

**International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM)  
2009 Government Affairs Committee**

**Economic Downturn Summary Report**

On April 29, 2009, the Government Affairs Committee of IAEM asked our regional presidents and the state associations of local emergency managers to distribute a link to an internet survey to association members in their respective areas. The short 16-question survey solicited information in two areas related to local emergency management: 1) the role of Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) funds, and 2) the impact of the economic downturn.

The survey, hosted by Survey Monkey, was accessible from April 29-May 6, 2009. In total, 348 individuals completed the survey. Selected demographic information and survey limitations are in the appendix at the end of this report.

The Economic Downturn Summary Report presents findings from the survey related to the current and projected impact of the economic downturn on local emergency management programs.

**Findings**

The survey asked emergency managers to respond to four questions about the influence of the economic downturn in the United States on local emergency management programs.

<b>Current Impact Economic Downturn?</b>		
	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>69.5%</b>	<b>242</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>26.7%</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>348</b>

The first question asked emergency managers whether the economic downturn had affected their jurisdiction’s emergency management program yet. The answer was overwhelmingly “yes”; 69.5% of, or 242 out of 348, respondents indicated that the economic downturn had already had an impact on their emergency management program.

The second question asked respondents to select impacts to their emergency management program from a provided list. The table below lists the potential impacts from which emergency managers chose as well as the breakdown of respondent’s choices. The most frequently selected impact of the economic downturn on local emergency management programs, selected by 77.7% of, or 195 out of 251, respondents was that the local emergency management program budget had been frozen or reduced.

<b>Economic Impacts on Local Emergency Management Programs</b>		
	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>
<b>The budget for emergency management has been frozen or reduced</b>	<b>77.7%</b>	<b>195</b>
<b>Training has been reduced or eliminated</b>	<b>57.8%</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>Salaries for personnel positions have been frozen or reduced</b>	<b>55.8%</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>Suspended or cancelled purchase other equipment.</b>	<b>52.6%</b>	<b>132</b>
Community awareness and outreach activities have been reduced or eliminated	45.4%	114
We have suspended or cancelled our plans to purchase software/technology	41.8%	105
We have suspended or cancelled efforts to maintain or improve our EOC	41.0%	103
Our exercise program has been reduced or eliminated	40.2%	101
We have suspended or cancelled our plans to purchase communications equipment	37.1%	93
Personnel status (e.g., full-time or part-time) has changed	21.5%	54
Other	9.6%	24
Personnel have been let go	9.2%	23
<b>Total</b>		<b>251</b>

Skipped Question 97

The third question asked emergency managers whether they anticipate the economic downturn having an impact on their emergency management program in the next 1-3 years; and, 87.4%, or 304 out of 348, of respondents responded in the affirmative.

Emergency managers were then asked to address the kinds of impacts they anticipated the economic downturn having on their program in the next 1-3 years in a narrative format. Themes that emerged during data analysis include anticipated reductions in emergency management personnel, loss of emergency management programs, decreasing local capability and capacity, and decreasing funding in the midst of an increasing need for and responsibilities related to emergency management.

Anticipate Impact of Economic Downturn?		
	%	#
Yes	87.4%	304
No	8.3%	29
Other	4.3%	15
<b>Total</b>		<b>348</b>

Two of the themes—decreasing local capability and capacity and decreasing funding in the midst of an increasing need for and responsibilities related to emergency management—cut across the type of jurisdiction the emergency manager represented, the size of population the emergency manager represented, and where the emergency manager was geographically located.

The four themes clearly indicate the need for increased funding to support local emergency management programs. Of note, the quotations from emergency manager responses included below in italics represent only a small fraction of the total responses from emergency managers along the four themes.

#### Presentation of Themes

Emergency managers often voiced a concern that their position, or the position(s) of support staff, would be reduced in status (i.e., from full-time to part-time or half-time to quarter-time) or eliminated as a result of the economic turndown.

*Emergency management will cease to exist or be made into a part-time position. There will be no person to assess the situation as it exists, no coordination, no accountability, and information sent to state and federal levels will diminish.*

Emergency managers noted that the elimination of, or reduction in status of, their position would have negative consequences for the field of emergency management as well as their communities. First, it would discourage the development of the professionalization of emergency management.

