

Natural Hazard Research

**RENEWING F.E.M.A.:
REMAKING EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

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PREFACE

This paper is one of a series on research in progress in the field of human adjustments to natural hazards. The Natural Hazards Working Paper Series is intended to aid the rapid distribution of research findings and information. Publication in the series is open to all hazards researchers and does not preclude more formal publication. Indeed, reader response to a publication in this series can be used to improve papers for submission to journal or book publishers.

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RENEWING FEMA: REMAKING EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

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IMPETUS FOR RENEWAL

In the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew in 1992, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was highly criticized, if not excoriated, for a poor, mismanaged emergency response. FEMA's own Office of Inspector General documented the agency's shortcomings in its response to Hurricane Andrew (FEMA, 1993a). A few lawmakers even proposed legislation calling for FEMA's dissolution (*National Journal*, 1993, p. 2132). Today most of those proposals are withdrawn, sidetracked, or await further consideration.

Since Hurricane Andrew, significant changes have occurred. Foremost among them has been a presidential election, the change to the Clinton administration, the appointment of a professional and experienced emergency manager to head FEMA, the push of the National Performance Review to reinvent federal administration, and an in-house assessment and reorganization led by the new FEMA director. Additionally, in January 1994 southern California's San Fernando Valley experienced the Northridge Earthquake, a major disaster that gave FEMA officials the opportunity to demonstrate how much their agency had improved since Hurricane Andrew.

The purpose of this study is to examine the degree and range of reform made at FEMA since President Clinton and his FEMA Director, James Lee Witt, assumed office. In order to provide a point of reference, several U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) studies and official statements, along with a probing National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) study of FEMA (all researched late in the Bush Administration), will be used to provide the "before" picture of FEMA transformation (GAO, 1993; NAPA, 1993). This analysis cannot examine all changes made at FEMA, and it does not go very far in authenticating how deep and lasting FEMA's self-avowed reforms will be. However, it does review important strategic and operational changes;

new ways in which FEMA is relating to states, localities, and disaster victims; as well as some of the shifting dynamics of presidential disaster declarations. For FEMA, Hurricane Andrew and political reaction gave new meaning to the old adage "change is in the wind."

FEMA HISTORY

President Carter formed the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 1979 after a much-criticized federal response to the Three Mile Island Unit #2 Nuclear Power Plant accident. FEMA was to provide a single point of contact for state and local governments in order to "optimize" the use of emergency preparedness and response resources at all levels of government by taking advantage of the similarities in and response activities for peacetime and attack emergencies (McLoughlin, 1985, p. 166). The agency was supposed to replace a patchwork of disparate agencies, councils, laws, and executive orders with a central, integrated emergency management agency (Sylves, 1994, p. 303).

Before FEMA opened its doors and before the Federal Response Plan (FRP) took effect, there was "no organized, regulated framework . . . by which the federal government could provide" coordinated emergency management and federal disaster response (Abernathy and Weiner, 1994, p. 1). The FRP was in place for many years to coordinate federal response, but not disaster assistance. Also, for many years Congress dispensed disaster aid to states on a disaster-by-disaster basis; from 1803 to 1950, over 128 separate laws were enacted. It was not until shortly before the 1992 Hurricane Andrew disaster that the national government implemented for the first time an "organized framework to coordinate federal disaster response to victims" (Hart, 1994).

One definitive 1986 study of disaster policy revealed that laws passed "between" disasters (in normal times) were usually better conceived than those hurriedly approved soon after disasters (May and Williams, 1986, p. 3). This study also determined that Congress was slow to understand the commonalities of disasters, that is, lawmakers tended to pass separate laws for earthquakes, hurricanes, forest fires, floods, etc. By failing to approach disaster policy in more generic terms using "all-hazards" reasoning, legislators often created a patchwork of overlapping organizations and programs that worked duplicatively, inefficiently, parochially, and sometimes at cross-purposes.

The first law to establish a disaster relief program that broke the single-incident cycle was the Federal Disaster Act of 1950 (P.L. 81-875). It embodied the basic philosophy of disaster relief and laid the foundation for federal and state cost-sharing in disaster assistance. Initially, federal relief went only to public assistance (government-to-government) projects that usually supported infrastructure repair or replacement. Often the federal government paid 100% of these costs. Individual victims of disaster could only seek help from private charities like the Red Cross and the Salvation Army (Abernathy and Weiner, 1994, p. 2).

Although the gap between public and individual assistance was largely closed by temporary housing and other individual assistance programs put in place after the Disaster Relief Act of 1970, the Disaster Relief Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-288) instituted the Individual and Family Grant (IFG) program (Hart, 1994). This provided 75% of the funding for a state-administered program to provide cash for home repairs, furniture, clothing, and other necessities (Hart, 1994).

From 1979 to 1988, FEMA handled a variety of disaster response and recovery responsibilities, largely under the broad authority of the Disaster Relief Act of 1974. It was accorded a new "structure and legal basis for disaster response" under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act of 1988 (P.L. 100-707), which supplies "FEMA with the authority to provide for all disasters, regardless of cause. It delineates FEMA's disaster assistance programs, and in conjunction with the FRP [Federal Response Plan], the processes by which specialized assistance is afforded to victims" (Settle, 1990, pp. 44-46; Abernathy and Weiner, 1994, p. 2). The term "regardless of cause" means that human-caused and environmental disasters are included, as well as natural disasters.

FEMA and Civil Defense Against Nuclear Attack

Federal civil defense programs have existed since 1916, but civil defense against nuclear attack did not emerge until the Soviet Union detonated its first atomic bomb in 1949. That explosion ended a U.S. monopoly on atomic weapons and made it clear a nuclear attack against the U.S. was possible; thus, a superpower nuclear arms race resulted. Advances in compact thermonuclear weapons and sophisticated delivery vehicles raised new fears. The 1957 Gaither report declared the American public vulnerable to, and ill-prepared for, a Soviet

intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) nuclear attack. It "urged that [President] Eisenhower not only protect SAC [Strategic Air Command], but undertake a vast civilian shelter program" (Herken, 1987, p. 115). This prompted the fallout-shelter mania that peaked around the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. A coterie of civil defense units handled nuclear civil preparedness duties for about 30 years; in 1979 most of these offices were folded into the new FEMA.

FEMA's civil defense programs garnered new emphasis in the Reagan administration of the early 1980s. Population relocation, sheltering, emergency warning operations, and evacuation plans have long been central features of FEMA operations. These duties include "continuity of government"—a highly secret and disputed program that calls for protection and safe evacuation of the nation's governmental leaders in periods of nuclear threat. To the average American these programs are obscure and largely infeasible. To the emergency management community, civil defense against nuclear attack has, for better or worse, shaped nearly every aspect of FEMA operations (Sylves, 1994, p. 304; Waugh and Hy, 1990, pp. 5-6). For many years, "civil defense funds have been the primary source of federal funds allowing subnational governments to upgrade disaster and civil preparedness" (May and Williams, 1986, p. 10).

