

Complacency Our Enemy

Today marks the end of the hurricane season, and we have been fortunate that no major storms have hit the US this year. Naturally, it is a time for relief, but we need to guard against becoming complacent. Most emergencies do not strike according to a calendar, so while we may breathe a sigh of relief at the end of the hurricane season, we need to remember that earthquakes, floods, epidemics, and indeed terrorist attacks can strike at any time.

As a nation, we can not take for granted our preparedness. Too many people pay attention only to emergency *response*, and not to *preparedness*. Unfortunately, most people think about emergency management only after a disaster, when they are in the midst of destruction and chaos, and not beforehand, when they can do many things to reduce their vulnerabilities.

As presidents of the National Emergency Management Association and the International Association of Emergency Managers, we are unveiling today a new national symbol to promote Emergency Management and to help Americans understand how and why it is so important in their lives, and to inspire people to become more involved in their own protection and preparedness.

Its three stars remind us that local, state and Federal levels are all vital in preparing for and responding to emergencies. And its presence on web sites, on the sides of government vehicles, on crates of emergency relief supplies, and on preparedness material, will demonstrate the benefits that emergency managers are providing, making people's lives safer and more secure.



If you are old enough, you will remember a relic of the Cold War, the old Civil Defense logo – the “CD” inside of a triangle – that accompanied information crucial to helping people prepare themselves for emergencies, including a nuclear attack. The old symbol may have gone out of style, but preparedness should not. That is why we hope the new Emergency Management symbol will remind people of the thousands of professionals dedicated not just to helping people recover from natural disasters or acts of terrorism, but to improving our nation's preparedness.

The symbol's slogan, “Public Safety, Public Trust,” also says that citizens should be taking responsibility to protect their own lives, families, homes and businesses. For example, people have a responsibility to inform themselves of local evacuation plans. Families need to have their own emergency response plans in place. Schools need to maintain their readiness programs. Places of worship and other local institutions need to think about how they are prepared to help the community. Companies need to protect their employees by having evacuation and business continuity plans in place.

And just as important, we urge all Americans to pay attention to what your local, state and Federal governments are doing. Know who your emergency managers are, care when budgets for first responder services are cut, and demand that Congress and State legislatures adequately fund emergency management programs across all levels of government.

At the state and local levels, thousands of highly talented professionals throughout this nation are committed to fighting complacency and putting into place better ways of responding to tomorrow's crises. Those people are devoting thousands of hours to training and readiness exercises and building cooperative compacts to ensure joined up response from local, state and Federal agencies.

These people are emergency management professionals, an honorable profession. They are drawn from the ranks of the police, firefighters, health agencies, the military, public safety departments, homeland security agencies, and other government offices. Unfortunately, many are retiring, with too few younger people entering the profession. With those leaving goes vast experience and talent. Without a strong supply of trained and qualified emergency managers, our nation's safety is severely compromised.

As representatives of the local and state emergency managers, our goal is to promote emergency management and help Americans understand how and why it so important in their lives, why they should learn and care about their local and state emergency management departments...or even know they exist to protect their lives and property. We hope as well that more young people will be inspired to seek careers in emergency management.

We look forward to working with the 110th Congress and trust the lawmakers will continue to protect the needs of their constituents with adequate funding for emergency management.

With that, we have much to be optimistic about. With complacency our enemy, we will continue to work for an America that is prepared for any emergency and a government that not only strives for public safety, but also public trust.

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