page 19

It's Not AI, It's U

continued from page 18

- **Crisis Communication Challenges**: Negative-oriented users may disproportionately consume unverified or extreme interpretations of events. During rapidly evolving disasters, such tendencies may complicate message clarity and reduce adherence to safety instructions.
- **Access and Functional Need (AFN) Concerns**: Algorithmic reinforcement may disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, those with anxiety, low trust in institutions, or prior trauma—amplifying disparities in how risk information is understood.

Mitigation Strategies for Emergency Information Systems

Adaptive messaging within AI interfaces: AI systems could detect patterns of negatively oriented queries and algorithmically balance responses, providing context or presenting probabilistic information clearly and recommending a more positive alternative. Research on ethical AI design supports integrating guardrails to reduce harm from emotionally loaded queries (Jobin, Ienca, & Vayena, 2019).

Clear, consistently updated official information sources: Emergency management agencies can reduce reliance on unmoderated search results by ensuring authoritative information is accessible, optimized for search indexing, and clearly structured for rapid understanding.

Public education on algorithmic dynamics: Communicating how AI systems compile and filter information may help users understand and interpret results more critically, particularly during stress-inducing events.

Cross-sector collaboration: Partnerships between emergency managers, AI developers, and risk communication experts can lead to systems better aligned with public safety goals.

Conclusion

Ultimately, AI systems reflect user framing, making individual information-seeking behavior a critical variable in risk perception, especially during emergencies. Because AI often reflects the framing of user queries and learns from repeated patterns, negatively framed search behavior can evolve into a self-reinforcing loop. This dynamic poses challenges for emergency management, potentially distorting public risk perception and complicating crisis communication.

Recognizing these psychological–technological interactions is vital for designing emergency information systems that support, rather than undermine, effective public response. Integrating positive, ethical AI design with established risk communication practices may help balance informational needs with psychological well-being during crises. Because- it's not AI, it's U! 🔷

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Planning for Resilience, Part 1

By Troy Neville MS, CEM, CBCP, Adjunct Professor - Continuity Planning, Center for Disaster Research and Education, Millersville University

At its core, **resilience is the capacity to withstand impacts**. But many hazard-based plans fail to provide that capacity. This happens in several ways:

- **Ignored risks or impacts**: Few risks are truly hidden from us. Many risks are in plain sight, but perhaps we are not looking for them, or maybe even looking the other way. Some dependencies (e.g., people without personal transportation or data circuit and communication failures) may be missed entirely in plans. (Neville, April 2022).
- **Avoiding worst-case**: Plans need to address high-consequence impacts. Not the average storm, but an historic storm. Not a 4-hour power outage but a 7-day outage. Not a 100-year flood, but a 1000-year flood. Facility repairs requiring not days, but months. IT systems are not down for a few hours, but for several days. (Neville, April 2023).
- **Faulty assumptions**: We make a lot of assumptions in our planning – severity, workforce availability, time of day/week/year, duration, geographic limit, and co-dependencies. Assumptions telegraph when and where plans will fail. Underestimating impacts with assumptions will make a bad day worse.
- **Over-reliance on probabilities**: We have a very difficult time calculating meaningful probabilities. We either lack an adequate recorded history of past events, or these past events do not account for changes in the frequency or magnitude of risks and impacts. Many probabilities are not truly predictive of future events. Calculating a reliable probability for catastrophic events is more difficult, if not impossible. Since catastrophes are usually low frequency, the probability is also usually very small. This sometimes makes it easy for us to ignore low-frequency, high-consequence events. And regardless of the probability, it could happen tomorrow (Neville, July 2024).
- **Testing deficiencies**: For areas with few recent significant disasters, testing may not consider the worst-case scenario to identify planning deficiencies before an actual disaster. There are also scenario testing limitations. If you have 30 hazards to test, and you perform two tabletop exercises per year, you may not get through all hazards for 15 years to identify all weaknesses.
- **Scripting disasters**: Hazard-based planning typically develops a sequence of steps to respond to the hazard – a script. These plans are often designed more for routine events than catastrophic or historic events. However, most disasters do not follow scripts, are often dynamic and complex, and have cascading impacts that are difficult to predict. This increases the likelihood of a plan failing to provide resilience.