However, by the 1990s, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the decline of Communism, and the break-up of the Soviet Union dramatically reduced the threat of nuclear attack against the United States, raising doubts about the need for FEMA's nuclear attack programs. The NAPA report declared that "the time has come to shift the emphasis from national security to domestic emergency management using an all-hazards approach" (NAPA, 1993, p. 2). However, retooling FEMA in a way that moves "nuclear attack civil defense" employees and resources to domestic emergencies and disasters requires extensive internal reorganization, personnel retraining, and new laws. While FEMA has undergone extensive internal reorganization under the Clinton administration, it has not dismissed or completely reassigned its national security-related workers and has not been asked by Congress to surrender its Cold War programs or resources.

PRESIDENTS, DECLARATIONS, AND FEMA

Disasters and Presidents

FEMA may be a relatively obscure federal agency, but it has exhibited special importance to recent presidents. Over the past 20 years or more, presidents have taken more than a passing interest in disasters, particularly major ones. President Carter issued a presidential disaster declaration while flying over Washington state's Mount St. Helens volcanic eruption. President Reagan was photographed shoveling sand into a gunnysack on the banks of the flooding Mississippi River. President Bush was filmed commiserating with victims of the Loma Prieta earthquake in a heavily damaged San Francisco neighborhood. President Clinton appeared on television visiting shelters and inspecting freeway damage in the days after the Northridge earthquake. Thus, Americans have come to expect their president to not only dispatch federal disaster help, but to personally visit damaged areas. Americans also expect most of the president's cabinet, especially officials heading disaster-relevant departments, to visit disaster sites.

Such visits have political consequences. The Bush Administration's awkward handling of the Hurricane Andrew disaster in south Florida, despite a presidential visit to devastated areas, allegedly almost cost Bush Florida's electoral votes in the 1992 presidential election. Similarly, California has 54 electoral votes, one-fifth of the total needed to win the presidency, as well as more than its share of disasters and emergencies. Both points do not go unnoticed in the White House. How presidents manage disasters and appear to be responsive to the needs of victims can have political and electoral consequences.

The Clinton administration, like others, appreciates the importance of media management after disasters. President Clinton visited Northridge quake-damaged neighborhoods and met with victims, responder authorities, and state and local officials, while his staff issued numerous statements about the disaster. Moreover, the president, accompanied by his FEMA director, made himself available for several press conferences while in the vicinity of the most heavily damaged areas. Besides possible political benefits, such activity promotes public awareness of the disaster across the state, nation, and world. It also underscores the political legitimacy of the government's response and may even convey a greater sense of urgency to responders, donors, and others who provide assistance to disaster victims.

The White House

In their evaluation of FEMA's Hurricane Andrew response, the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) and the General Accounting Office (GAO) suggested that federal response to catastrophe needs a greater presence in the White House. In the past, ad hoc arrangements such as appointing presidential staffers (e.g., Bush White House Chief of Staff John Sununu following the Loma Prieta earthquake in San Francisco) or disaster-inexperienced cabinet secretaries (e.g., Bush Transportation Secretary Andrew Card following Hurricane Andrew) have proven to be unsatisfactory. NAPA and GAO concluded disaster response needs a formal identification within the White House so that presidential authority can be brought to bear in managing federal agency activities in the aftermath of a disaster (NAPA, 1993; GAO, 1993).

In addition, FEMA needs a director who is trusted by the president to assume a lead federal role in disasters. That leader needs the political and managerial clout to compel other federal agencies to respond to an emergency. Thus far, the Clinton Administration seems content to trust the FEMA director with top disaster management authority, leaving only a low-level White House liaison staffer to act in support of FEMA on the presidential level (Sylves, 1994, p. 306).

Big Disasters versus Small Disasters

Part of the political dynamics of disaster involves whether an event is of "catastrophic" scale—affecting a wide area with massive devastation—or is of more limited magnitude. FEMA was strongly criticized for failing to anticipate and mobilize in the days and hours before Hurricane Andrew struck the Florida coast. Critics claimed that FEMA should maintain a domestic crisis monitoring unit able to mobilize before governors request presidential disaster declarations.

How is it possible for FEMA officials to draw a dividing line between catastrophic and "garden variety" disasters? Presumably, catastrophic disasters should trigger mobilization even before a governor's request comes in or during the onset of the disaster itself. GAO officials insist that a catastrophic disaster grossly overwhelms the capacity of state and local governments to respond. Comptroller General Bowsher claims, "We define catastrophic as any disaster that overwhelms the ability of state, local, and volunteer agencies to

adequately provide victims with such life-sustaining mass care services as food, shelter, and medical assistance within the first 12 to 24 hours" (GAO, 1993a, p. 6). He estimated that about 35 presidential disaster declarations are issued each year, but usually only one or two are of catastrophic magnitude (GAO, 1993a, p. 5).

Table 1 shows that there have been 1,258 presidential declarations issued, with 1,036 for major disasters, 114 for emergencies, and 108 for fire suppression between January 1, 1953, and August 18, 1994—a span of 41.66 years. This yields an annual average of 30 declarations for all types. It represents about 25 declarations a year for major disasters and a little less than three a year for emergencies and fire suppressions.

Table 1
Presidential Disaster Declaration Approvals and Turndowns
by State Request Action Category
January 1, 1953, to August 19, 1994

Action Category	Approvals by Category	% of Total	Turndowns by Category	% of Total
Major Disaster*	1,036	67.6%	503	32.4%
Emergencies**	114	56.5%	77	43.5%
Fire Suppression***	<u>108</u>	<u>63.9%</u>	<u>61</u>	<u>36.1%</u>
Total	1,258	66.3%	641	33.7%

* Omits nine state request withdrawals.

** Omits seven state request withdrawals, but includes 14 major disaster requests approved as emergencies rather than major disasters.

*** Omits two state request withdrawals.

Source: FEMA DARIS, run August 19, 1994.

The problem remains—when and how are FEMA officials to know that an impending disaster is catastrophic? When should FEMA sit tight and wait for a state request for a presidential disaster declaration? Moreover, there is currently a lack of objective criteria for all types of declarations (Hart, 1994). The current

process under which state officials petition for presidential disaster or emergency declarations requires that they prove the disaster, of whatever nature, is beyond the state's ability to adequately respond, thus requiring federal assistance. However, it is difficult, if not impossible, for FEMA people (whether part of a Domestic Crisis Monitoring Unit or not) to ascertain that a disaster is of catastrophic impact unless damage claims can be estimated. Moreover, it is difficult to judge whether state and local areas can recover *on their own* before disaster damage is actually assessed. Early sources of information are electronic media coverage and sometimes state and local disaster officials themselves.

