



National Response Framework: Frequently Asked Questions

GENERAL QUESTIONS

What is the *National Response Framework*?

The *National Response Framework* is a guide to how the Nation conducts all-hazards response – from the smallest incident to the largest catastrophe. This key document establishes a comprehensive, national, all-hazards approach to domestic incident response. The *Framework* identifies the key response principles, roles and structures that organize national response. It describes how communities, States, the Federal Government and private-sector and nongovernmental partners apply these principles for a coordinated, effective national response. And, it describes special circumstances where the Federal Government exercises a larger role, including incidents where Federal interests are involved and catastrophic incidents where a State would require significant support. It allows first responders, decision-makers and supporting entities to provide a unified national response.

Why was the *National Response Plan* renamed?

The *National Response Plan* has been renamed the *National Response Framework* to better align the document with its intent and to encourage the continued development and refinement of detailed, robust all-hazards emergency operations plans.

What is the purpose of the NRF?

To ensure that government executives, private-sector and nongovernmental organization (NGO) leaders, and emergency management practitioners across the nation understand the domestic incident response roles, responsibilities and relationships in order to respond more effectively to any type of incident

What is the scope of the NRF?

The *Framework* provides structures for implementing national-level policy and operational coordination for domestic incident response. In this document, incidents include actual or potential emergencies or all-hazard events that range from accidents and natural disasters to actual or potential terrorist attacks. Such incidents range from modest events wholly contained within a single community to others that are catastrophic in nature and national in their scope of consequences.

Who is the NRF written for?

The *Framework* is written especially for government executives, private-sector and nongovernmental organization (NGO) leaders, and emergency management practitioners.

What are the NRF's key concepts?

Five key principles define response actions in support of the Nation's response mission. Taken together, these five principles of operation constitute national response doctrine::

- Engaged partnerships
- Tiered response
- Scalable, flexible and adaptable operational capabilities
- Unity of effort through unified command, and
- Readiness to act

Is the Framework applicable to non-Stafford Act incidents?

Yes. As with its predecessor, the *National Response Plan*, the *National Response Framework* applies to both Stafford Act and non-Stafford Act incidents.

Is prevention relevant within the Framework?

Prevention is a vital element in the *National Homeland Security Strategy*. Doctrine addressing prevention, long-term recovery and protection is expected to be developed and will integrate with the *National Response Framework*.

What is the implementation plan for the NRF?

The *National Response Framework* builds upon and supersedes the *National Response Plan* (December 2004, as amended May 2006).. The effective date for implementation will be 60 days after final publication.

Which documents as part of the NRF are being released, and which documents are still being refined (i.e., core, emergency support annexes, support annexes, incident annexes, and partner guides)?

The Department of Homeland Security is initially releasing the *NRF* base document, Emergency Support Functions Annexes, and Support Annexes which supersede the corresponding sections of the *National Response Plan* (2004, with 2006 revisions). The *NRP*'s Incident Annexes remain in effect until superseded at a later date.

ON-LINE ACCESS

How can I get a copy of the NRF?

Electronic copies are available on-line at www.fema.gov/NRF. In addition, supplementary materials such as annexes, appendixes, partner guides and other reference documents may also be found at the NRF Resource Center.

What is the NRF Resource Center?

The NRF Resource Center can be found at www.fema.gov/NRF. The *Framework* is supported by an online tool designed especially for emergency management practitioners, the NRF Resource Center (<http://www.fema.gov/NRF>). This online resource will grow and routinely evolve in support of the *Framework* and those who work with it. The core *Framework* should require significant change only infrequently. However, the operational planning and detailed work of developing stronger emergency management plans and capabilities will require a continued rapid pace of change in the months and years ahead.

The Resource Center hosts supplementary materials such as the Annexes, Partner Guides, authorities and references, other informational material, and links to training, job aids and other documents. Beginning in January 2008, new documents will begin appearing on the NRF Resource Center. DHS/FEMA will automatically notify stakeholders of changes to the *National Response Framework* and other associated documents. The website has an "email update" feature that allows stakeholders to be added to a list of people who will be notified each time the site is updated. DHS will also post notices on the DHS home page indicating changes have occurred.

Is the best way to access the NRF on-line through the NRF Resource Center?

Emergency management personnel should become familiar with and download all relevant material well-before deploying to an incident site with the knowledge that communications may not be immediately available. Field and national-level incident management personnel in community, State, tribal, Federal governments, as well as appropriate private sector and NGO representatives should download the materials to a hard-drive or a USB drive (annexes, references, etc) that they may need during an incident.