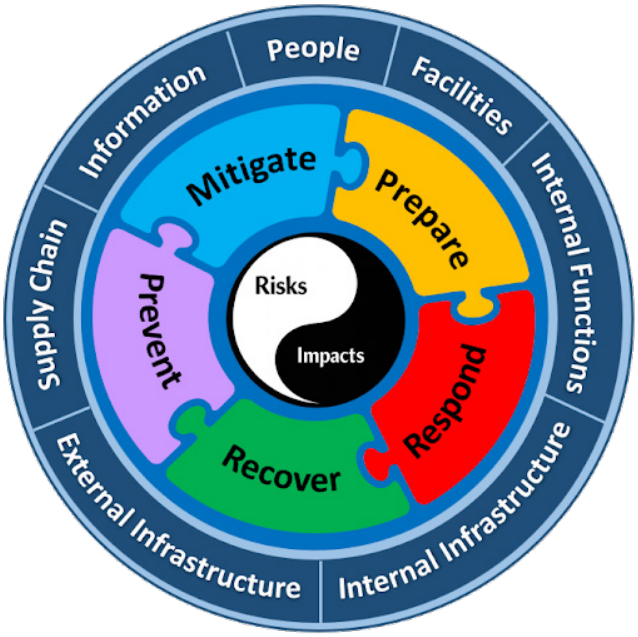

Figure 1 – Impact Planning Framework.

Each of these has a single common thread: organizations did not plan for all impacts to all dependencies. In fact, our hazard-based planning methodology may be the cause of response failures and a lack of resilience.

Impact Planning Framework

The Impact Planning Framework is a paradigm shift from a traditional response based on hazards and risks to a holistic and in-depth analysis of impacts to all dependencies through all phases.

Risks and Impacts: Whether we are working in risk management, continuity of operations, or emergency management, our world ultimately

continued on page 21

Planning for Resilience

continued from page 20

revolves around two fundamental drivers: risks and impacts (Neville, February 2019). A risk is simply a future impact that has not yet transitioned from potential to reality. Because of this, impacts are the true center of gravity.

In the Impact Planning Framework (Figure 1), I purposefully chose the Yin-Yang symbol for risks and impacts. It reframes resilience as a dynamic, interdependent system.

Yin traditionally represents latent potential, subtle forces, and the conditions that give rise to change. Positioning risks there highlights how vulnerabilities often begin quietly emerging from underlying patterns, behaviors, or exposures that may not yet be visible.

Yang, by contrast, represents manifestation, consequence, and outward expression. Placing impacts in the black Yang emphasizes that when risks materialize, they become concrete disruptions that demand response.

The symbol is also a reminder that resilience depends on perceiving early signals, anticipating how they might evolve, and recognizing that every impact contains the seeds of future risk if not addressed with intention.

Most importantly, the risks and impacts considered for this framework are worst-case or near-worst-case, not the routine incidents common in hazard-based planning.

Phases

The phases of Impact Planning should be very familiar, but we use them as a lens - think of risks and impacts as flowing through each phase with courses of action that answer: what should be done to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from risks and impacts for each dependency (Figure 2). The courses of action will be holistic and address impacts across organizational boundaries.

The phases in the Impact Planning Framework are:

- **Prevent**: The prevent phase involves controls, deterrents, and systems that avoid or stop an impact from occurring. Examples include armed security guards, IT systems designed for high availability to prevent downtime, two-factor authentication to prevent unauthorized access, a 500-year flood wall, a full building generator with UPS, and a backup for a water system outage. In each case, impacts from an outage are prevented.
- **Mitigate**: The mitigate phase involves controls and plans that reduce or minimize impacts. A fire sprinkler system does not prevent a fire. It actually requires a fire to burn at a high enough temperature to melt the fusible link in the sprinkler head and begin the flow of water to extinguish the fire. Some smoke and water damage will occur. Likewise, some cyber tools detect a potential cyberattack, but may not be able to prevent impacts. Other mitigation measures include plans to deploy sandbags, plans to transfer operations further inland for a hurricane, and building designs that limit wind or earthquake damage.
- **Prepare**: The prepare phase has several components:
  - Horizon scanning for potential impacts.
  - Maintaining response and recovery resources (notification systems, supplies, contracts, planning data, etc.).
  - Develop strategies to continue critical functions where impacts cannot be prevented or properly mitigated.
  - Develop strategies to address prevent and mitigate control failures.
  - Training of response and recovery personnel and procedures.
  - Exercising plans and strategies.
- **Respond**: The respond phase includes:
  - Conducting continual risk and impact assessments.