The NAPA Report claims "The trend toward nationalization and politicization of emergencies and disasters fueled by the CNN Syndrome seems irreversible" (NAPA, 1993, p. 101). By this they mean:

One of the most dramatic contextual changes for emergency management is the greater intrusiveness and influence of news media. Disasters and emergencies provide dramatic news and the appetites of news media, particularly television, are insatiable. This means that emergency management agencies will have to perform under intense media scrutiny. It also means that few emergencies and disasters will remain local—most will be "nationalized" and politicized as a result of media coverage. This presents particular problems for maintaining emergency management's SOP's [Standard Operating Procedures] and the tradition that local and state governments are the governments with primary responsibility, while the federal government merely supplements their efforts. The media pressures reluctant local and state leaders to "ask for federal help," presidents to dispatch such help, and representatives and senators to demand it on behalf of constituents. This "CNN Syndrome" or "camcorder policy process" disrupts and distorts normal procedures and response patterns. The best laid plans and procedures are now vulnerable to disruption, indeed destruction, by one dramatic "sound bite" [visual and audio image lasting only a few seconds] that the media turns into political shock waves (NAPA, 1993, p. 18).

Media coverage of impending or transpiring disaster may accelerate a FEMA mobilization, but it also invites a short-circuiting of the entire disaster assistance process. A premature federal mobilization for disaster is not inherently bad, unless it encourages state and local officials to suspend or delay their own emergency response so that the federal government will shoulder most of the burden or to assume that federal help will automatically be approved because the event was on national television.

A second important concern is that of "marginal" disasters, that is, disasters not of catastrophic proportions, not a matter of national security, and not beyond the recovery capacity of the state or states in which they occur. Some have received assistance under presidential declarations and some have been denied. Table 1 shows that, over the past 41 years, there have been 503 major disaster request turndowns, 77 emergency request

turndowns, and 61 fire suppression request turndowns from 1953 to August 18, 1994. Although it may seem arbitrary to contend that, among the 1,258 presidential disaster declarations during this period are hundreds of marginal disasters, many states have the capacity to recover from small-scale flood, tornado, toxic substance threat, windstorms, snowstorms, and other limited events on their own, but have won presidential declarations anyway.

FEMA records for any sample year reveal myriad examples of marginal disasters that received presidential declarations. In 1980, Arkansas won a declaration that provided \$127,300 for disaster #617, severe storms and tornadoes affecting one county. Missouri won declaration #620 in the same year for the same reason, and \$137,182 in federal aid flowed to victims. Also in 1980, Maine secured \$385,610 in emergency declaration #3082 (FEMA begins all emergency numbers in a 3000 sequence). Maine's disaster was for red tide-toxic algae, which hurt the local fishing industry. Although the victims of these incidents are not undeserving of aid, why can't Arkansas, Missouri, and Maine afford to address these problems with their own resources, particularly since they have experienced these events many times before? By contrast, in the same year Florida experienced flooding after a dam failure and was denied federal assistance. Alabama experienced tornado damage and was also denied. Oklahoma asked twice in two weeks for a presidential declaration for severe storms and flooding, and was denied both times. The list of approvals and turndowns for every year raises questions about the criteria used to determine who does and does not receive a presidential disaster declaration for marginal events (FEMA DARIS, 1994).

Gubernatorial requests for presidential disaster declarations in cases of marginal disaster invite political subjectivity. Governors sometimes seek presidential declarations for drought, various crop failures, slow-moving landslides, small floods, limited tornadic damage, coastal beach erosion from storms, and a host of other calamities that cannot be considered either a catastrophe or a major disaster under existing criteria. Consequently, the president may deny the request for a declaration. FEMA (or its predecessor agencies) may have recommended to the president that a request not be approved because it was judged not to have met administrative criteria. However, the ultimate decision resides with the president, who can disregard administrative criteria and legally approve or deny any request for a presidential declaration. Information

regarding whether the president has or has not followed a FEMA recommendation on any single request is not available. However, it is possible to infer that some gubernatorial requests for marginal events have been approved (see above). Such approvals suggest that other factors, perhaps political considerations, account for the president's decision.

Table 1 shows that for all requests for presidential declarations (including major disasters, emergencies, and fire suppression), about 66.2% are approved and 33.8% are turned down (FEMA DARIS, 1994). By category, approval rates for major disaster requests run about 67.6%; for emergencies, 56.5%; and for fire suppression (mainly forest firefighting), about 63.9%.

According to FEMA Director James Lee Witt:

Each disaster incident is evaluated individually on its own merits. Criteria set forth in the Stafford Act for evaluation are: (1) the severity and magnitude of the incident; (2) the impact of the event; and (3) whether the incident is beyond the capabilities of the State and local governments.

The process and criteria are purposely subjective to some extent to allow the President discretion to address a wide range of events and circumstances (U.S. Senate, 1994, p. 151).

Witt adds at present there are no definitive "objective evaluators that could be used in the declaration process," although he recommends FEMA "endeavor to establish some" (U.S. Senate, 1994, p.151). Thus, state disaster officials and their governors can never be sure how their petition for a presidential declaration will be judged. As long as a governor and other state officials know that the state can afford to pay the 25% share of the federal aid formula (to which the federal government contributes 75%), they have an incentive to request a presidential declaration of disaster, emergency, or fire suppression. State officials logically minimize their own capacity to address the disaster (often crying poor) in petitioning for federal help.

Correspondingly, no president can afford to be perceived as callous or indifferent to even marginal disasters. The greater the intensity and duration of national media coverage of the event, the more the president is compelled to act in order to maintain and enhance his political image. Political responsiveness is also a force in the behavior of members of Congress, who plead on behalf of their constituent states or districts for approval of federal aid.

Furthermore, since enactment of the Disaster Relief Act of 1970, "the definition of disaster has been expanded to include not only 'major disasters' but also 'emergencies'." In 1988, new categories of emergency

were approved—the term "emergency" is used to define any event determined by the president to require federal assistance as stipulated by the Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Amendments (H.R. 2707, Sect. 320) (Abernathy and Weiner, 1994, p. 3). Emergencies are usually of smaller magnitude and scope than major disasters, are capped at \$5 million in federal aid, and are eligible to receive help from a narrower set of federal assistance programs. Emergency designations, perhaps even more than major disaster designations, are likely to stretch the rule that states must lack the capacity to recover on their own before they are eligible to win a presidential disaster declaration. In times when state and local budgets are tight or in deficit, and some calamitous incident occurs (e.g., a major snowstorm strikes a dozen eastern states or a severe drought befalls several Midwestern states), an emergency designation provides a flexible category. It also invites politically subjective determinations of aid, as perhaps when President Clinton issued a declaration for District of Columbia ice storm damage in June 1994, five months after the event. Other presidents have not been immune from doing this as well.

