

DomPrep Journal

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- Moving on From 2020 – A Future for Emergency Management
- Building a Holistic Homeland Security Enterprise System
- Viewing the U.S. Election Process as an Essential Mission
- Ghosts of Viruses Past



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Publisher's Message: Costs vs. Benefits



Over the past 20 plus years, I have been perplexed and bewildered why leaders both in government and industry have not taken preparedness seriously. A while ago, it was explained to me. It all comes down to cost-benefit analysis. Leaders love to present bright, shiny new things to their constituents, shareholders, customers, media, and so on. Let's face it, preparedness is boring! For example, weatherizing power plants in warm environments is not economical nor exciting. Or is it? By kicking the can, leaders hope that unpleasant, yet predictable once-in-a-hundred-years events do not happen on their watch. Cost-benefit analysis matters a lot when those unforeseen events happen. And these types of events have been occurring more and more frequently lately with great cost through loss of life, sociological-psychological impact, and loss of revenue.

This month's issue of the *DomPrep Journal* highlights the evolutionary process of disaster preparedness. Remember back to when tabletop exercises and grants were abundant. Preparedness professionals broke out into small groups to discuss *what if* scenarios. The ideas were plentiful, and the interagency, multijurisdictional plans could almost seamlessly address whatever low-frequency high-consequence event should arise.

However, as those *what if* scenarios turned into real *what now* scenarios, the expectations no longer fit the plan. Knowing that a disaster is coming at some point in the future is not the same as being prepared for the events that will unfold. Although pandemic preparedness has been long discussed, the reality of resource shortages, workforce attrition, funding gaps, etc. make some plans nearly impossible to implement. Therefore, lessons not only need to be learned and shared, but they also need to be adaptable to future crises with numerous variables.

Adaptability includes building a more robust [homeland security enterprise](#) and enhancing [emergency management](#) capabilities to prioritize risk reduction and consequence management. [Essential missions](#) may also change as new threats emerge. For example, in 2020, the pandemic and the election cycle both went through the typical phases of the disaster cycle (preparedness/protection/prevention, response, recovery, and mitigation), so both warrant all-hazards planning to ensure community resilience.

So much has changed in the past decade, but some things are worth revisiting. In 2010, DomPrep asked readers to provide their thoughts on pandemic preparedness without having the personal experience of a pandemic on the scale and scope of the one that emerged just 10 years later. With the knowledge and experience acquired over the past year, how have perceptions change and plans evolved? Do the cost-benefit analyses still provide the same results? Please let us know [how your pandemic preparedness and response plans are evolving](#).

Martin (Marty) Masiuk, publisher@domprep.com

Moving on From 2020 – A Future for Emergency Management

By Kyle Overly

The events that unfolded over the course of 2020 and 2021 challenged emergency managers in ways only previously imagined. In the midst of a global pandemic, emergency managers worked through the complexities of a global response while delivering core administrative functions and coordinating the response to countless other threats and hazards. This response tested emergency management capabilities and challenged long-held assumptions about mutual aid systems.



The COVID-19 response, which continues well into 2021, brought with it several key implications and a pathway toward the next generation of emergency management. What is abundantly clear is that the old emergency management system cannot meet the changing needs of today's society.

The Emergency Management Response to COVID-19

For over a year, emergency management professionals supported the ongoing COVID-19 response. Providing essential coordination and support services, agencies repeatedly rose to the occasion and addressed the acute challenges facing their communities. From building hospital surge capacity, testing capability, providing public information, liaising with the private sector, distributing food, to purchasing personal protective equipment (PPE), emergency managers provided the essential framework to facilitate jurisdictional response to COVID-19.

The demands of the pandemic tested the limits of emergency management staff capability. Not only did COVID-19 stretch resources thin but also 2020 and 2021 brought with it an onslaught of additional emergencies and disasters. An overactive hurricane season, major wildfires, flooding, earthquakes, severe weather, civil unrest, political strife, a failed insurrection, and presidential inauguration were just some of the additional disasters that emergency managers faced since the start of the pandemic. All told, the [National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration](#) reported 22 billion-dollar disasters in 2020 alone. The last 12 months have tested, and in some cases, broken the nationwide emergency management system.