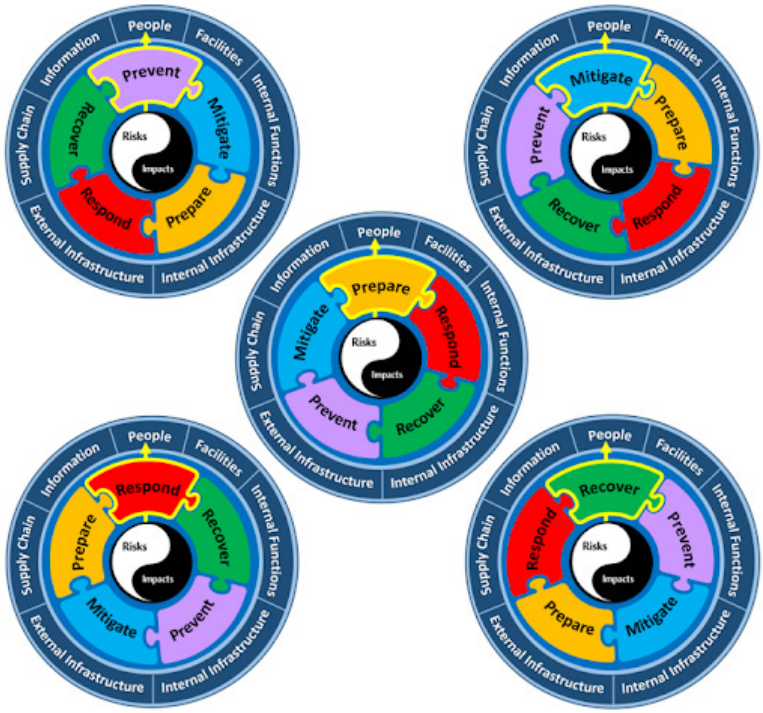

Figure 2 – Risks and impacts flowing through each phase for each dependency.

continued on page 22

Planning for Resilience

continued from page 21

- Protecting life, property, and the environment.
- Executing and/or developing additional prevention and mitigation courses of action, as needed.
- Continuing critical operations and services.
- Activating life safety plans, search and rescue, evacuation, sheltering, mass feeding, security operations, managing casualties, performing communications.

■ **Recover**: The recover phase involves actions to return to "normal" after impacts, which is sometimes a new normal, perhaps even more resilient than things were before. This includes:

- Internal and external infrastructure repairs and restoration.
- Building repairs.
- Supply chain resumption.
- IT system restoration.
- Counseling.
- Debris management.
- Long-term housing.
- Financial assistance.
- Potential for a permanent relocation if homes or buildings are a total loss and rebuilding is not an option.
- Conducting after-action and improvement planning.

Dependencies

A critical component for the impact planning framework is to define the dependencies. For continuity planning there are seven top level dependencies:

■ **People** – employees, customers, visitors.

■ **Facilities** – including building systems (HVAC, safety systems, electrical switch gear, backup generators, piping, etc.).

■ **Internal infrastructure** – including IT systems, warehouse and inventory, processing or manufacturing equipment.

■ **Internal functions** - the organization determines the appropriate number of functions. Some organizations use the department hierarchy as a basis. Other organizations may use a product or service construct.

■ **External infrastructure** – I use the FEMA Community Lifelines:

- Safety and security.
- Food, water, and shelter.
- Health and medical.
- Energy.
- Communications.
- Transportation.
- Hazardous materials.
- Water systems.

■ **Supply Chain** – traditional vendors as well as community supply chains.

■ **Information** – physical or electronic.

However, this is not etched in stone. Organizations should define the dependencies that make sense for their use and their planning focus. Chemical manufacturers may add the environment as a dependency. Public emergency management may replace Facilities with Environment and Internal Infrastructure with Community Infrastructure.

Conclusion

The Impact Planning Framework is a needed replacement for traditional hazard-based planning. It emphasizes developing an in-depth understanding of impacts on dependencies and creating appropriate courses of action for all phases. It breaks down the silos and forces an organization-wide collaboration, as few impacts require actions by only one department or group.

In Part two, I will provide a method to implement this framework to build plans that promote resilience, and how to use this framework for an event. 🔷

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Trust Has Left the Chat: Emergency Management Faces an Escalating Credibility Crisis

By Misha R. McNabb, MA-EML, CIP, VT-CEMD, NRP, Executive Director, Crisis Management Partners, LLC

Emergency management has always depended on public cooperation. Evacuations only work if people leave. Vaccination campaigns only succeed if communities participate. Mitigation investments yield dividends only if residents believe the system is worth engaging with. Trust is operational currency. That trust account is now overdrawn. Emergency management is confronting a systemic credibility crisis driven by opaque intelligence practices, disparities in disaster recovery, and misaligned communication strategies, and unless the field redesigns how trust is built, shared, and operationalized, even the most sophisticated response systems will continue to fail at first contact with the public.