Budget Authority

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is one of the smallest independent agencies of the federal government. Its budget is microscopic when compared to other federal departments and independent agencies. FEMA employs 2,719 full-time workers (1993 figures), but has the capacity to mobilize an extensive network of intermittent personnel who can staff Disaster Application Centers in areas hit by disaster or in 800-number help-line centers at locations across the country.

The fiscal year (FY) 1994 appropriated budget for the agency was \$786 million, and another \$292 million was earmarked for disaster relief. For FY 1995, FEMA secured about \$822 million in budget authority and another \$320 million for disaster relief. These sums pale when compared with the \$5.7 billion supplemental appropriation for the Midwest floods in 1993 and the first installment \$4.7 billion supplemental passed in the aftermath of the January 1994 Northridge earthquake (Katz, 1994, p. 2575; Brenenson, 1994, p. 113). Federal disaster costs over and above regular funding levels are covered by supplemental congressional appropriations. "For example, in fiscal year 1992, Congress appropriated nearly \$3 billion in additional funding for FEMA

in response to Hurricanes Andrew and Iniki" (FEMA, 1993a, pp. 1 and 13). Budget authority to spend money on presidentially declared disasters is dependent on the regular infusion of supplemental appropriations approved after catastrophic disasters, providing a reservoir of funds the president can open up for agencies providing disaster assistance. However, for many years supplemental appropriations have been, and are today, funded by borrowed money. The Department of the Treasury must sell bonds in order to collect the money for these supplemental appropriations.

The dynamics of FEMA budgeting are unusual. The chief law governing federal disaster spending is the Stafford Act of 1988 (see Settle, 1990, pp. 44-46). That measure empowers FEMA to spend federal funds through a variety of programs, chief among them "individual and family assistance" and "public assistance" (rebuilding or repairing government-owned infrastructure). The Stafford Act also empowers FEMA to direct other federal agencies to engage in disaster operations, subject to FEMA reimbursement. Moreover, a presidential disaster declaration or emergency may initiate activity by other federal agencies apart from FEMA and consequently not subject to FEMA reimbursement. Sometimes disputes have arisen between FEMA and other agencies over whether or not actions are subject to FEMA reimbursement under the Stafford Act or were undertaken exclusive of FEMA direction and thus should be funded through other accounts.

Each time the nation experiences a mega-disaster, like Hurricane Andrew or the Northridge earthquake, a supplemental appropriation is enacted into law. According to an anonymous FEMA official, in packaging requests for these supplementals, federal officials "tend to ask for everything they need up front," rather than be found wanting at some later point in the disaster response and recovery. As a result, costs for mega-disasters are routinely overestimated. It is clear from the pattern of presidential disaster fund spending that huge supplemental appropriations contain excess budget authority, which gives the president authority to fund lesser disasters that do not require supplemental appropriations. In other words, unspent budget authority can be used to pay for disasters beyond the original supplemental. To appreciate why supplementals are so essential, it is important to understand the pressures of regular appropriations spending.

Regular annual appropriations for FEMA and other executive branch agencies tend to be kept as low as possible in the interest of federal deficit control and spending rules. Therefore, the federal government has

grossly inadequate "rainy day" appropriations through which to pay for disaster costs. Added pressure to hold down regular appropriation disaster budgets stems in part from the annual cap applied each year to total domestic discretionary spending. Under the Budget Enforcement Act of 1990, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) tightly polices all spending in the domestic discretionary category (as it does for the other two categories, defense discretionary and international discretionary spending). OMB is particularly sensitive to all over-budget spending. Surges in federal disaster spending from regular annual domestic discretionary accounts set off alarms at OMB when spending threatens to exceed allotted funding. Over-spending in regular accounts may breach the domestic discretionary spending cap. This is supposed to compel OMB to make mandatory cuts in baseline spending for all nonexempt accounts in that category, something OMB officials abhor. Thus, FEMA and other federal disaster-relevant agencies tend to routinely underestimate the cost of "smaller disasters" not fundable through enactment of a supplemental appropriation. In other words, their regular appropriations for disaster relief can quickly be exhausted by garden variety disasters.

By contrast, supplemental appropriations carry some advantages over regular appropriations. As off-budget spending, supplemental appropriations do not "officially" count against either the federal deficit limits or domestic discretionary spending. Supplementals to the president's Disaster Relief Fund usually come as "no year" appropriations, meaning the money is available until spent and not subject to lapse with the end of the fiscal year. An exception to the "no year" custom is the Midwest floods of 1993, where the supplemental carried a five-year limit. Notwithstanding, mega-disasters that produce new supplementals provide less-encumbered spending authority. Unspent "no year" appropriations in the Disaster Relief Fund, owing to overestimation of the costs of mega-disasters, may help federal agencies (FEMA and others) pay for smaller disasters that win presidential declarations.

OMB has less incentive to tightly supervise Disaster Relief Fund spending because it rests on supplemental appropriations that do not threaten the domestic discretionary spending cap and do not officially add to the national debt. Because of this and its capability to carry over excess spending from previous mega-disasters beyond the fiscal year, there is considerable pressure to use this fund to pay for smaller disasters. This helps prevent federal cash squeezes for smaller disasters that do not warrant massive supplemental appropriations.

Yet, a recent report discloses that over "the 10-year period from the beginning of fiscal year 1983 to the end of fiscal year 1992, annual obligations for FEMA's Presidential Disaster Relief Fund averaged \$668 million a year in constant 1992 dollars, much of it deficit-financed" (FEMA, 1993b, p. 13). The following quote is most revealing:

The system as a whole encourages state and local officials to ask for maximum federal assistance. Requests have increased approximately 50 percent over the last 10 years. Even minor emergencies have been awarded full compensation. The federal government expects to pay 17 states and the District of Columbia a total \$126 million for the costs of snow removal for emergency transportation after the March 1993 storms, even though snow is a regular, recurring event in many of the affected states.

To prevent the federal government from becoming the states' first-line resource in every emergency, objective criteria are needed to replace political factors affecting decisions about disaster declarations and the ensuing response. These criteria should be accompanied by efforts before catastrophe strikes to limit the costs afterward—a better alternative than limiting aid to suffering families and communities after a disaster hits them (Office of the Vice President, 1993, p. 14).

FEMA'S STRATEGIC CHANGES

New Leadership and Political Appointees

NAPA and GAO researchers alleged that FEMA has had too many political appointees (30+) for its size. Eight require Senate confirmation. Five separate Senate committees, each with different program interests, must act to confirm most of these appointees. The problem is that many of these appointees owe their allegiance not to the FEMA director, but to certain lawmakers on certain Senate committees and to influential clientele groups of FEMA. Caustic media and agency reports compound this problem by contending that FEMA has been a dumping ground for political appointees who are unqualified to meet their obligations (NAPA, 1993; GAO, 1993; FEMA, 1993b, p. 21).