For the first time in history, [all 56 states, territories, commonwealths, and the District of Columbia](#) were simultaneously under a state of emergency. Unlike most regional disasters where resources come from un-impacted areas through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), mutual aid through this mechanism was largely unavailable. The supply chain was nonexistent, forcing communities into bidding wars to acquire severely limited commodities critical to the response. Furthermore, emergency operations centers (EOCs) remained activated and staffed for months on end, far beyond the capability of countless agencies with small staffs. As emergency management agencies move beyond 2020 and the first half of 2021, they must embrace transformative change to build a more robust system going forward.

Beyond 2020 – Implications for Emergency Management

Even as the response to the pandemic ends later in 2021 and communities return to some semblance of normalcy, this response has fundamentally changed the nature of emergency management. Moving forward, agencies will need to build systems equipped to meet the changing demographics of communities and changing climate that promises to bring with it more extreme hazards. Four key actions that emergency managers must adopt to their new reality include: breaking the cycle of disaster, building organic consequence management capacity, building the emergency management profession, and building equity in administration and program delivery.

Breaking the Cycle of Disaster – Although emergency management agencies have traditionally focused extensively on response and recovery efforts, agencies are beginning to recognize that they cannot simply respond their way out of disaster vulnerability. The response to COVID, coupled with historic disaster losses in 2020, illustrates the need for agencies to prioritize disaster risk reduction to break the cycle of disaster. Twenty years past the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 and five years since the United Nations codified the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the United States continues to struggle to make progress in stopping disasters through transformative hazard mitigation. The 2018 Disaster Recovery Reform Act and subsequent Building Resilient Infrastructure Communities grant program from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offer some promise by drastically increasing funding for mitigation. Still, however, emergency managers fail to prioritize risk reduction and mitigation. The outcome of 2020 needs to be a moonshot of innovation in mitigation funding to strengthen communities before it is too late.

Building Organic Consequence Management Capacity – The response to COVID also illustrated the fragility of the emergency management system. While many plans were built on the assumption that mutual aid would be readily available from neighboring counties or states, COVID showed the impacts of a true nationwide incident on response actions. Not only did emergency management organizations struggle to find trained staff to sustain EOC operations for months on end, the resources needed to respond to the incident were also in severe short supply. Going forward emergency managers must reach deeper horizontally across stakeholder groups to identify staff with the skills needed for EOC operations. This includes thinking creatively about which agencies have staff with the unique skills needed for a massive community-wide response and entering into agreements. Although some positions have transferable skills, specialty positions, such as logisticians and leadership positions in EOCs will still be an in-house responsibility. However,



Maryland Emergency Management Agency (2020).

organizations can focus on building this capacity and expand outward. In addition to personnel, organizations need solid tools to facilitate response. This includes leveraging data, predictive analytics, and artificial intelligence systems to aid decision makers. Emergency managers also need strong resource and information management systems that can accurately track and report on incident status. The complexity of modern disasters requires a commitment to building core support technological systems to aid in response.

Building the Emergency Management Profession – If there is any positive aspect from the 2020-2021 response, it is that emergency management agencies have elevated their profile significantly. In most cases, they have provided the backbone for community response to COVID-19, filling gaps where other agencies were not capable. This is the chance for emergency management agencies to demonstrate, or reinforce, their indispensability to community response to all threats/hazards, including those not typically traditional emergency management issues such as disaster risk reduction, the opioid crisis, and homelessness (all examples of emergency management coordinated issues). Emergency managers must also continue to build the profession. This is accomplished through prioritization of education and professional development, maturation of professional associations, and finding transformative staff to build the profession. This also includes building organizations that are diverse in terms of cultural background, skills sets, and experience.

Building Equity in Administration and Program Delivery – Finally, emergency managers must build equity into organizations and program delivery. The events of 2020 highlighted the inequity of disasters and society more broadly. It is no longer acceptable to “strive” toward equity, rather, the time is now to fully embrace equity in organizations and in the ways that emergency managers deliver services. Initiative such as the [Institute of Diversity in Emergency Management](#) are working to bring these issues to the forefront. However, it is the responsibility of all emergency managers to fully embrace equity across agencies and services.