Who is responsible for maintaining the NRF and the on-line resource center?

The Department of Homeland Security, through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), will maintain the *NRF* and the on-line *NRF* Resource Center.

COORDINATION AND PLANNING

How do State and local planning synchronize with Federal planning?

State and local emergency operations plans have been developed, updated and revised over the past two years to reflect the principles and concepts outlined in the *National Response Plan*. The number of substantive changes in the *NRF* that will affect planning, training and exercising are relatively few. DHS/FEMA's National Preparedness Division is developing steps to help States, tribes and localities to synchronize their plans and training with the *NRF*.

How does the NRF better incorporate the National Incident Management System (NIMS)?

The *NRF* employs the *NIMS* standardized structures and tools that enable a unified approach to be effective both on scene and at the emergency operations centers. As opposed to being a Federal-centric plan, the *NRF* is truly a national plan and describes in detail, both in the base document and partner guides how the *National Response Framework* starts at the local level and builds using *NIMS* principles.

How will the NRF affect the work that States and local governments and Federal departments and agencies did to implement the NRP over the last three years?

The new *National Response Framework* is based directly on the *NRP* and retains much of its content. The title was changed based on user comments that correctly pointed out the fact that the *NRP* was not a plan, but rather a construct or *Framework* for coordinated national incident management. The document itself was changed to improve its usability and to incorporate suggestions from stakeholders as well as lessons learned and best practices from exercises and events such as Hurricane Katrina. The efforts that incident managers at all levels of government have made over the past two years to implement the *NRP* and *NIMS* have greatly improved preparedness in America and laid a solid foundation for the implementation of further improvements that the *NRF* will describe.

Are there instances where the Federal government may play a lead role in a proactive response to a catastrophic incident?

Following a catastrophic event, segments of State, tribal, and local authorities as well as NGOs and the private sector may be severely impacted. The Federal Government will employ a proactive Federal response to expedite resources to the impacted area. In rare instances resulting from a catastrophic incident, local and State jurisdictions may not be able to establish an effective incident command structure and lead the response. There may also be serious gaps in continuity of government and public and private sector operations. In these situations, the Federal Government may temporarily assume certain roles typically performed by State, tribal, and local governments. For example, at the direction of the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Federal

Government may establish a unified command structure to save lives, protect property, secure critical infrastructure/key resources, contain the event, and protect national security. As soon as State, tribal, or local authorities reestablish the incident command structure, the Federal Government will transition to its normal role supporting the incident.

How does the NRF pertain to the private sector, and what are the private sector responsibilities under the NRF?

Private sector organizations play a key role before, during, and after an incident. In many facets of incident response, the government works directly with private sector groups as partners in emergency management. The *NRF* describes the process for how the private sector interfaces with other response organizations during an incident and better articulates the private sector’s relationships with other response entities.

The *NRF* also acknowledges the private sector’s unique roles during an incident ranging from an impacted organization to a response provider, to a partner with State and local organizations since many private-sector organizations are responsible for operating and maintaining portions of the Nation’s critical infrastructure.

Supplemental material describing the private sector’s roles and responsibilities has been developed to provide additional information. These are in addition to the existing Private Sector Support Annex and Volunteer and Donations Management Support Annex.

ADJUDICATION OF COMMENTS AND OUTREACH

Since September 10, 2007, when DHS/FEMA released the draft *NRF* to the public for general comment, hundreds of agencies and individuals have been involved in reviewing the draft *NRF*, providing suggestions for changes, adjudicating comments received, and producing what has become the final *NRF*. DHS/FEMA initiated a nationwide outreach effort to engage all sectors of society, including government, private sector, and non-profit agencies, to provide information on the draft *NRF* and to solicit input and collaboration. Over 400 individuals participated in briefings, meetings, conferences, training events, and other venues, to learn more about the *NRF*. The chart below illustrates the extensive involvement of all sectors of the emergency management community in the development of the *National Response Framework*:

# of COMMENTORS - Org Type x Document	BASE	ANNEX	TOTAL
Federal	59	68	127
General Public	15	4	19
Local	12	4	16
NGO	45	15	60
Private	22	11	33
State	36	14	50
Tribal	2	0	2
TOTAL	191	116	307
# of Comments on CORE NRF Document	3,318		
# of Comments on NRF Annexes	2,385		
TOTAL COMMENTS	5,703		

How can I see if my comment was included?