This problem has been partially addressed in the Clinton administration. President Clinton worked for many years as a governor and seems to trust his former Arkansas emergency management director and current FEMA Director James Lee Witt. Also, FEMA's new political appointees manifest much more professional emergency management experience and expertise than their predecessors. Director Witt has insisted on promoting "technical and managerial selection criteria for political appointments," orientation and broader on-the-job training for politically appointed FEMA regional administrators, and improved career development options for both political and career FEMA employees (Office of the Vice President, 1993, pp. 22-23). Better qualified

people have been appointed to direct FEMA regional offices, and some positions previously filled with political appointees have been filled by career civil servants (Haddow, 1994; Hart, 1994).

However, it is up to Congress to reduce the number of FEMA political appointees. At least one measure, S. 995, proposes to do this. Some appointee positions have been left vacant by the administration. Clientele groups, like the nation's fire services, have been reluctant to allow elimination of appointed executive posts affecting their interests. The fire services have long considered the U.S. Fire Administration within FEMA to be a locus of fire service representation at the federal level.

A New Mission Statement

Reinventing FEMA was the goal of Director James Lee Witt. President Clinton nominated Witt for the job shortly after assuming the presidency. Based on his experience in providing emergency management services at the state and local levels, his commitment to the administration and its "reinventing government" initiative, and his promises made to Congress during the confirmation process, Witt vowed to renew or reinvent FEMA on April 6, 1993 (Office of the Vice President, 1993).

FEMA's traditional strategy has been to, "1) enhance the capability of state and local governments to respond to disasters, 2) coordinate with 26 federal agencies assigned to provide resources to respond to disasters, 3) give federal assistance directly to citizens recovering from disasters, 4) grant financial assistance to state and local governments, and 5) provide leadership, through grants, flood plain management, and other activities for hazard mitigation" (GAO, 1993a, pp. 3-4).

Director Witt's first step in renewing FEMA was to give it a clearer mission statement:

The mission of the Federal Emergency Management Agency is to provide the leadership and support to reduce the loss of life and property and protect our institutions from all types of hazards through a comprehensive, risk-based, all-hazards emergency management program of mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery (Office of the Vice President, 1993, p. 25).

FEMA is to have a leadership, coordination, and management role that focuses on reducing risks and helping the victims of disasters, regardless of cause. FEMA officials concede that this role is shared with other federal agencies, state and local governments, and private and volunteer organizations involved in disaster relief (FEMA, 1993b). However, the mission is said to denote that FEMA's leadership and support will focus on the

most likely risks, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, or floods, that a jurisdiction faces. By developing the capacity to respond to specific risks, emergency management capabilities will exist for any hazard and will be comprehensive (FEMA, 1993b).

National Performance Review

With Osborne and Gaebler's *Reinventing Government* as its blueprint (1992), the Clinton administration (with Vice President Al Gore at the point) has compelled nearly all federal agencies to undertake thorough self-assessments aimed at finding ways to encourage public officials to tap entrepreneurial spirits and free market forces to improve government efficiency and service delivery. Under Director Witt's leadership, FEMA has conducted thus far at least two rounds of self-evaluation, with findings issued in the agency's National Performance Review report (FEMA, 1993b). Central in these self-assessments has been the broad input of FEMA employees and the recommendations of many reports and studies of FEMA. FEMA employees were invited to submit suggestions and attend planning retreats that included Witt himself. FEMA's public employee unions, its regional staffs, and its advisory groups and ad hoc committees were canvassed for their views as well. Once all this information was collected and considered, Witt and his associates used it to plan FEMA's reorganization (discussed below).

Hazard Mitigation

Witt has added further dynamism to FEMA by emphasizing the importance of disaster mitigation. Mitigation involves actions and strategies that can reduce the impact of disaster or, in some cases, prevent one altogether. FEMA now allocates 15% of its budget to assisting states and local governments in developing and implementing long-term mitigation activities. "Under the 1993 Hazard Mitigation and Relocation Assistance Act, FEMA can now fund up to 75% of the costs of each local project" (Abernathy and Weiner, 1994, p. 5). Included in the law is the Hazard Mitigation Assistance Program. A related effort came in the Stafford Act's Section 409 Planning Program. The first program authorizes federal funding to states, which in turn pay for local mitigation projects selected competitively. The "409" program provides assistance to states to update their

hazard mitigation plans after experiencing a disaster (Abernathy and Weiner, 1994, p. 5).

Witt has made mitigation the foundation of emergency management and the primary goal of his agency.

FEMA officials assert that

mitigation must become a recognized national priority. Although mitigation makes good sense, it often isn't a priority for communities. Establishing mitigation as a primary foundation for emergency management will decrease demands for response to disasters. Buildings, homes, and infrastructures that are built better, withstand hazards better. This means less destruction, less loss of life, less personal and economic hardship. This also means a reduction in outlays for disaster assistance by federal, state, and local governments for rebuilding communities and businesses (FEMA, 1993b).

Although FEMA housed a collection of modest mitigation programs before the Clinton-Witt regime, by highlighting mitigation and beefing up its resources, FEMA enhances its capacity in intergovernmental relations on a continuous basis, rather than merely following a disaster. Whether invigorated FEMA mitigation efforts produce adequate state and local responses is a serious and open question.

Better State/Local Preparedness

Witt and his FEMA team have vowed to "do everything possible to make sure that state and local emergency management agencies receive maximum possible support" (FEMA, 1993b). This includes having adequate resources to manage the risks they face as well as enough properly trained and prepared personnel. Strong state and local emergency management organizations reduce the need for federal intervention and provide a better response to events.

State and local governments are FEMA's most important constituencies, and state emergency agencies are FEMA's most critical clientele group. Since many of these state organizations have evolved and work closely with FEMA, the agency's renewal process must be mirrored at the state level in order to bring about genuine reinvention of the nation's emergency management system.

FEMA'S OPERATIONAL CHANGES

Reorganization

In 1993, GAO officials claimed that FEMA's National Preparedness Directorate, the office that handled nuclear attack civil defense, must be reorganized so that it is no longer isolated from FEMA's other major arm,

the State and Local Programs and Support Directorate. Comptroller General Bowsher revealed that the National Preparedness Directorate had "about 900 employees and . . . an annual appropriation of about \$100 million [aimed at developing federal, state, and local nuclear attack emergency response]—significant assets that could be used more effectively to help guide the federal government's response to catastrophic natural disasters, especially in light of the changing nature of national security emergencies" (GAO, 1993a, p. 13).

In response to these criticisms and in an effort to modernize, Witt and his team reorganized FEMA. This was done to create a framework that "more readily reflects FEMA's updated vision of emergency management and to establish an efficiently functioning, agency-wide disaster response team" (Abernathy and Weiner, 1994, p. 6). In the past, FEMA comprised two massive directorates, one dedicated to national preparedness for (nuclear) attack and the other devoted to helping state and local governments address disasters and emergencies. The new FEMA is more functionally based. It includes directorates such as Response and Recovery Operations, Mitigation, Preparedness-Training and Exercises, and Operations Support. FEMA continues to house the Federal Insurance Administration and the U.S. Fire Administration as well. Both original directorates have been dismantled; however, former national preparedness functions, while not abandoned, appear to be distributed amongst larger sets of functions and programs (Office of the Vice President, 1993).