Public trust in the federal government remains near historic lows. This decline is unfolding amid climate-driven disasters, pandemic fatigue, cyber disruptions, political polarization, and persistent disinformation (Pew Research Center, 2024). The result is an expanding intelligence gap. The divide is between what institutions know and what communities believe.

The Intelligence-Trust Gap

Emergency management has invested heavily in fusion centers, analytics dashboards, and cross-agency data sharing. Technically, situational awareness has never been more advanced. Relationally, it has rarely been more fragile. Real-time threat feeds, predictive analytics, behavioral assessment tools, and interoperable platforms now allow agencies to map risk with unprecedented precision. Behavioral threat assessment models used in schools and other institutions further demonstrate the sophistication of modern intelligence practices (Alathari et al., 2021; Jackson et al., 2025). Yet technical capability does not automatically translate into public legitimacy.

Opaque surveillance authorities and secretive intelligence practices erode public confidence, even when pursued in the name of safety (Goitein, 2024). Likewise, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2025) has identified oversight gaps within the Department of Homeland Security that weaken transparency and accountability. When communities see intelligence expanding but cannot see the guardrails that constrain it, suspicion grows. Data centralization without visible accountability creates a perception of imbalance. Power flows upward, while explanation flows nowhere.

This is the intelligence-trust paradox: the more centralized, integrated, and technologically complex our systems become, the more distant and abstract they can appear to the communities they are meant to protect. In the absence of relational transparency, even well-intentioned intelligence efforts can feel intrusive rather than protective.

Pandemic Fallout and the Misinformation Surge

COVID-19 exposed structural weaknesses in crisis communication. Inconsistent messaging, evolving scientific guidance, and politicized narratives undermined public confidence in health institutions (Lal et al., 2025). Although the CDC's Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) principles emphasize transparency, timeliness, and empathy, their application varied widely across jurisdictions (CDC, 2024). In some communities, daily briefings fostered clarity and reassurance. Others experienced conflicting guidance from federal, state, and local authorities, creating confusion about risk levels, protective behaviors, and vaccine safety.

In to that inconsistency stepped misinformation. Mis-, dis-, and mal-information intersect with race and identity, amplifying distrust in historically marginalized communities already shaped by historical inequities in health access and treatment (McWhorter, 2025). Faith-based and community organizations were often left to counter rumors in real time, frequently without formal integration into public health strategy (Levin et al., 2021; Cutts & Gunderson, 2020). Once misinformation is embedded in a narrative, correcting it becomes exponentially more difficult, particularly when institutional trust is already fragile.

The consequences were tangible: delayed vaccine compliance, skepticism toward guidance, uneven compliance with mitigation measures, and deeply polarized trust in institutions. The pandemic did not create mistrust; it accelerated and exposed it, revealing that communication breakdowns are rarely about information scarcity; they are about relational disconnect.

Climate Disasters and Resource

continued on page 24

Trust Has Left the Chat

continued from page 23

Strain

Climate-driven disasters have further strained institutional credibility. FEMA's most recent Disaster Relief Fund report signals continued fiscal pressure as the frequency and severity of declared disasters increase (FEMA, 2025). When headlines focus on depleted funds or delayed supplemental appropriations, the public narrative shifts from confidence to concern.

At the same time, communities experiencing repetitive flooding, wildfire displacement, prolonged drought, or extreme heat are navigating recovery cycles that feel increasingly compressed. Assistance is often technically available, but procedurally complex. For renters, undocumented residents, and low-income households, recovery pathways can be especially burdensome. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (2022) documents how housing insecurity compounds the impacts of disasters, leaving many families in prolonged displacement or precarious living conditions long after media attention fades.

The issue is not simply funding levels. It is perceived as unfairness and inaccessibility. When mitigation funds appear slow, uneven, or difficult to access, communities interpret this as indifference. Recent federal analyses have also emphasized the need to reimagine resilience systems so infrastructure, housing, and community capacity are strengthened before disasters strike, rather than rebuilt afterward (National Infrastructure Advisory Council, 2024).

As disasters become more frequent and visible, so do disparities in recovery outcomes. Trust fractures when institutions fail. However, when communities observe that failure is unevenly distributed across geographic, income, and identity-based dimensions, civil unrest increases.

