

The Ohio State University
Disaster Research Center

MISCELLANEOUS REPORT #1

ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN
DISASTER IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

DRC STAFF REPORT

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I. Introduction

In the United States, responsibility for activity in disaster rests primarily with State and local governments. However, when State and local resources are "clearly insufficient" to cope with the effects of a disaster, Federal assistance may be procured. In this short memorandum we will first present typical local organizations involved in disasters. This will be followed by a brief presentation of State and Federal agencies either directly or indirectly involved.

II. Local Organizations Which Become Involved in Disasters:

- A. Police - Police have responsibility to protect the life and property of the community. When disaster strikes they are inevitably involved. Some typical post-disaster functions performed by police are: traffic control, ambulance service, security of abandoned property in the disaster area, official clearance of entering rescue and relief agencies and persons, communications via mobile radio cruisers, evacuation of threatened areas, emergency first aid. (Many policemen are trained in emergency first aid.)

In nearly every American community police are available on a 24 hour basis. They are usually one of the first organizations to respond to emergencies. City and county police are full-time civil employees. In many small towns police are hired on a part-time basis.

- B. Fire Departments - Firemen are on 24 hour alert in all cities. Most small towns have volunteer firemen on a standby basis, who leave their normal employment to assist in fire-fighting. Fire departments are also among the first organizations that respond to disasters. Some typical services performed are: fire-fighting, first aid, rescue and removal of victims, ambulance service, and communications.

room entrances where hospital personnel take charge. Because of the medical skills, equipment and supplies available at hospitals they become focal points for disaster victim distribution. Their functions include: emergency care and treatment, providing medical teams for specialized needs, providing medical supplies for emergency first aid stations at the impact area, long-term treatment and physical rehabilitation.

G. Red Cross - At the local level, the American Red Cross is organized in chapters covering a city or county or both. Local chapters in urban areas usually have a small group of full-time employees and a series of committees staffed by volunteers. The Red Cross attempts to recruit volunteers having skills and organizational connections which could be of value in emergencies. For example, the communications committee chairman may be a telephone company official or lineman; the food committee chairman a bakery or restaurant official. In time of disaster the Red Cross mobilizes very quickly. Its services include: canteen trucks with supplies of hot coffee and rolls or sandwiches for disaster rescue workers, establishing and staffing mass shelters in event evacuation is ordered, compiling master lists of injured and dead, establishing information centers where concerned individuals may learn where friends or relatives are, providing volunteer medical teams with doctors and nurses for emergency service at the impact area, organizing volunteer blood donations for victims, mass feeding of homeless where needed, assistance to needy individuals (food, clothing, shelter, medical care, etc.) The Red Cross makes no charge for its services.

H. Salvation Army - The Salvation Army is a multi service national and international organization which in some ways, provides disaster relief services

similar to the Red Cross. Like the Red Cross it is entirely supported by voluntary contributions. Every Salvation Army institution maintains supplies for immediate use. Their mobile canteens are so designed that they can be loaded and dispatched quickly.

The services of Salvation Army include: individual aid such as meals, lodging, and clothing; canteen service for rescue personnel and victims; procurement of volunteers and privately owned cars and trucks; assistance in clean-up operations; information and communication with friends and relatives.

- I. Other organizations at the local level which typically become involved when disaster strikes are medical and paramedical professional organizations, religious and charitable groups other than Red Cross and Salvation Army, businesses, supply houses and industries which have equipment and supplies on hand (e. g. bull dozers, cranes, taxi companies, pharmaceutical supply houses, food warehouses, etc.)

III. State Disaster Relief

In disaster the most immediate and effective assistance is mobilized in the disaster area and from nearby urban entities. However in large-scale disasters, State assistance may also become available.

- A. Some organizations at the State level which are most frequently involved are:
 1. State Highway Patrol - Highway traffic control and policing is their main responsibility. In disasters they assist local police in rescue, security patrol, traffic control, etc.
 2. National Guard - The National Guard is a State military force used primarily for state emergencies. It can be Federalized by the President

under certain emergency conditions. National Guardsmen are not on active duty but follow civilian pursuits. They engage in regular training exercises. Barracks training centers, supply depots with vehicles and equipment are maintained. In a disaster, at the request of the State Governor and under command of the State Adjutant General, the National Guard may be activated. Units are usually assigned wherever additional manpower and equipment is needed. They perform such duties as fire-fighting, maintenance of law and order, assistance in rescue and clean up.

3. Such governmental agencies as the State Civil Defense, Park and Forestry Division or Division of Natural Resources, State Fire Marshal, State Department of Highways, etc. Depending upon the nature and scope of the disaster, the Governor or his designated official may call upon any governmental agency which has personnel and/or equipment that is needed.
4. Voluntary and charitable agencies such as the Salvation Army, as well as quasi-official agencies such as the Red Cross, maintain state and national offices through which requests for assistance are channeled and coordinated. This makes supplies, equipment and personnel available on a much wider basis.

IV. Federal Disaster Assistance (Federal assistance is more frequent in large-scale disasters and during the rehabilitation phase. It is of less concern to us but is included here for your information). Although disaster relief is primarily the responsibility of State and local governments the Federal Government also has a responsibility to aid communities in times of great disaster.

