



International Association of Emergency Managers

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News Release

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Statement by IAEM President on the Hurricanes

By Dewayne West, CEM, CFI, IAEM President

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Falls Church, Va., September 23, 2005. As I write this, my heart is heavy watching the events and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the approaching Hurricane Rita. I know you all share my concerns. We are in the midst of responding to and recovering from the largest natural catastrophe to strike the United States in our lifetime. Our prayers go out to the victims and our counterparts in the affected areas. Recovery will be long and difficult.

The events that continue to unfold underscore the critical need for strong emergency management programs throughout the world. Any doubt regarding the value of the “all-hazards” approach to what we do or should be doing, has surely been erased. Historically, adequate funding and staffing has not been provided to the extent needed to address the various phases of emergency preparedness. Added to this have been guidelines and restrictions that hamper or prevent real preparedness and mitigation. This has to change if we are to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

As our populations increase and hazards become more complex and challenging, it is crucial that officials recognize the need and their responsibility for adequate funding and support at all levels of government. No longer can we have the “spare tire” syndrome applied to emergency management and expect it to perform flawlessly when disasters occur.

Without question, there will be much finger-pointing by self-made experts and Monday morning quarterbacking in days to come. Unfortunately, it has already started. However, I believe it is our responsibility as emergency management professionals to stay focused and unified in our approach and efforts to highlight the needs and value of our profession. This includes public education, training, professional standards, code enforcement, public policy, funding, mitigation and legislation. The message is nothing new.

Our efforts must continue to include individuals, families and communities. Public education programs must be expanded and enhanced, and citizens must be educated regarding their role and responsibility when confronted with a potential disaster. They must be trained in self-help procedures to look after themselves and their neighbors. Then government can concentrate its resources on those citizens and areas not capable of self-help.

We are also responsible for ensuring that we as emergency management professionals are trained and prepared to do our jobs. This includes training and education, professional development and program standards. If you are not consistently upgrading your knowledge base and capabilities, if you are not proactive in your role and program development, then you need to consider another vocation. Apathy is no longer acceptable regardless of the source. Our role and responsibility is much too serious to be taken lightly.

There must be a renewed effort at all levels to accomplish these goals. If this event doesn't serve as a wake-up call to everyone, then I don't know what it will take. The word must go forth from IAEM members, our partner organizations, and anyone else who can lend support, to convince officials and policy makers that change must come. After all, is that not what we have been saying for some time now? I hope you will join me in this effort – our citizens deserve no less.

The International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) is a non-profit organization consisting of more than 2,700 emergency management professionals from local, state and federal governments, military, private industry, and volunteer organizations. IAEM has consistently promoted the goals of saving lives and protecting property during emergencies and disasters since its founding in 1952 as the U.S. Civil Defense Council.

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