Conclusion

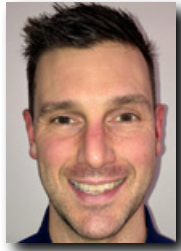
While 2020-2021 has unquestionably been the most challenging period for emergency managers, it also presents an opportunity to emerge as a much stronger profession. Although the response to COVID-19 is still ongoing at the time of this article’s publication, the pathway forward for emergency managers is clear. Going forward emergency managers must: (1) prioritize disaster risk reduction, (2) build organic consequence management capacity, (3) build the emergency management profession, and (4) build equity into programs and services.

Kyle R. Overly, MS, CEM, is an accomplished emergency management practitioner and educator who is the Director of Disaster Risk Reduction with the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA). He is a member of MEMA’s senior leadership team and provides executive-level oversight to the agency’s Disaster Risk Reduction Directorate. With over 10 years of experience, he has responded to major disasters including Hurricane Irene, Hurricane Sandy, the Baltimore City Civil Unrest, Ellicott City Flash Flooding (2016 & 2018), and the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. He is also an educator, with over 10 years of teaching experience, primarily at the University of Maryland Global Campus. He is a graduate of Oklahoma State University’s Fire & Emergency Management Masters Program and is a Doctor of Public Administration student at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. He is also a graduate of the National Emergency Management Executive Academy and is currently completing the Center for Homeland Defense & Security Executive Leaders Program.

Building a Holistic Homeland Security Enterprise System

By Daniel Rector

In the United States, a diverse group of agencies and organizations work together to accomplish the homeland security mission. Many of these organizations fall within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Organizations that are not directly a part of DHS act as partners and provide support in various ways. One of the most vital and most capable partners in the homeland security mission is the Department of Defense (DOD). The current organizational makeup of DHS is disorganized and confusing. As is, it prevents efficient support from its partners. The government should create a new, robust homeland security enterprise to solve these issues. By creating an updated homeland security enterprise and leaning on the DOD's support, the nation will increase its security and protect its citizens.



Within the United States, homeland security is the primary responsibility of DHS. According to the Department of Homeland Security in a [2010 report](#), “Homeland security describes the intersection of evolving threats and hazards with traditional governmental and civic responsibilities.” In its [2014 Quadrennial Homeland Security Review](#), DHS places its missions into five categories:

- Prevent terrorism and enhance security
- Secure and manage borders
- Enforce and administer immigration laws
- Safeguard and secure cyberspace
- Strengthen national preparedness and resilience

Currently, the organization of DHS and its partners appears haphazard and ill-conceived. The organizational structure is a deterrent to effective operations. [DHS's leadership](#) comprises a slew of deputy secretaries, undersecretaries, directors, administrators, commissioners, and a commandant. These leaders are responsible for their department or agencies' effective operation and report to the Secretary of Homeland Security. The [DHS organizational chart](#) shows 23 agencies and departments directly reporting to the deputy secretary's office. DHS's organizational structure is beyond the recommended [span of control](#) of 3-6 subordinates, which has been utilized for years within many government and military organizations. Agencies within DHS should be grouped according to their functions, allowing them to be managed more effectively. These functions are: (a) intelligence, planning, and coordination; (b) border security; (c) immigration; (d) response and prevention; and (e) international affairs. Ideally, a “chief” would lead each division. The chief could operate in a role similar to that of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. By working together, the divisions will accomplish the five DHS missions mentioned above.

Example of a Holistic Homeland Security Enterprise

DHS Chief of Intelligence, Planning, and Coordination

- Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans
- Science and Technology Directorate
- Office of Intelligence and Analysis

Partner agencies associated with Intelligence, Planning, and Coordination

- Office of the Director of National Intelligence

DHS Chief of Border Security

- U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)
- Transportation Security Administration (TSA)

DHS Chief of Response & Prevention

- U.S. Secret Service
- Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Directorate
- The United States Coast Guard (USCG)
- Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)
- Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Partner agencies associated with Response & Prevention

- Department of Justice (FBI & DEA)

DHS Chief of Immigration

- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)
- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

DHS Chief of International Affairs

- Office of Partnership and Engagement

Partner agencies associated with International Affairs

- Department of State

Additional Partner Agencies

- Local, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement
- Local, state, tribal, and federal governments
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- The National Guard
- Department of Defense (DOD)
- The Council of Governors
- The Department of Energy

The department relies on a broad network of support organizations and partners to accomplish its mission. Beyond the agencies and departments that fall within DHS's organizational structure, numerous others work to ensure the United States is secure. If properly grouped and structured, these organizations, agencies, and partners could form a holistic homeland security enterprise. In the [Joint Publication 3-27 Homeland Defense](#), the office of The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff describes this type of configuration as an "active, layered defense – a global defense that aims to deter and defeat aggression abroad." They go on to describe the relationship as "a defense-in-depth that relies on collection, analysis, and sharing of information and intelligence."