- A. A number of Federal agencies have disaster responsibilities under their own statutory authority and can provide certain types of services prior to or in the absence of a major disaster declaration. If the disaster need cannot be met by one or more of these agencies the Governor may request the President to declare a major disaster in his state.

Federal agencies which can provide disaster assistance to communities, homeowners and businessmen without a "major disaster" declaration by the President:

1. Corps of Engineers has authority to assist in flood fighting and rescue operations and to repair and restore flood control works threatened or destroyed by flood.
2. Small Business Administration can provide direct and bank participation long-term disaster loans to individuals and business concerns to restore or rehabilitate damaged or destroyed property.
3. Department of Defense can provide military assistance when the overruling demands of humanity compel immediate action to protect lives and property.
4. Public Health Service can provide assistance to State and local communities for emergency health and sanitation measures.
5. Bureau of Public Roads can provide assistance to restore roads and bridges on the Federal Aid System.

- B. By Public Law 875, passed in 1950, Congress specified conditions under which Federal assistance may be provided. This Law gives the President broad powers to supplement State and local governments' disaster relief efforts. Responsibility for administering the Federal Disaster Act and for coordinating the activities of Federal agencies providing disaster assistance is assigned

to the Director of the Office of Emergency Planning.

Federal assistance under the Federal Disaster Act of 1950:

1. Upon request of the Governor of a State and his certification of the need for disaster assistance under The Federal Disaster Act, the President may declare a major disaster and make funds available to the Director of the Office of Emergency Planning for use in relief operations. These funds may be:
 - a. Granted to the State and local governments upon a showing of need.
 - b. Used to reimburse any Federal agency for expenditures incurred in providing disaster assistance at the direction of OEP.
2. Agencies which can provide disaster assistance under Public Law 875 include:
 - a. Department of Agriculture can provide available surplus food to relief organizations assisting the homeless or those evacuated from the disaster area. Can make available Commodity Credit Corporation owned feed grains to feed unidentified, commingled livestock for which feed and pasture is not available.
 - b. Department of the Treasury can makes loans to damaged industrial concerns engaged in national defense production to restore productive capacity.
 - c. The Bureau of Public Roads can survey damage and make emergency repairs and temporary replacement of roads, streets and bridges of State and local governments when requested by OEP.
 - d. The Federal Housing Administration can authorize lenders to permit suspension of payments on FHA insured home loans and

on home repair and modernization loans by disaster-affected borrowers. Can provide temporary housing for disaster victims in defaulted FHA-insured housing.

- e. Veterans Administration can authorize the temporary suspension of VA loans to assist borrowers in the retention of their property. It also can permit lenders to make advances on existing VA guaranteed loans to repair damages.
- f. General Services Administration can make surplus property available to States at the request of the Director of the Office of Emergency Planning.

3. Types of Assistance under The Federal Disaster Act of 1950

a. To State and Local Governments

- (1) Equipment, supplies facilities and personnel
- (2) Protective work essential to preservation of life and property
- (3) Debris and wreckage clearance
- (4) Emergency repairs and temporary replacements of essential public facilities of States and local governments.
- (5) Medicine, food and other consumable items distributed through the American Red Cross.
- (6) Temporary housing and emergency shelter.
- (7) Financial assistance to alleviate the effects of disaster by relief of suffering, protection of life and property and the repair of physical damage.

b. **Individuals and Groups**

- (1) **American National Red Cross plays a vital role in providing help to individuals and families while the Federal Government's help goes to primarily States and local governments. Operating under a Charter from Congress, the American Red Cross assists individuals and families to recover from disasters by grants to cover their emergency and long-term needs. Red Cross is not dependent upon a declaration of a major disaster nor does it duplicate the relief provided by the Federal Government.**
- (2) **Other relief agencies of a community participate in rendering assistance to individuals and families.**

C. Addenda:

National Sources of Assistance Available To:	
Individuals and Groups	State and Local Govts.
<p>*Grants from American Red Cross and other relief agencies for emergency relief.</p> <p>*Assistance by Federal agencies— Small Business Administration, Farmers Home Administration, Federal Housing Administration, Veterans Administration.</p>	<p>*Financial assistance under Federal Disaster Act.</p> <p>*Federal Agencies •Bureau of Public Roads, Department of Agriculture, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Corps of Engineers, General Services Administration.</p>

Declaration of a Major Disaster

A "major disaster" is any flood, drought, fire, hurricane, earthquake, storm or other catastrophe which in the determination of the President, is or threatens to be of sufficient severity and magnitude to warrant disaster assistance by the Federal Government to supplement efforts and resources of State and local governments.

When Disaster Strikes:

1. Local authorities request help from the State Government.
2. The State Government provides all assistance possible. If the emergency needs are beyond the State's capability;
3. The Governor requests a Presidential declaration of a major disaster through the OEP Regional Office.
4. The OEP Regional Office surveys the damages and makes recommendations to the OEP Director.
5. The OEP Director evaluates the request and recommends action to and by the President.
6. The President makes determination. If warranted, the President then declares a "major disaster" and may allocate funds.
7. The President informs the Governor and directs Office of Emergency Planning to reallocate funds and direct and coordinate Federal disaster relief.