Civil Unrest and Enforcement Optics

Enforcement actions add another layer of complexity. The 1992 Los Angeles riots demonstrated how opaque intelligence and enforcement practices can amplify community trauma and deepen long-term distrust (Davis, 1999; Giroux, 2003). Decades later, similar tensions resurface when federal or local agencies conduct high-visibility operations without a clear public context. More recent reporting on expanded detention and deportation operations during public demonstrations has reignited transparency concerns, particularly among communities already wary of surveillance and over-policing (Freedom for Immigrants, 2025).

In these moments, perception often outpaces policy. Tactical decisions made for officer safety or investigative integrity can be interpreted as targeted suppression or political signaling when they are not accompanied by a timely, plain-language explanation. The vacuum between action and explanation is where rumor, fear, and escalation take root.

At the same time, countering extremism and preventing violence requires upstream, community-based approaches. The United Kingdom's Prevent strategy illustrates how early intervention, partnership with local stakeholders, and clear articulation of objectives can coexist with national security priorities (Arbuthnot, 2023). While not without controversy, the strategy emphasizes a critical lesson: legitimacy increases when communities understand the "why," even if they cannot access the operational "how."

The threat is real: some intelligence operations require confidentiality. Yet secrecy without context breeds suspicion. The challenge for emergency management professionals is not eliminating operational discretion, but rather embedding it within visible guardrails, post-event transparency, and consistent two-way communication that reinforces accountability rather than eroding it.

Cross-Sector Lessons in Trust Repair

Trust breakdown is not unique to government. The 2015 European Union refugee crisis and Toyota's 2010 recall show that credibility can be lost and partially rebuilt through visible accountability, structural reform, and sustained engagement rather than defensive messaging (McNabb, 2025a, 2025b). In both cases, initial institutional responses were perceived as reactive and insufficiently transparent. Recovery began only when leadership acknowledged failure, adjusted policy, and created mechanisms for stakeholder inclusion.

Global pandemic responses offer similar lessons. New Zealand's consistent, empathetic communication approach strengthened compliance and public confidence by pairing clear restrictions with clear rationale (Cousins, 2020). OECD (2022) findings reinforce that institutional trust correlates strongly with perceived fairness, responsiveness, and the belief that decision-makers act in the public interest rather than to protect institutional image.

Across sectors, the pattern is consistent: credibility is restored when institutions demonstrate both competence and care. Technical correction without relational repair is insufficient. Trust is not restored through press releases alone. It requires structural design changes that

continued on page 25

Trust Has Left the Chat

continued from page 24

embed transparency, feedback loops, and accountability into daily operations, not just crisis moments.

The Cost of Inaction

When trust erodes, measurable operational consequences follow:

- Evacuation orders are ignored.
- Public health guidance is questioned.
- Rumors outpace official updates.
- Community partners disengage.
- Mitigation investments are stalled by public hearings and local resistance.

Disaster preparedness rests on social capital. Where trust networks are strong, response accelerates and recovery stabilizes (Sutton & Tierney, 2006). Where they are weak, cascading failures compound, and even well-designed plans collapse under public skepticism.

We have refined incident command structures. We have built interoperable communications systems. We have invested billions in intelligence platforms and analytic tools. Yet none of those systems function as intended if the public does not trust the institutions that operate them. This is not a marginal issue for public information officers to manage. It is not a branding problem. It is not a temporary fluctuation in sentiment. It is a structural vulnerability.

If trust continues to deteriorate, emergency management will find itself technically advanced but socially brittle; capable of issuing alerts but unable to compel action; equipped with data but lacking legitimacy; prepared on paper but fragile in practice.

The credibility crisis is not approaching. It is here. And unless we redesign how intelligence and transparency coexist, resilience will remain a promise that communities no longer trust. 🔷

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continued on page 26

Trust Has Left the Chat

continued from page 25

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EM Calendar

June 3-4	2026 Emergency Management Higher Education Colloquium
June 18	IAEM-USA Emerging Technology Caucus Lunch & Learn – Developing Your Disaster Geospatial Toolkit
July 29-30	IAEM-USA Region 7 2026 Conference University of Nebraska Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska
Aug. 10-13	National Homeland Security Conference Kentucky International Convention Center, Louisville, Kentucky
Aug. 11-12	IAEM-USA Region 9 Symposium 2026 Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii, Honolulu, Hawaii
Nov. 6-12	2026 IAEM Annual Conference Long Beach, California

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