Partner agencies will work with the office, whose area align with their specialties. These partners should have liaisons who work as permanent members of the chief's staff. Partners may assign multiple liaisons to multiple offices if their area of expertise falls within the scope of more than one office. To improve communication and information sharing nationally, each state emergency operations center should include a federal DHS liaison. This liaison can communicate requests to the DHS headquarters in Washington, D.C., and facilitate coordination among the department. This structure would increase the effectiveness and cohesiveness of the disparate parts of the current homeland security configuration.

The Department of Defense is a unique partner with an enormous amount of personnel and equipment to support homeland security functions.

Department of Defense

Within the homeland security enterprise, the Department of Defense is a unique partner. The organization has an enormous amount of personnel and equipment it can use to support homeland security functions. However, DOD's ability to operate within the United States borders is limited slightly by the [Posse Comitatus Act](#) (PCA). The PCA prevents the military from being used by law enforcement agencies to conduct certain law enforcement activities. The PCA states, "Whoever, except in cases and under circumstances expressly authorized by the Constitution or Act of Congress, willfully uses any part of the Army or Air Force as a posse comitatus or otherwise to execute the laws shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than two years, or both." Posse comitatus is a group of non-law enforcement personnel, formed under the authority of a law enforcement official, typically a sheriff or U.S. Marshal, to defend the laws and restore order. While the PCA prohibits the department of defense from being used in this capacity, it has other robust abilities to assist with homeland security.

DOD can assist with homeland security through defense support of civil authorities (DSCA) operations. DSCA operations allow DOD to support local authorities in responding to domestic emergencies, cyber incidents, and law enforcement support. DSCA includes all activities involved in preparing, preventing, protecting, responding, and recovering from these events.

- DOD can provide homeland security support and assistance in several ways:
- Cyber assistance is provided through the U.S. Cyber Command and its partnership with other DHS and government agencies.
- The Special Operations Command provides support for domestic counterterrorism activities.
- The Transportation Command can advise on mobility needs for both goods and personnel.
- DOD assets can be utilized for imagery, to include reconnaissance of incident sites, to provide assessment and situational awareness.
- DOD can also support critical infrastructure protection. Critical infrastructure consists of the power grid, water supply, and cyber networks.
- DOD provides robust support to counter weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosive (CBRNE), threats through its extensive CBRNE enterprise. The CBRNE enterprise includes National Guard Civil Support Teams, Homeland Response Forces, and CBRN Enhanced Response Force Packages.

DOD can share intelligence with DHS as long as there is no collection of information on U.S. persons. Also, the subject of intelligence must be linked to defense or counter-insurgency activities. All these capabilities make the DOD a valuable partner to DHS in the homeland security mission.

Homeland Defense vs. Homeland Security

According to the office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in [2018](#), homeland defense is the “protection of US sovereignty, territory, domestic population, and critical infrastructure against external threats.” It is accomplished by “detecting, deterring, preventing, and defeating threats from actors of concern as far forward from the homeland as possible.” In the same Joint Publication 3-27, Homeland Defense, the office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff goes on to list the objectives of homeland defense as:

(1) Dissuade threats from undertaking programs or conducting actions that could pose a threat to the US homeland. (2) Ensure defense of the homeland and deny a threat’s access to the nation’s sovereign airspace, territory, and territorial seas. (3) Ensure access to cyberspace and information (including information systems and security). (4) Protect the domestic population and critical infrastructure. (5) Deter aggression and coercion by conducting global operations. (6) Decisively defeat any attack if deterrence fails. (7) Recover the military force to restore readiness and capabilities after any attack or incident.

