

**United States Council of the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM-USA)  
Government Affairs Committee**

**2010**

**Impacts of the Economic Downturn**

**Summary Report**

By

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On February 17, 2010, the Government Affairs Committee of IAEM-USA asked our regional presidents and the state associations of local emergency managers to distribute a link to a survey hosted by Survey Monkey to members in their respective areas. The survey was designed to learn about the use and value of Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) funds and the continuing impact of the economic downturn on local emergency management programs.

When data collection ceased on March 3, 2010, 314 emergency managers representing 30 states had completed the survey. Most of those who completed surveys were employed full-time (76 percent) as county emergency managers (84 percent). An additional 3 percent represented village or town jurisdictions and 13 percent represented city jurisdictions.

A majority (55 percent) of emergency managers represented jurisdictions with a population of less than 50,000; while, 18 percent represented jurisdictions with populations between 50,000 and 99,999, and 27 percent represented jurisdictions with a population of more than 100,000.

The following pages summarize the findings from the survey questions related to the impact of the economic downturn on local emergency management programs.

**Findings**

The economic downturn has had, and continues to have, a severe impact on local government jurisdictions in the United States. Home foreclosures, job losses, bank failures, and instability in the stock market are some of the most publicized impacts of the economic downturn that have affected local governments. To varying degrees, federal, state, and, to the extent possible, local efforts are addressing these impacts. Yet, there are a variety of less publicized impacts of the economic downturn that have yet to be addressed including its impact on emergency management.

The survey assessed whether local emergency management programs are experiencing impacts from the economic downturn. Our results indicated that yes, indeed, emergency management programs at the local level are suffering as a result of the economic downturn; and, furthermore, that emergency managers expect the economic downturn to have an increasing impact on their programs in the next few years.

The majority of emergency managers (72 percent) participating in the survey reported that the economic downturn has already affected their jurisdiction's emergency management program. And, a startling 92 percent of emergency managers anticipated the economic downturn having an impact on their jurisdiction's emergency management program in the next 1-3 years.

Emergency managers expressed concerned about the state of emergency management in their jurisdictions and what is happening to preparedness as a result. As one emergency manager stated, "Emergency management is in a dire state of affairs in this economic crisis."

Due to events like the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and Hurricane Katrina, it is now recognized nationwide that local level capability and capacity to prepare for, respond to, mitigate against, and recover from hazard events are of critical importance to our national security.

Efforts have been made in recent years to support emergency management at the local level. Emergency managers are fearful that the recent progress made in developing their programs will be derailed without increased funding. As one emergency manager indicated, "As local programs struggle more funding is needed to maintain current programs and to improve as technology improves. Emergency management has made great strides over the past few years. To lose this would be devastating to Emergency management programs nationwide. We need help"!

Emergency managers are also worried about emergency management beyond their individual jurisdictions. They are concerned about the relationship between the impact of the economic downturn on their programs and their communities and the nation's emergency management capacity and capability as a whole. As one emergency manager noted, "The state of our nation's preparedness is being squeezed badly and it will result in a diminished ability to respond to emergencies/disasters".

The survey results evidenced a wide variety of impacts local emergency management programs have experienced to this point as a result of the economic downturn as well as impacts emergency managers anticipate in the next few years. A review of these results leaves one with the clear impression that the progress we have made in recent years in building local level capability and capacity is at risk; and, further, that if these impacts are not addressed soon our national ability to cope with hazard events will be weakened.

The following sections briefly address some of the impacts to local emergency management programs identified by emergency managers.

### *Budgets*

Nearly a third of the emergency managers responding to the survey identified that their emergency management budget has been frozen and 59 percent (134 out of 227) identified that their budget has been reduced. For many programs, funding emergency management was a struggle prior to the economic downturn and that struggle has been intensified. As an emergency manager put it, "There was only a limited amount of funds prior to the economic downturn. Now there are even less for public safety in general."

The challenges related to emergency management budgets are anticipated to grow. As one emergency manager indicated, "Budget and salaries have been frozen for 3 years. We have been able to sustain most programs through the Homeland Security Regional Grants; however, those are being reduced too." In total, 29 percent of emergency managers, or 84 out of 289, anticipate their budgets being frozen in the next 1-3 years; and, 59 percent, or 171 out of 289, emergency managers anticipate their budgets will be reduced in the next 1-3 years.

Already An Impact (n=227)	Impacts of Downturn on Emergency Management Budgets	Anticipated Impact (n=289)
31%	budget has been frozen	29%
59%	budget has been reduced	59%

### Personnel

The “life-blood” of local emergency management programs is the emergency manager himself or herself, and any other staff members, who perform the managerial function of facilitating the framework through which communities prepare for, respond to, mitigate against, and recover from hazard events. Emergency management personnel have been, or anticipate being, impacted by the downturn in a variety of ways including reduced benefits, reduced pay, termination, change of status, and forcible furlough days.