FEMA will be publishing a Response to Comments to be posted on www.regulations.gov once the *NRF* is finalized and published. Information will also be available on the NRF Resource Center at www.fema.gov/NRF

Did FEMA consult with Federal departments and agencies and other stakeholders in the development of the *NRF*?

DHS conducted stakeholder meetings in the Fall of 2006 with various groups of stakeholders representing local, tribal, State, Federal, private sector and NGO partners. These same organizations, as well as others, were extended an invitation to participate in working groups to review the key revision issues and provide recommendations. In addition, all stakeholders had the opportunity to review and comment on the *NRF* before it was finalized. In addition, FEMA conducted meetings following the release of the draft *NRF* with key Federal departments and agencies, State, tribal, local, private sector, and non-governmental organizations to address questions and concerns directly.

What were some specific edits made to the *NRF* as a result of feedback received during the comment period?

State and local officials provided input on the narrative style, readability, specific word use and tone of the draft *NRF* document, and numerous changes were made to the final document based on those comments. Input from state partners during the comment period also pointed out some inconsistencies in the draft document between the *NRF* language and the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act which were addressed. Stakeholder groups during the comment period also sought specific language addressing the unique challenges faced by special needs populations. Based on stakeholder comments, special needs language was added to the document. State and tribal representatives requested that clarifications be made in the core document to reflect that states and tribes do not have to exhaust all resources (including mutual aid) before requesting Federal assistance following disasters.

UPDATES AND CHANGES

Many stakeholders have used the term Incident of National Significance to tier response processes. Why was the term eliminated? Is there any new term to replace it?

The "Incident of National Significance" term utilized in the *NRP* caused significant confusion. Many readers understood that a declaration of an Incident of National Significance by the Secretary of Homeland Security was a requirement for the *NRP* to be invoked or Federal assistance or interagency incident management support to be provided. This was not true, but efforts to clarify the Incident of National Significance term were not completely successful. And since the actual declaration of an Incident of National Significance brought no new authorities to the incident response, the decision was made to eliminate the term.

Does the Framework address Federal-to-Federal support in detail?

The *NRF* applies to all hazards and all types of incidents including those in which one Federal department or agency is called on to support another Federal department or agency. In keeping the document as concise as possible, the language and examples focus on the most common scenarios in which incidents begin as local events and ultimately escalate to require Federal assistance. More information on Federal-to-Federal support can be found in supplementary material at the *NRF* Resource Center.

Has the National Preparedness Goal been changed to the National Preparedness Guidelines?

Yes. This is a change in title is intended to more accurately describe this important guidance. The National Preparedness Guidelines, released in September 2007, support the requirements of Homeland Security Presidential Directive - 8 and replace the interim National Preparedness Goal. The Guidelines maintain the following preparedness tools: 1) National Preparedness Vision; 2) National Planning Scenarios; 3) Universal Task List; and 4) Target Capabilities List.

DEFINITIONS AND DETAILS

Where do special events fit within the Framework?

The Federal government provides support and resources to State and local governments for significant special events. The Secretary of Homeland Security may designate an event as a National Special Security Event (NSSEs). These represent a unique category, which, due to the political, economic, social, or religious significance, may make them particularly attractive targets of terrorism or other criminal activity. If an event is designated as an NSSE, the U.S. Secret Service, as the primary agency for coordinating the Federal support, employs NIMS principles and any applicable structures within the *Framework* such as a Joint Field Office, ESFs, Support or Incident Annexes.

What is a Unified Coordination Group and how does it relate to unified command?

The term Unified Coordination Group replaces the term Joint Coordination Group described in the *NRP*. The JFO is led by the Unified Coordination Group, which is comprised of specified senior leaders representing State and Federal interests, and in certain circumstances tribal governments, local jurisdictions, the private sector, or NGOs.

What are the roles and responsibilities of the Principal Federal Official (PFO) and the Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO)?

The Secretary may elect to designate a single individual to serve as his or her primary representative to ensure consistency of Federal support as well as the overall effectiveness of the Federal incident management. When appointed, such an individual serves in the field as the PFO for the incident. The Secretary will only appoint a PFO for catastrophic or unusually complex incidents that require extraordinary coordination. When appointed, the PFO interfaces with Federal, State, tribal, and local jurisdictional officials regarding the overall Federal incident management strategy and acts as the primary Federal spokesperson for coordinated media and public communications.