Joint Publication 3-27 describes homeland defense and defense support of civil authorities as additional blocks on top of the foundation built by homeland security. Suppose a threat or incident evolves beyond the scope of homeland security into homeland defense missions.

The relationship between DOD and DHS occurs in both land and maritime operations. While the Coast Guard is the lead federal agency for maritime homeland security, DOD is

the lead agency for maritime homeland defense. DOD supports USCG operations in homeland security and defeats threats beyond the Coast Guard's capabilities in [homeland defense missions](#). In that case, DOD can take over the leadership role as it is the lead federal agency for homeland defense operations. This contrasts with homeland security missions, where the DHS is the lead federal agency, and DOD is a supporting



partner. DOD operates in these two areas to counter threats beyond the capabilities of the homeland security enterprise or threats from other nations. It is important to note that homeland defense activities do not fall under the PCA constraints.

Partnerships & Capabilities

The U.S. government and its many support agencies offer diverse and robust capabilities to defend its homeland. Many of these are federal government organizations, but many of them operate outside the federal government's constraints. Within the country's borders, the Department of Homeland Security works daily to protect citizens from actors who desire to cause them harm. Currently, the organization of the Department of Homeland Security is not ideal. It is a mismatch of agencies, offices, and departments. Ideally, the government would merge these into a more streamlined homeland security enterprise.

Beyond DHS, several partners work to support the homeland security mission. The Department of Defense is one of these partners and is a crucial organization in the homeland security process. It works as a supporting partner of the DHS in many functions. However, when a threat extends beyond the scope of DHS, DOD is prepared to move from its support role in homeland security to a leadership position in homeland defense. Without the DOD, homeland security would not function as it does within the United States, the borders would be less secure, and the threat of terrorism would be increased.

Daniel Rector is a military service member with 11+ years of experience in homeland security and emergency management operations. He served as a damage controlman in the U.S. Coast Guard and as a survey team chief on a National Guard Weapons of Mass Destruction – Civil Support Team. His career is supported by a Master of Science degree in Emergency Management and current coursework toward a Doctorate of Management with a Homeland Security focus. He has completed multiple courses in CBRN response and detection from the Defense Nuclear Weapons School, Idaho National Laboratory, Dugway Proving Grounds, the U.S. Army CBRN School, and the U.S. Army CCDC Chemical Biological Center, among others. He has completed the FEMA Professional Development Series and the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) Course. He is a licensed HAZMAT technician, Confined Space Rescue Technician I/II, and EMT-B. He is a recipient of multiple awards for excellence, including being the only National Guard soldier ever named the Distinguished Honor Graduate while simultaneously being nominated by his peers for the Leadership Award at the CBRN Advanced Leaders Course.

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Viewing the U.S. Election Process as an Essential Mission

By Michael Prasad

As a critical element of democracy, elections need to be a part of the all-hazards planning, organization, equipment, training, and exercising benefiting from the nation's emergency management agencies and departments at all levels of government. Election security, capability, and integrity, as well as the ability for citizens to exercise their constitutional rights through democratic processes are essential to the sustained republic.



As with every threat and hazard that comes to fruition, disasters wait for no one. They do not distinguish between one political party or another, nor do they meet any specific timeline or deadline. The application of emergency management protocols, doctrine, and standards to the “before, during, and after” for elections (the disaster cycle phases of preparedness/protection/prevention, response, recovery, and mitigation activities familiar to all emergency managers) should be applied nationally –

for all local, state, and federal primary and general elections.

Emergency Management Needs for Elections & Disasters

During any other disaster (weather event, cybersecurity attack, or even a national pandemic), running an election, verifying and announcing results, and conducting a successful inauguration can be major tasks for government. The consequence management challenges will grow exponentially. Much like a pandemic, the disaster cycle phases for an election run concurrently (not sequentially) across multiple jurisdictions. Government needs to prepare to inaugurate a newly elected/re-elected candidate while potentially dealing with judicial challenges to the election results and also run-off elections – all at the same time. For emergency managers, this concept is no different from a complex coordinated attack or dueling natural/technological/human-caused disasters in the same geographic footprint. It is effectively standard consequence management planning. The 2020 U.S. national elections cycle experienced all of this. The [State of Georgia](#) suffered through civil unrest (both election and non-election related), election lawsuits, and a run-off election for both U.S. Senate seats – all while dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The National Association of Secretaries of State ([NASS](#)) recognized this concern after Superstorm Sandy impacted at least 15 states and the District of Columbia right before the presidential election of 2012. The NASS recognized the interagency cooperation and coordination needed before, during, and after elections should include the state emergency management department. Their focus was on alternate locations for polling places impacted by a disaster, alternate methods to power voting machines, and communication enhancements

between local, county, and state election officials when the traditional communication channels fail during disasters.

