

POSITION STATEMENT

The Critical Role of Emergency Management in Climate Change Planning



POSITION

Ongoing climate change affects all regions, generating not only direct public-safety hazards, but also long-term economic, sociological, and public-health impacts. IAEM-USA strongly recommends comprehensive mitigation and adaptation strategies, integrated with existing processes such as hazard and land-use planning, as the only realistic path for resilience among individuals, communities, and our nation. In addition, IAEM-USA specifies that emergency managers have a critical role in this process and should be considered essential participants at all levels of government.

This position paper does not attempt to engage in the political controversy surrounding climate change. As with US domestic and global security concerns, it focuses on the potential effects and the need to address them now, using objective assessment, strategic planning, and policy development.

ISSUE

There is abundant evidence that global climate has been warming and likely will continue to do so. This complex process drives a range of effects, from discrete events like extreme weather to longer-term impacts that vary by location, such as drought, sea-level rise, regional energy vulnerabilities, increased wildfires, habitat modification, and emerging diseases. The environmental and economic consequences of a changing climate vary by geography and affect communities at all levels. All levels of government, as well as private and non-profit organizations, are evaluating strategies to address climate change based on assessments of current and projected impacts, attempting to address specific challenges that communities face now and will continue to face in the coming years.

Emergency management at all levels of government contributes to lessening the physical, social and economic impacts of disasters. Emergency managers play a critical role in community resilience, including developing the comprehensive strategies needed to address the range of hazards associated with climate change. Emergency managers should use climate research data to target emergency mitigation, preparedness, and response actions for their communities. More immediate challenges may include preparing for more intense storms, frequent and/or heavy precipitation and flooding, higher sea level, heat waves, and droughts. Active participation and collaboration among emergency managers and other stakeholders throughout this planning process is essential for understanding and adapting to new and/or greater hazards and vulnerabilities.

FEMA's March 2015 announcement of changes to state mitigation funding included a newly required analysis of climate change on communities. Beginning in March 2016, states

requesting federal disaster preparedness money will have to assess specific threats to their communities related to climate change, and identify mitigation strategies that are needed to lessen those threats. A formal analysis of the risks communities face must be conducted and states must identify prospective policies and projects to address those risks. This is the first time that a federal agency has mandated consideration of climate-change impacts at the state and local levels in order to receive funding.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMERGENCY MANAGERS

IAEM-USA recommends that all emergency managers incorporate the short- and long-term effects of climate change in hazard vulnerability analyses, mitigation plans, and comprehensive planning. Emergency managers should foster a collaborative, interdisciplinary process that uses peer-reviewed research and engages professional expertise, in order to build a foundation of community resilience.

REFERENCES

- 1) FEMA State Mitigation Plan Review Guide
http://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1425915308555-aba3a873bc5f1140f7320d1ebabd18c6/State_Mitigation_Plan_Review_Guide_2015.pdf
- 2) Climate Change: Long Term Trends and their Implications for Emergency Management
http://www.fema.gov/pdf/about/programs/oppa/climate_change_paper.pdf
- 3) How Does Climate Adaptation Affect Emergency Management?
<http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/jhsem.2014.11.issue-2/jhsem-2013-0037/jhsem-2013-0037.xml>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- 1) United States Global Change Research Program: <http://www.globalchange.gov>
- 2) The National Climate Assessment: <http://nca2014.globalchange.gov/>
- 3) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports: <http://www.ipcc.ch/>
- 4) Climate Change Evidence and Causes (Royal Society and U.S. National Academy of Sciences): <https://royalsociety.org/policy/projects/climate-evidence-causes/>
- 5) FEMA's Climate Change Adaptation Policy: http://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1919-25045-3330/508_climate_change_policy_statement.pdf
- 6) State, 2014, US Climate Action Report to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change: <http://www.state.gov/e/oes/rls/rpts/car6/index.htm>

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IAEM-USA is our nation's largest association of Emergency Management professionals, with more than 8,000 members including emergency managers at the state and local government levels, tribal nations, the military, colleges and universities, private business and the nonprofit sector. Most of our members are city and county emergency managers who perform the crucial function of coordinating and integrating the efforts at the local level to prepare for, mitigate the effects of, respond to, and recover from all types of disasters including terrorist attacks. Our membership includes emergency managers from large urban areas as well as rural areas.