*Many [emergency managers] I have met across this country are professional, proud and very capable, most, if not all, are nowhere near compensated at levels commensurate with their qualifications. We need to recruit and retain professionals in this business because the welfare of a community could rest in proper planning, coordinated response, and adequate recovery.*

*Disasters are getting worse, more damaging and from what I have been reading and watching, it is not going to get better. We need these experienced people there not only for their own county, [but] for our neighboring counties and our state.*

**A reduction in staff would also decrease preparedness across impacted communities.**

*Staff is the most important resource to emergency management and is how we assist our cities and partners with planning and response and this would have a great affect on our ability to prepare our population for emergencies.*

*Disasters occur at the local level. NIMS depends on interagency coordination, but if there is no coordinated local agency response, the burden will fall on federal agencies or state agencies that do not have knowledge of local communities and local hazards.*

*Emergency managers are the glue that holds local emergency management programs together. They routinely work 60 hours a week because they are committed to providing a more prepared community even if no one wants to fund it...I have seen, first hand, the frustration being experienced by emergency managers who know exactly what needs to be done and don't have the staff to accomplish it. At the same time, Homeland Security is pouring money into the Urban Area Security Initiative groups. As a result, our cities and counties are watching regional plans be developed by a group of consultants and retired first responders with minimal input from professional emergency managers - because we do not have the staff to attend the meetings. The products developed could be so much more effective if the emergency managers were given the money to do their job.*

*Not being able to meet state and federal requirements. Nothing being done as far as exercising and training. Non experienced people with a name or a signature. Large turn over in this position due to demands and no money.*

**Beyond a potential reduction in staff due to the economic downturn, many emergency managers are concerned that their jurisdictions may eliminate the local emergency management program. Local level jurisdictions increasingly operate in an environment of scarce resources and competing local level priorities. Emergency managers fear that their jurisdiction may be forced to sacrifice emergency management so that other departments and agencies can continue providing services to the public.**

*Being a one-person department, as well as some still not understanding the importance of the position, I can see some of my budget being lowered so other departments may continue. Where my position is more of the planning, coordinating type work, emergency management is not in the spotlight so everyone can see the importance of the job.*

**Over the past decade, local communities have increasingly recognized the importance of emergency management in their communities. Indeed, communities of all sizes and all financial situations have increasingly made a financial investment in local emergency management programs. The economic downturn is threatening to erode the progress in building emergency management programs across the United States.**

*It has taken years to convince local politicians in the rural and smaller jurisdictions of the need and importance of establishing viable emergency management program. Many of the smaller jurisdictions have just begun to build these programs and with the budget downturn these programs are now in dire jeopardy of being lost.*

**Regardless of the type of jurisdiction the emergency manager represented, the size of population the emergency manager represented, and where the emergency manager was geographically located, virtually all emergency managers voiced a concern that their jurisdiction will experience a decrease in emergency management capability and capacity as a result of the economic downturn.**

**Emergency managers are not just concerned that their local emergency management programs may not improve—they are worried that they might not be able to maintain their current programs.**

*The impact of the economic downturn means not having the funds available to maintain the current level of service and the growing demand for emergency management programs in our communities...The economic*

*downturn will significantly impair our ability to improve our level of preparedness to meet the complex scenarios we face in today's world.*

*We simply hope to maintain what we have now and the services we provide today.*

*...there will be less budget and staff time available to maintain what we current programs, let alone tackle new programs.*

*The emergency management program will remain stagnant with only the federal and state minimums accomplished. Without additional funding, program development, training, and exercise programs will not be accomplished.*

**Emergency managers anticipate that their jurisdiction will not be able to fulfill core emergency management functions, such as planning, training, and exercising due to funding shortages. Therefore, overall preparedness in their communities will diminish.**

*Mandated budget cuts have reduced the emergency management operational budget by 16%. Federal and state requirements must still be completed, but there is less money for equipment, planning activities, and other required program elements...Operational components have and will continue to be cut, jeopardizing the overall capabilities to successfully respond to and recover from disasters.*

*We will also have to suspend many of our planning activities including COOP, COOG, Mitigation, and preparedness planning. Our exercise schedule will also be reduced.*

**They also expect that because other departments and agencies across their communities are feeling affects from the economic downturn, departments and agencies critical to emergency management will be less able to participate in jurisdictional emergency management activities.**

*Partner agencies are also affected by the downturn and their ability to support emergency management activities decreases. In short, to make up for less participation from our partner agencies we need to take on more capacity just when we are least able to afford it.*

**But, beyond the preparedness of local government departments and agencies and the involvement of nongovernmental organizations and the private sector, emergency managers also expect citizen preparedness to decrease.**

*A cutback in funding could cause a shortfall in preparing our citizens and their families on how to prepare themselves in case of emergencies. Mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery could be severely affected should funding for this program be cut.*

**Decreasing local emergency management capability and capacity are particularly problematic when the need for emergency management and responsibilities related to emergency management are increasing. Emergency managers repeatedly noted this issue in their responses.**

*Emergency management is a field that grows with responsibilities every day. Most of the planning is mandated but not funded. Whether you are a large organization or a one-person shop like mine, you have to know and respond to all of those mandates. You have to do all of the NIMS compliance issues, hazard mitigation planning, maintain a current Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, do annual exercises, train all your staff in mandated training, plan for sheltering, evacuations, COOP/COG, debris management, resource management,*

