

Walter Topp, ARMADA Ltd. (formerly with the Cuyahoga County Office of Emergency Management)

## COMPETITIVE DIVISION – PRACTITIONER

### Building Resilient Communities: A Guide for Emergency Managers

All communities can recover from disaster. The characteristics that helped them grow in the first place are the same characteristics that will help them recover. But some communities are better prepared for recovery than others. They are more adaptable, more flexible, better connected, and they have taken effective steps to mitigate the effects of disaster. In a word, they are more resilient.

Building a resilient community is a never-ending whole-community effort, but emergency managers can accelerate the process by educating community leaders, encouraging collaboration, and by identifying effective mitigation actions. When disasters do occur people and property in resilient communities' fare better. There are fewer deaths and injuries, fewer buildings collapse, fewer power outages occur, fewer households and business are put at risk, and fewer communications and coordination breakdowns take place. After disasters, resilient communities recover faster and recovery costs less.

The foundation of community resilience is connectedness and emergency managers are experts in establishing and nurturing community connections. Community efforts to build resilience should focus on four main elements: human capital, disaster-resistant infrastructure, community-wide recovery plans, and a culture of collaboration. Emergency managers can contribute to building a resilient

community by identifying and assessing risks; educating citizens and leaders; recommending mitigation actions, removing barriers to resilience; engaging the whole community; encouraging collaboration and cooperation; and supporting and strengthening civic organizations.