FEMA's reorganization was executive-driven and not a product of new laws or statutes. However, some might say FEMA's self-transformation was in part a pre-emptive action intended to ward off unwanted congressional measures. The agency has pressed for a number of new powers and legislatively sanctioned changes. How Congress responds to Clinton administration requests for new FEMA statutes is another open question at this time.

Crisis Monitoring

Several GAO studies, responding to claims that FEMA was ill-prepared to mobilize in the hours before Hurricane Andrew, implored FEMA to mobilize before a presidential disaster declaration is asked for and issued. "Current federal law governing disaster response does not explicitly authorize federal agencies to undertake preparatory activities before a disaster declaration by the President, nor does it authorize FEMA to

reimburse such agencies for such preparation, even when disasters such as hurricanes provide some warning that such activities will be needed" (GAO, 1993b).

Others have challenged FEMA to "take preparatory actions in anticipation of a disaster declaration or a governor's request for assistance" (Abernathy and Weiner, 1994, p. 9). However, law and funding requirements pose a problem. A state is "automatically and immediately liable for a portion of the cost of providing disaster assistance once FEMA responds to a disaster" (Abernathy and Weiner, 1994, p. 10). By law federal assistance is supplemental, not primary. "Under principles of state sovereignty (respect for state independence from the federal government), the federal government can only step in when requested to do so by the state or when the state is unable, on its own, to meet the needs of its victims" (Abernathy and Weiner, 1994, p. 10).

FEMA is working to better anticipate disasters likely to trigger a gubernatorial request for a presidential disaster declaration. FEMA officials have established pre-disaster cost-sharing agreements with states, dispatched a FEMA representative to the staff of governors facing a catastrophic disaster (e.g., an approaching hurricane), prepositioned FEMA resources in advance of an imminent disaster, and other preparation measures to better anticipate federal disaster mobilization.

Headquarters/Field Relations

Another damaging claim of the past was that many FEMA offices are compartmentalized and isolated—this in an agency that is supposed to be a model and focal point of federal administrative coordination after disasters. The Witt leadership group may have helped reduce some of this compartmentalization by diminishing, or at least seriously de-emphasizing, FEMA's national security operations. Also, changes in each of FEMA's 10 regional offices have been made parallel to all of the reorganization changes made under Witt at FEMA headquarters (Hart, 1994).

FEMA's headquarters and regional personnel have been asked to spend as much time as possible working with state and local organizations. This is expected to make FEMA staff "better acquainted with their counterparts at the state and local levels" and the emergency management organizations, policies, and procedures used by these governments (FEMA, 1993b).

Training and Education

NAPA and GAO studies in 1993 concluded that FEMA needs to better integrate academic and professional scholarship into the training and education programs it provides for its employees and for state and local government employees. FEMA was chided for not doing more to research risk reduction and risk management. The NAPA study also claimed that "the information contained in some of the training courses of FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI) and some of those sponsored by FEMA and offered by state emergency services agencies contain information that is at least five years out of date" (NAPA, 1993, p. 98; GAO, 1993).

Central to these concerns is the ability of FEMA to learn from its disaster experience and define what constitutes adequate performance for the agency in response to every disaster. An assortment of studies call for better, more standardized operating procedures and guidelines for federal, state, and local agencies. Implicit is the need to address how "FEMA staff are trained to respond to disasters" (Abernathy and Weiner, 1994, p. 13). "FEMA is in the first stages of developing a systematic interim and long-term evaluation program to ascertain the operational areas in which training appears to be a critical need." Central training development, standardized instruction and materials, uniform standards for disaster positions, and updated training methodologies are among the changes under way in the reinvented FEMA. (Source?)

Complicating FEMA's training and education modernization is low turnover of its civil service workforce, many of whom joined the agency with little or no specific expertise in emergency management and who, until recently, have been given little incentive to retool. Also, FEMA lacks a history division or its equivalent by which good records can be maintained of past agency actions and through which institutional memory cells can be kept alive.

Classification

In 1992, about 38% of FEMA's total staff and about 27% of its budget (excluding the Disaster Relief Fund) were dedicated to national security emergencies; foremost among them was all-out nuclear war. The bulk of such activity is classified, and this was alleged to have created a "wall of secrecy" between FEMA's domestic emergency management staff and its national security/nuclear civil defense staff. With about 3,000

full-time employees, no less than 1,900 FEMA people held security clearances (Office of the Vice President, 1993, p. 6). Not all FEMA employees with security clearances work on national security issues, and this has led some to question why so many people need to hold security clearances. Critics charged that FEMA must "demilitarize" or risk that its operations continue to work in a divided way.

Acting on internal and external pressures, FEMA has moved to de-emphasize its controversial national security/nuclear civil defense programs. Since issuance of the GAO and NAPA studies, FEMA Director James Lee Witt has, as stated previously, eliminated the National Preparedness Directorate by subsuming its functions within new directorates in 1993 (*FEMA News Brief*, 1993, p. 1). An effort has been made to fold these programs under an all-hazard, integrated emergency management approach. The agency also conducted a review of personnel holding security clearances and working in classified or restricted operations. The aim of the review was to determine whether the agency had too many employees working unnecessarily in classified positions. As of August 1993, FEMA had reduced the number of secret clearances from 381 to 365, but those holding top-secret clearances rose from 1,501 to 1,582 (Office of the Vice President, 1993, p. 6). Vice President Gore's national performance review of FEMA states, "FEMA should sharply reduce the number of security clearances" (Office of the Vice President, 1993, p. 6).

The problem with all this is that Congress has not relieved FEMA of its national security responsibilities, and already small and under-funded FEMA abhors the prospect of losing national security resources. Gargantuan efforts have been made to give FEMA national security functions (now including response to domestic terrorism) "dual use" for civilian disaster response and recovery.

FEMA AND OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES

Federal Response Plan

In mid-1993, Comptroller General Bowsher critiqued the adequacy of the Federal Response Plan (FRP), which specifies the duties and relationships of some 26 federal agencies and the American Red Cross. That plan is found to be "inadequate for dealing with catastrophic disasters such as Hurricane Andrew in South Florida because, among other things, it lacks provisions for a comprehensive assessment of damages and the

corresponding needs of disaster victims" (GAO, 1993a, p. 6). NAPA and GAO recommended in 1993 an internal refashioning of FEMA and improvement of the Federal Response Plan.