These are all standard continuity of operations actions associated with the tactical missions for [threats and hazards](#). When applied to the states' election operations agency/division/department, these actions can produce collaboration, coordination, cooperation, and communication across multiple departments, not just emergency management. There are two aspects here:

Connecting the essential activities of the election process to emergency management (and elevating and aligning them to other federal-level emergency management essential activities); and

Aligning governmental agencies involved in the election process to and through emergency management interagency partnerships.

Many U.S. states now apply the cross-functional and interdependent [core capabilities](#) (such as operational coordination, planning, and public information and warning) of emergency management principles. In the response mission area, for instance, monitoring events and

possible incidents on election day could include the [possible options](#) of relocating the polling places and possibly delaying or rescheduling the election.

The federal government and states should consider applying current interagency cooperation capabilities and protocols to their emergency operations plans for elections.

For example, New Jersey activates its State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) on election days, including primaries. Part of the reason for this direct connection between election

officials and emergency management is that the New Jersey State Police, a Division of the Attorney General's Office, is also the state's lead agency for emergency management. New Jersey and Michigan are the only two states that have this construct. The Attorney General's Office has deputies assigned across all of the counties during elections to act on possible voter fraud, electioneering violations, and voter intimidation. In 2018, New Jersey's governor also made an [executive order](#) to protect New Jersey's elections infrastructure from cybersecurity attacks, through its New Jersey Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Cell of the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness.

Functions, Core Capabilities & Community Lifelines

During an election, the state-level coordination of these entities occurs at the SEOC, where all of the tools and situational awareness capabilities of the state's emergency management partnerships are available. There is already interagency cooperation capability and protocols to support the election process via emergency management, at the state level, even if not formalized through the state's emergency operations plan.



Elections as a Function. One option is to consider elections as a mission essential function, an emergency support function, and/or a recovery support function. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security maintains a list of validated Primary Mission Essential Functions (PMEFs) by Department, which is validated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) national community coordinator. That list is already very wide in scope, including: maintaining the electrical grid, keeping the social security administration functioning, instilling confidence in the nation's banking system, and imposing trade sanctions. There is currently no mention of elections or voting in the PMEfs. Changes to the PMEfs may require federal legislative changes to the [Stafford Act](#).

Elections as a Core Capability. Elections have been a national security concern as foreign governments have been identified as interfering with the election process. The alignment of the five mission areas from the National Preparedness Goal can certainly apply to elections. There are actions to take in prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery to support free and fair elections, especially during concurrent disasters. Since the current list of 32 core capabilities are more aligned with activities (such as public information and warning, cybersecurity, critical transportation, as well as on-scene security, protection, and law enforcement), adding elections as a core capability does not seem applicable. The actions

before, during, and after an election (and subsequent inauguration) are not the election itself – the election is the successful result of applied core capabilities during the mission areas.

Elections as a Community Lifeline. In 2018, FEMA created a new construct – the [Community Lifelines](#) – which it uses to measure the continuous operation of critical government and business functions and “is essential to human health and safety or economic security.” FEMA prioritizes the rapid stabilization of Community Lifelines after a disaster, and those currently include: safety and security; food, water, and shelter; health and medical; energy; communications; transportation; and hazardous material. When elections are viewed through the lens of a Community Lifeline, additional stakeholders and partners can be added to the overall whole-community approach to all of the lifelines. Whether elections are considered to be a Community Lifeline on their own or as part of a more general community support elements lifeline – which could include social, educational, and childcare services – all are remiss in the current construct.