Already An Impact (n=227)	Impacts of Downturn on Emergency Management Personnel	Anticipated Impact (n=289)
20.8%	reduced employee benefits	19.7%
16.3%	reduced employee pay	17.6%
14.5%	terminate personnel	16.3%
12.1%	changed the status of employees (i.e., from full-time to part-time or part-time to quarter-time)	24.9%
7.7%	force employees to take furlough days	14.2%

Without emergency management personnel, there is no question emergency management will suffer and the data suggests that for many communities terminating the emergency manager will be a step they are soon forced to take. As one emergency manager expressed the situation, “We have eliminated mileage, travel, overtime, planning dollars, and eliminated our local Disaster Preparedness guide...the next reduction will be equipment or staff. It is a shame at a time when disasters are still befalling our county that service delivery has been degraded.”

### Training and Exercises

Due to the economic turndown, local emergency management programs are reducing or terminating basic and necessary preparedness activities. As one emergency manager indicated, “Although I have been given a budget we are under a spending freeze which has severely impacted our ability to continue our planning and other preparedness functions.” The inability to engage in any one of the basic preparedness activities at the local level threatens other preparedness activities. One emergency manager suggested, “I believe the downturn is causing a ripple effect. As one part of emergency management is affected so are all. If we have to reduce training, it is a direct reflection on cutting back on exercises all together. If we cut back on exercises and training, it affects how we reach out to our communities and protect them from potential hazards”.

Already An Impact (n=227)	Impacts of Downturn on Training and Exercises	Anticipated Impact (n=289)
70.8%	reduced training activities	76.7%
4.6%	eliminated training activities entirely	10%
59.7%	reduced exercises	71.8%
4.4%	eliminated exercises altogether	10.1%

### Community Outreach and Awareness

Emergency managers are anxious about what may happen to community outreach and awareness. One emergency manager surmised, “As funding (federal) continues to dwindle many programs are going to be lost that took years to fund and the public loses out. Public education is at a prime right now and we will be forced to eliminate these programs leaving the public unprepared and at risk. It’s not just the emergency management programs that suffer—we do—but it’s also the people we serve.”

Already An Impact (n=227)	Impacts of Downturn on Community Outreach and Awareness	Anticipated Impact (n=289)
71.3%	Reduced	73.1%
5.1%	forced to eliminate	11.8%

### Facilities, Technology, and Communications

Emergency managers identified a range of areas impacted beyond those discussed to this point including facilities, technology, and communications. For instance, one emergency manager noted, “Capital spending in all budgets throughout our county has been cut or eliminated. Funding to maintain contracts for...response equipment has been under intense scrutiny. Purchase of vehicles and equipment needed for emergency response has been under intense scrutiny.” Another emergency manager indicated, “Any further reduction in funding would force us to decide to reduce services or to turn off standby communication equipment such as satellite communication equipment, and standby cell phones. It could also result in the county being forced to drop our contract for an emergency telephone notification system (Code Red).”

Already An Impact (n=227)	Impacts of Downturn on Facilities, Technology, and Communications	Anticipated Impact (n=289)
49.5%	suspended plans to maintain or improve their EOC	55.1%
15%	cancelled their EOC-related plans	19.3%
55.5%	suspended plans to improve their emergency management software/technology	59.6%
19.6%	cancelled plans to improve their emergency management software/technology	21.5%
56.1%	communications equipment maintenance or improvement has been suspended	62.4%
12.7%	plans to maintain or improve the equipment has been cancelled	16.8%

### EMPG Helps Keep the Lights On

While economic conditions are this tough there is not much local governments can do to provide additional support for emergency management. As one emergency manager expressed, “I believe we have reduced about as far as possible and still be able to meet mandates/expectations.” Increased financial support from the federal governments and state governments will be required if we are to prevent the deterioration of local emergency management programs.

One way to address the needs of local programs is to not only maintain, but also increase, the amount of Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) funds available to local jurisdictions. As the following quotes suggest, EMPG funds are already helping to “keep the lights on” for emergency management programs around the country.

- “As the economy worsens our administration tells us to rely more on our EMPG funds just to maintain basic program level”.
- “The agency cannot survive without it. City funding is dwindling, thanks to the economy... Virtually all of our activities depend on this funding. We are dead without it. All planning, response, and recovery activities for both city and county jurisdictions cannot effectively occur without the nexus of the Tulsa Area Emergency Management Agency”.
- “The Town of York is looking to EMPG funding to help lessen the impact of reductions in funding that have occurred because of the economic downturn over the last two years.”
- “EMPG is more critical now to every local jurisdiction since the funds are not as available.”
- “Funds provided through EMPG prevent reduction of funds during poor economical conditions...funds essential to maintain effective programs in emergency management.”
- “EMPG allows us in these hard economic times to maintain our current program.”

#### *Concluding Thoughts*

IAEM-USA’s Government Affairs Committee undertook this survey at the request of Congress to help them understand how the economic downturn is influencing local emergency management programs. The data gathered through this survey has established that local emergency management programs are being negatively impacted for the second year in a variety of ways that threaten the preparedness and capacity of their local jurisdictions as well as the preparedness and capacity of our nation.

Many emergency managers took the time to participate and share their thoughts about how the emergency management programs in their jurisdictions are struggling in these tough economic times. And, of those who responded to the survey, nearly 3 out of every 4 emergency managers reported that the economic downturn has already impacted their program and a startling 9 out of 10 expect it to impact their program in the next 1-3 years.

The high numbers of emergency management programs struggling to “keep their lights on” must be addressed if we want to prevent deterioration in the emergency management capability and capacity that we have worked so hard as a nation to develop.