Since its publication in August 1992, the FRP has been the basis of federal government mobilization to assist states and localities respond to all types of disaster. Hurricane Hugo in 1989 revealed the need for a comprehensive federal response program. The FRP was first carried out in August of 1992 and set the federal response to Hurricane Andrew in both Florida and Louisiana, Hurricane Iniki in Hawaii, and Typhoon Omar in the Pacific (Abernathy and Weiner, 1994, p. 8). The FRP includes 12 Emergency Support Functions (ESFs), each of which is administered by a federal agency with compatible resources and capabilities for that specialized function. FEMA is the primary coordinating agency for Information and Planning (ESF #5) and Urban, Search and Rescue (ESF #9) and has a supporting role in most of the other emergency functions. The FEMA leadership says it "is committed to refine, streamline, and exercise the Federal Response Plan sufficiently to ensure that the roles of the signatory, participating response and recovery agencies are clearly understood and exercised" (FEMA, 1993b).

Preliminary reports indicate that the federal response to recent disasters has conformed to the 12 ESFs and that this has broadly improved federal disaster response (FEMA, 1994).

FEMA and the Military

The FEMA response to Hurricane Andrew in 1992 led some policymakers to consider terminating the agency and parceling out its major functions to the departments of Defense, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, and others (*National Journal*, 1993, p. 2132; Sylves, 1994, p. 304). The military's admirable work in providing for the mass care needs of Florida's Andrew victims led some to propose that the military might be the right place for FEMA-type operations. Comptroller General Bowsher said: "increasing reliance on DOD [Department of Defense] to provide mass care would strengthen the federal role following a catastrophic disaster when there is a gap between what the private sector can provide and what disaster victims need" (GAO, 1993a, p. 8).

In recent years the military has modified its mission as a result of humanitarian relief and peacekeeping

experience in places like Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, and other areas of human tragedy (Sylves, 1994, p. 304). However, this raises a perennial problem of American civil-military relations. "DOD officials strongly believe, and we agree, that assuming overall management responsibility could create the impression that the military is attempting to make or direct domestic policy, which runs contrary to principles that have guided the military's roles in the United States" (GAO, 1993b, p. 8; Sylves, 1994, p. 304). In addition, the military is ill-suited for, and does not want, core domestic emergency management duties owing to constitutional restrictions on military activities in domestic civilian affairs, incompatibility of defense training and missions with disaster preparedness and response functions, and problems in dividing military assets between domestic and foreign operations, particularly during periods of heavy military deployment abroad.

However, a question left unanswered is whether or not FEMA has enough "clout" to induce the military to follow its direction in a widespread disaster. FEMA must undertake an investigation of the response capabilities of private charitable organizations in meeting post-disaster victim needs. Clearly, an early decision about whether, and how much, military mass care help is needed rests on knowing the capability and commitment of private charitable organizations.

STATES AND FEMA

State Role

Each of the 50 state governments has an emergency management agency of some type. These state agencies, like their local counterparts, are expected to be effectively organized and should possess well-maintained emergency plans, facilities, and equipment. On a day-to-day basis each state must oversee a state program that complements and promotes local emergency management. However, there is wide variation among the 50 states (Drabek, 1987). GAO and NAPA investigators concluded that FEMA grants and services should be used to promote uniformity and further professionalization of state and local emergency management. However, the extent to which states engage in emergency preparedness and management is dependent, as Bowsher says, on the commitment of each state's governor and legislature. Also of prime import is the "reality of a perceived threat" from disaster and the state's fiscal soundness (GAO, 1993a).

New FEMA/State Agreements

NAPA and GAO researchers maintain that FEMA needs to initiate more and better predisaster agreements with state authorities and emergency officials. The researchers add that FEMA should circulate model organizing plans to encourage more state-to-state uniformity in emergency management (NAPA, 1993; GAO, 1993b).

The new FEMA is "encouraging the states and territories to adopt an interstate compact as a mutual aid agreement." This will be useful in managing multistate emergencies and will help promote more uniform state emergency management across the nation. FEMA officials have prepared a model Draft Interstate Compact, which they hope will help diffuse this innovation (FEMA, 1993b). Current FEMA officials insist that the agency has, and is, crafting new memorandums-of-understanding with each state. At the same time, the agency has endeavored to reduce the administrative burden it imposes on state programs and officials through greater simplification and flexibility. Moreover, the Clinton FEMA now routinely dispatches a representative to the staff of any governor whose state faces imminent threat or has sustained a major disaster. This is an attempt to smooth out FEMA-state relations at the earliest possible time so that coordination and cooperation can be assured.

Comptroller General Bowsher complained in early 1993 that "FEMA headquarters sets policies and establishes training programs but does not monitor state performance." He added that FEMA regional offices "have no uniform national standards that can be used to judge state and local readiness." He goes further by claiming, "Most state officials believe that their disaster exercises do not adequately prepare them to respond to catastrophic disasters" (GAO, 1993a, p. 44). In the past, critics claimed that FEMA often fails to participate in the disaster drills and exercises it induces state and local governments to undertake (Sylves, 1994, p. 306; U.S. Senate, 1994, p. 107).

The Witt team reports that it "currently encourages state and local preparedness through training and emergency management exercises, and by state matching grants that directly fund state and local emergency preparedness. The effectiveness of the current federal preparedness programs could be improved by using performance measures that encourage states to use federal funding efficiently for the most productive emergency

management activities" (FEMA, 1993b). Clearly there is tremendous variation in the quality and numbers of state and local emergency managers, and for this reason FEMA's efforts to promote standardized training, exercises, and preparedness seem necessary.

All-Hazards Preparedness

Since the early 1980s, FEMA has promoted an implementation strategy referred to as the "integrated emergency management system" (IEMS) (May and Williams, 1986, pp. 160, 161, 163; McLoughlin, 1985). The strategy strives to ensure that emergency preparedness actions at all levels are as responsive as possible to major crises. IEMS was based on intergovernmental agreements. Much of this effort has helped to professionalize state and local emergency management; but, it is also true that a grassroots evolution of the profession has probably done more to modernize state and local emergency management.

FEMA Regions and States

The NAPA study claims that FEMA's federal-state relations are often rocky and uneven. Some of FEMA's regional offices mesh poorly, if at all, with FEMA headquarters. NAPA favors reducing the number of FEMA regional offices from 10 to five, but some state emergency officials oppose this and instead favor strengthening FEMA regional offices (NAPA, 1993). These state officials count on the FEMA regional offices to support federal-state emergency management projects, and they want FEMA regional personnel available to help in damage assessment following a disaster.

FEMA's moves to improve its regional offices, making them more responsive to state and local emergency managers and reflecting FEMA's reorganization, have been discussed previously. It is noteworthy that FEMA regions IV, VI, and IX experience a disproportionately large number of major disasters and emergencies. Region IV covers many southeastern states, Region VI encompasses Texas and the south central states, and Region IX includes California and other southwest states. From 1954 to August 18, 1994, Region IV has had 205 presidential disaster declarations; Region VI has had 191; and Region IX has experienced 168. In FEMA regions I, II, III, VII, and VIII, none has received more than 95 presidential declarations (FEMA DARIS,

1994). FEMA officials must be sure each region maintains a high level of competence, responsiveness, and experience—regardless of disaster frequency.