For Stafford Act incidents (i.e., Presidentially declared emergencies or major disasters), upon the recommendation of the FEMA Administrator and the Secretary of Homeland Security, the President appoints an FCO. The FCO is a senior FEMA official trained, certified, and well experienced in emergency management, and specifically appointed to coordinate Federal support in the response to and recovery from emergencies and major disasters. The FCO executes Stafford Act authorities, including commitment of FEMA resources and the mission assignment of other Federal departments or agencies. The same individual will *not* serve as the PFO and the FCO at the same time for the same incident.

What is the relationship to each other of the Defense Coordinating Officer (DCO) and Joint Task Force (JTF) as part of the Unified Coordination Group (UCG)?

The DCO and JTF Commander, although both DOD representatives, have very distinct roles and responsibilities. If requested and approved, the DCO serves as DOD's single point of contact at the JFO for requesting assistance from DOD . With few exceptions, requests for Defense Support to Civil Authorities (DSCA) originating at the JFO are coordinated with and processed through the DCO. Based on the complexity and type of incident, and the anticipated level of DOD resource involvement, DOD may also elect to designate a JTF Commander to command Federal (Title 10) military activities in support of the incident objectives. If a JTF is established, consistent with operational requirements, its command and control element will be co-located with the senior on-scene leadership at the JFO to ensure coordination and unity of effort. The co-location of the JTF command and control element does not replace the requirement for a DCO/Defense Coordinating Element as part of the JFO Unified Coordination Staff. The DCO remains the DOD single point of contact in the JFO for requesting assistance from DOD.

What is the purpose of the Planning Chapter? The planning section was written to impart general planning fundamentals to stakeholders as well as to highlight the importance of planning for integrated, effective response. As noted in the *NRF*, comprehensive planning modernization is a long-term effort. In the near term, the soon to be published *Guide for All-Hazards Emergency Planning* will provide the necessary guidance for Federal, State and local governments.

TRAINING

What are training implications of the new plan?

Training is critical to the implementation of the *NRF* in the *NIMS* environment. While the *NRF* provides the *Framework* for response, it clearly must be understood and rehearsed (through exercises) by Federal components; State, Tribal, and local governments; and private sector as well as nongovernmental organizations. All stakeholders need to know how the Nation's response structure works and their roles and responsibilities within that structure. Each audience requires a different level of understanding or ability to work within the *NRF*. Personnel who have a specific role in the national response or who must interact with the Federal response require more detailed, position-specific training and exercises. Training and exercises will follow a logical progression from awareness of knowledge, to operational skill building, through skill applications using exercises.

- **Awareness Training:** Awareness training provides a general orientation for all *NRF* partners including Federal, State, Tribal, local, voluntary, and private sector personnel. Chief elected and appointed officials at all levels of government should participate in awareness training. Awareness training will consist of independent study/classroom courses on the Introduction to the *NRF* (Revised IS-800) course and awareness training for each Emergency Support Function (ESF) and Support/Incident Annex. Stakeholders who previously completed IS-800 training are not required to complete the training again. However, stakeholders are urged to complete the revised IS-800 course as refresher training if at all possible. Stakeholders will specific roles or assignments in particular ESF's or Support or Incident Annexes should complete the awareness training in these functional areas.
 - Awareness Training for Emergency Support Functions 1 thru 15 is scheduled for mid March 2008.
 - Awareness Training for the Support Annexes is scheduled for late March 2008.
 - Awareness Training for the Incident Annexes is scheduled for mid April 2008.

- **Position Specific Training:** Position-specific training provides operational training for all personnel in the *NRF*, such as the National Response Coordination Center (NRCC), Regional Response Coordination Center (RRCC), and the Joint Field Office (JFO). Staff serving in specific ESF roles or in the Unified Coordination Group or in key leadership roles such as the Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) or Principal Federal Official (PFO) will receive more advanced training.
- **Exercises:** Tabletop and functional exercises will be utilized to involve key personnel in decision-making and information sharing to promote an understanding of all *NRF* concepts, roles and organizational elements. Exercises will assess the effectiveness of interagency coordination, the ability to develop a common operating picture, and resource management decisions.

What are the next steps in training and implementation?

- Starting February 5, 2008, FEMA will begin providing NRF training courses.
- By April 11, 2008, FEMA will have released 24 individual courses, each focusing on a key element of the framework.
- By June 1, 2008, the start of Hurricane season, FEMA's goal is to have all federal first responders complete their awareness training in the new system.