More Than Just Federal Funding – Federal Emergency Management

Congress has reacted in the past to funding needs associated with elections and disasters. For example, reimbursement for damaged voting equipment and costs of rescheduling primaries in New York City [during 9/11](#) and the [CARES Act in 2020 for COVID-19](#) provided some funding for securing ballot collection boxes, cleaning and sanitizing, and other election polling place security and logistics. It is important to note that, without Stafford Act elements, these funding mechanisms are not guaranteed to be there for every disaster, nor are they managed through an effective emergency management construct across the disaster cycle phases. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina [devastated New Orleans](#), which caused not only a massive exodus of registered voters but also damage to polling places and voting machines. FEMA did not reimburse those costs or share disaster applicant information with local governmental officials in order to provide election-related consequence management (such as alternate voting via mail-in ballots and alternate polling places – even for those out-of-state).

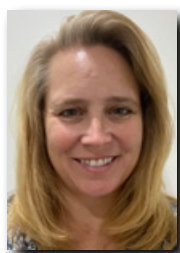
Further debate and discussion are needed and should be encouraged as part of the inevitable larger scale after-action review and improvement planning that will be conducted (another emergency management construct) by politicians and others in government after both the COVID-19 pandemic wains and the 2020 election cycle has ended. Perhaps then forward movement can be made on the concept of applying emergency management policies and protocols to the national election process.

Michael Prasad is a Certified Emergency Manager and is the principal researcher for Barton Dunant Emergency Management Consulting (www.bartondunant.com). He was formerly the assistant director for the Office of Emergency Management at the New Jersey State Department of Children and Families and the director of disaster support functions at the American Red Cross – New Jersey Region. He holds a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from Ohio University and is a Master of Arts candidate in Emergency and Disaster Management from American Public University. Views expressed do not necessarily represent the official position of any of these organizations.

Ghosts of Viruses Past

By Catherine L. Feinman

A decade before COVID-19 emerged as a pandemic, emergency preparedness, response, and resilience professionals were focused on infectious diseases. The H1N1 (swine flu), H5N1 (avian flu), and SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreaks were real, and lessons needed to be learned in preparation for something bigger. So, in April 2010, DomPrep polled the experts (i.e., DomPrep advisors and readers) to gather their thoughts on pandemic preparedness and response. A decade later, their responses are haunting.



The respondents' answers to seven simple questions in 2010 revealed the strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in [Pandemic Preparedness & Response](#). Resources, roles and responsibilities, and messaging were identified as preparedness gaps. These same gaps proved to be ongoing challenges ten years later as COVID-19 swiftly traveled around the world.

Resources

In modern times, the 2009 H1N1 pandemic could be considered a practice run for the COVID-19 response. However, even the processes that worked well in 2009-2010 were not handled as well in 2020. For example, [designed to supplement](#) local and state resources, the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) was able to pre-position personal protective equipment (PPE) like masks, gloves, and gowns before H1N1 infection rates accelerated. After H1N1, though, funding and congressional action were not sufficient to replenish those supplies and meet the needs that would arise in 2020. According to [Greg Burel](#), former director of the SNS, in March 2020,

Although funding provided for the current response is important, the nation would have been in a better posture had the funding provided for pandemic influenza response been continued as part of SNS appropriations so the investment made would have been sustained.

Respondents to the 2010 survey were almost evenly divided as to whether the SNS resources should include all pandemic response needs or only the items that are not easily accessible through commercial supply chains. In light of the nationwide PPE shortages, agencies discovered that even the commercial supply chains were not prepared to handle the surge as demand rapidly increased. In April 2020, a personal call to one local Maryland supplier revealed that, even companies that had large supplies of PPE on hand would only distribute them to preexisting customers.

In 2010, experts mostly agreed that local and state governments did not have sufficient resources for all the tasks required for an emerging infectious disease. Despite that assessment, the emergence of COVID-19 seemed to catch many of these agencies underprepared and under-resourced.

Roles & Responsibilities

There is no doubt that all levels of government hold some responsibility for pandemic planning and response. However, in 2010, the survey found that almost half of the experts

leaned toward the federal government as having primary responsibility for such efforts, with state and local governments sharing the rest of the burden. During the COVID-19 response, the main responsibility to develop and implement response plans was put on states and counties. However, funding still remained a critical role of the federal government, upon which state and local agencies depended. A May 2020 article published in the [National League of Cities](#) pointed out a cascading effect that may hinder a bottom-up approach for disasters when they cross state borders:

With states likely to cut aid to local governments to help alleviate their own budget pressures, federal support for cities, towns and villages is more critical than ever.