FEMA Grants to States

GAO's Bowsher suggested that FEMA's state government-directed programs should distribute block grants rather than categorical grants. NAPA and GAO concluded that FEMA must continue to help build state and local government disaster response capacity and should do so through flexible matching grants tailored to state needs, better training and exercises, and added improvements in state and local preparedness for "catastrophic" disaster (GAO, 1993a, 1993b; NAPA, 1993).

FEMA's response has been to promise that "states will have the flexibility to develop their own programs and priorities based on the specific risks that they face. FEMA's requirements will be performance based and focused on program accomplishments" (FEMA, 1993b). FEMA officials add that their work with states and localities will be more functional than programmatic, and will rest on broad and flexible guidelines more than on definitive requirements.

Federal Cost Sharing

Federal/state cost sharing is another important and sometimes mysterious feature of FEMA's intergovernmental relations. The Stafford Act establishes the federal share of disaster cost at no less than 75% and the corresponding state share at 25%. Disaster severity, political considerations, and equity/fairness factors allow the president to increase the federal share to 90% or even 100%.

What FEMA and other disaster-related federal agencies spend in any single disaster is to a great degree a function of damage assessment. Measuring damage costs after a disaster is extremely difficult and problematic (Settle, 1990, p. 36). States are integral participants both in assessing damage to government facilities and in gauging losses to individuals, property owners, and businesses. FEMA and its sister agencies are not supposed to provide disaster victims with financial assistance that is redundant of that covered by private insurance. Homeowner, casualty, business, property, and other forms of insurance are expected to pay out claims based on

the degree of damage, replacement or repair costs, and extent of coverage allowed in the policy, minus any deductible. However, private insurers are often slow to assess damage and process claims in the aftermath of a major disaster. In order to meet both legal obligations and political pressures to respond quickly to the needs of disaster victims, FEMA and related federal agencies sometimes inadvertently provide aid that covers insured damages. If federal officials become aware that a loss is insured, they may deny assistance. Also, if federal aid was conferred to pay for an insured loss, the federal government may require victims to reimburse the government.

LOCALITIES AND FEMA

Local Role

NAPA and GAO authorities agree that local governments are the "first responders" to disaster, and the key jurisdiction is often county government (Waugh, 1994; Schneider, 1990, p. 98). County emergency agencies usually work with municipal officials in disaster and emergency response. These governments receive FEMA funding passed through their state emergency management agency. FEMA's dual use and "all hazards planning" requirements, encapsulating nuclear attack preparedness rules, "have made it hard for both state and local organizations to plan and function effectively" (NAPA, 1993). The NAPA report carefully catalogues other factors contributing to unevenness in local preparedness and response capacity. It also suggests what FEMA can do to improve this capacity. Most of this consists of well-crafted and reasoned policy recommendations.

The NAPA report correctly points out that FEMA lacks strong clientele support. The report observes, "Except for those persons and agencies with responsibilities in emergency management, which are modest in number and influence, it has no generally attentive, supportive set of constituencies or clients, which is so important to the survival and effectiveness of public agencies" (NAPA, 1993, p.18). This is unfortunate because local emergency managers are a potentially powerful support base for the agency. FEMA should work more collegially with police, fire services, emergency medical authorities, public works departments, environmental emergency response units, emergency human resources agencies, and a host of others. However, these client groups often work in competition with and are suspicious of one another (Drabek, 1987, pp. 48-49). Efforts to

promote a multi-disciplinary emergency management profession are still in a nascent stage. FEMA has been slow to advance this disciplinary and occupational harmonization.

FEMA is not a regulatory agency, therefore, it cannot be expected to induce local agency emergency management reform unless it provides planning grants, federally subsidized training, and perhaps demonstration projects. If FEMA planning grants continue to shrink, so will any leverage FEMA has in its dealings with local and state governments. One study shows that 45% of local emergency management agencies surveyed across the nation received 50% or less of their budget from their local government. This means that a great many local emergency management organizations are heavily dependent on funds from FEMA and their home state. Unfortunately, localism, lack of standardization, police-fire-emergency medical occupational and professional differences, and fragmentation characterize many local emergency management agencies (Drabek, 1987, pp. 48-49).

CONCLUSIONS

- The Clinton administration and FEMA Director Witt have led a major overhaul of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Many of the changes under way reflect an earnest effort to modernize FEMA for post-Cold War responsibilities in natural and human-caused disaster response and recovery. Some of the changes also reflect a good faith effort to meet congressional criticisms, as well as fend off hostile legislation.
- Ironically, just as FEMA has begun transforming itself into a more professionally managed, responsive organization, it has had to cope with a series of mega-disasters and more limited minor disasters and emergencies. Owing to federal, state, and local budget exigencies as well as the spending flexibility of the president's Disaster Relief Fund, Presidents Bush and Clinton (and perhaps others) have sometimes approved gubernatorial presidential disaster declaration requests for marginal disasters—incidents the requesting states have the capacity and resources to respond to and recover from without federal help. Such actions often reflect "distributive" politics, under which resources are conferred in excess of need.

- Both large and small disasters have underscored the political importance of FEMA at the presidential level. The "CNN Syndrome" has promoted the nationalization of "garden variety" disaster and emergency incidents and has put greater pressure on presidents to appear politically responsive to any incident, regardless of state and local response and recovery capacity.
- Still problematic for FEMA is its old civil defense against nuclear attack duties. While many of the agency's friends and critics want FEMA purged of its national security programs, eliminating the agency's nuclear attack civil defense culture is not easy. These programs have been reorganized and downgraded in FEMA's official hierarchy, but no FEMA leadership wants to lose the resources these programs now bring to the agency. It is not yet clear how far the Clinton administration will go in this regard, and the matter is likely to be decided by Congress.
- FEMA's relations with state and local government are of cardinal importance. NAPA, GAO, and Bowsher underscore the intergovernmental nature of America's disaster management. However, lack of regulatory authority, very limited mandating ability, relatively small budget and grant-issuance power, weak research capacity, professional and occupational conflicts (especially at the local level), inadequate agency self-evaluation, politically weak clientele, vacillating governor and state legislative support for emergency management, and other factors continue to complicate FEMA's relations with state and local governments and agencies (Sylves, 1994, p. 307).
- Yet, the Clinton-Witt FEMA has made great strides in improving federal disaster response functions and in building new relationships with state and local emergency officials. FEMA's generally praised responses to the Northridge earthquake of January 1994 and the Midwest floods of 1993 are testament to the dynamism of FEMA's current leadership and a tribute to the good sense of President Clinton in taking disaster management seriously.

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