*transportation management, mass casualties, hazardous material spills, and collaborate and coordinate with community partners at every level of government, NGO's, faith-based [ organizations] and private business[es]...too numerous to list. However, it is not funded as Public Safety (Police and Fire) are...*

*The demand for services has risen sharply in the last few years. Preparedness and mitigation planning need additional funding if they are to survive in the future, local revenue will not be able to fund the demands of the federal, state and local governmental agencies. We must increase funding or reduce programs.*

*The world of EM has changed beyond all expectations. Duties and responsibilities have exploded on a local, regional, state and federal level; and, financial support has been steadily decreasing. It does not take much to see there is something wrong with this picture.*

### **Implications**

**September 11<sup>th</sup> and Hurricane Katrina reminded us that preparedness at the local level is critical to effective and efficient incident response and recovery; and yet, at a time when improving local level emergency management programs is crucial to our nation's security, the economic downturn has caused, and is anticipated to continue causing, local level emergency management to suffer.**

**Approximately, 70% of emergency managers who responded to this survey have already felt the impact of the economic downturn on their programs. The most frequently mentioned affect on their programs is the freezing or reduction of emergency management budgets making it difficult for emergency managers to maintain—let alone improve— their programs. Moreover, nearly 90% of the survey respondents anticipated that the economic downturn would affect their programs in the next 1-3 years. As a result, many emergency managers believe it is likely that there will be a reduction in staff or that their local emergency management program may be eliminated.**

**Regardless of the type of jurisdiction responding, the size of the population in the jurisdiction, or part of the country the jurisdiction was located in, emergency manager responses indicated their concern that budget reductions would result in decreased local capability and capacity at a time where there is an increasing need for and responsibilities related to emergency management. Furthermore, while emergency managers recognize that emergency management is first and foremost a local activity, many emergency managers fear that a decrease in preparedness at the local level will displace responsibility for emergency management to regional, state, and federal levels.**

**Since September 11<sup>th</sup> and Hurricane Katrina, the national emergency management system has made great strides in improving capability and capacity at all levels of government; however, the system-wide progress is now threatened as the economic downturn produces a ripple effect throughout emergency management from which very few jurisdictions appear to be immune. The emergency managers who participated in the survey want to do their job and report their communities' willingness to support their local emergency management programs, but they cannot maintain or grow their programs without help during the economic downturn.**

**To be truly effective local emergency management programs will require the continued cooperation and commitment of state and federal partners. Essential to this ongoing effort will be increased EMPG funding support to the local level.**

Jessica Jensen from the Center for Disaster Studies and Emergency Management at North Dakota State University facilitated the survey design, data collection and analysis, and report writing for IAEM's Government Affairs Committee.

## Appendix

### Jurisdictions Represented

	County/ Parish	City	Village/ Town	State	Other
<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>	75%	21.3%	4.9%	.9%	4.3%

### Population Size

	25%	25%	25%	25%
<b>Population Served</b>	10- 15,069	15,070- 45,000	45,001- 128,937	128,938- 11,000,000

### Emergency Management Program Budget

	25%	25%	25%	25%
<b>2008</b>	\$1,000- 60,000	\$60,857- 125,030	\$130,000- 297,003	\$300,000- 10,731,396
<b>2009</b>	\$1,175- 67,504	\$68,349- \$143,000	\$143,748- 331,000	\$335,880- 11,828,642

### Survey Limitations

The survey represents a broad cross section of agencies across the country and there was a large response to the survey; however, the survey has certain limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results.

- The sample for this survey was not randomized; therefore, the results from this survey are not generalizable to all local emergency managers or all local emergency management programs.
- Moreover, responses from emergency managers from several states are overrepresented in the sample and there were no responses from emergency managers in nine states.
- Emergency managers who completed the survey did not necessarily answer all of the survey questions.

### Survey Responses By State Represented

**Alabama (20)**  
Alaska (1)  
Arizona (1)  
**California (28)**  
**Colorado (23)**  
Connecticut (2)  
Florida (20)  
Georgia (16)  
Idaho (1)  
Illinois (5)  
Iowa (3)  
**Kansas (25)**  
Kentucky (5)  
Louisiana (3)  
Maine (4)  
Maryland (6)  
Massachusetts (7)  
Michigan (1)  
**Minnesota (27)**  
Mississippi (2)  
Missouri (2)  
Montana (7)  
**Nebraska (16)**  
Nevada (1)  
New Hampshire (2)  
New Jersey (3)  
New Mexico (6)  
New York (2)  
**North Carolina (17)**  
Ohio (2)  
Oregon (14)  
Pennsylvania (11)  
Rhode Island (2)  
South Carolina (7)  
Tennessee (2)  
Texas (14)  
Utah (2)  
Virginia (20)  
Washington (13)  
West Virginia (1)  
Wisconsin (8)