Without adequate funding or guaranteed funding streams, it is challenging to develop realistic plans and implementable actions. Under non-pandemic conditions, local governments lack the funds needed to manage many disasters that occur on a much smaller scale. However, when states are facing the same disaster and seeking federal financial assistance to supplement their resources, the downstream funding becomes even more difficult to secure.

With regard to funding, about three-quarters of the 2010 respondents believed that the federal government should broaden its public health funding to cover all-hazards rather than specific threats like pandemic influenza. Over the past decade, many agencies have adopted an all-hazards approach to disaster preparedness and response. With the scale and scope of COVID-19, though, the question now is whether that transition has helped or hindered the pandemic response.

Messaging

Perhaps one of the most interesting questions from the 2010 survey was whether “the federal government [should] provide more standardized prescriptive guidance to states for their pandemic planning and response.” About two-thirds of respondents said “yes.” Unfortunately, standardized guidance from the federal government was either lacking or confusing in 2020. Federal guidance did not provide definitive statistics and facts required to make informed decisions regarding mask usage, social distancing, reopening schedules, travel restrictions, vaccine distribution, etc.

Without standardized guidance at the federal level, public health agencies across the country implemented their own guidance. As a result, data collection and reporting varied, making it difficult to compare and analyze statistics from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Compounding the messaging concerns, some leaders cherry-picked or altered these findings to enhance their successes and downplay their failures. Subsequently, leadership credibility was often questioned and community buy-in suffered. This has left community stakeholders severely divided on PPE use and other safe practices during a pandemic.

Vaccine use and distribution have also received mixed reactions. The efficacy and safety of the various vaccinations have been questioned due to mixed messaging. In 2010, most of the respondents believed that the successes and lessons learned from the H1N1 vaccination campaign would have a long-term impact on future vaccination efforts. Unfortunately, the vaccine rollout for COVID-19 has had many reported challenges. The [timeline](#) and messaging for H1N1 demonstrates the stark difference between past and current federal messaging

efforts. The first H1N1 influenza case was detected in the United States on 15 April 2009. After interagency coordination efforts to develop a vaccine, on 10 September, “HHS secretary and CDC Director joined the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) in a news conference to stress the importance of getting vaccinated for the upcoming influenza season.” Similar joint messaging efforts during COVID-19 have been lacking.

Lessons to Be Learned – Past, Present & Future

The [1918 flu pandemic](#) infected an estimated 500 million and led to about 50 million deaths, of which 675,000 were in the United States. The [World Health Organization](#), currently reports COVID-19 statistics at more than 110 million confirmed cases and almost 2.5 million deaths, of which more than half million have been in the United States. With modern medicine and communications, hopefully COVID-19 will not meet or exceed the fatalities reached in 1918-1919. However, the instantaneous ability to share information around the world is still a wild card. False information that could lead to increased infections and death is just as easy to spread as life-saving information.

False information, poor messaging, and lack of buy-in are factors that will be studied for years to come as researchers examine how the United States jumped from less than 1.5% of the total deaths reported for the 1918 flu to 20% of the total deaths reported for COVID-19. Many important issues will be identified for improvement, including those identified during the H1N1 pandemic in 2009 (albeit, probably not in the same order of importance): clarity of responses, communities, competing direction from federal partners, common terminology/ data elements.

Action Items

As the pandemic has demonstrated, a public health emergency is not solely a public health problem. A multi-discipline, multi-jurisdictional effort is needed to overcome the numerous challenges that communities face. It is not good enough to create lessons learned and best practices if no subsequent actions are taken. Here are just a few ways DomPrep readers can take action to help communities respond better in the future:

- Revisit the [National Planning Scenarios](#) – in particular, Scenario 3: Biological Disease Outbreak – Pandemic Influenza
- Share lessons learned and best practices – both the good and the bad
- Examine and implement lessons learned and best practices from other agencies and jurisdictions
- Participate in local, regional, and national level exercises
- Take the [Pandemic Planning 2021](#) survey

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