



EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT IN COUNTY GOVERNMENT

A National Survey

MARCH 2019

Over the past 20 years, natural and manmade disasters have increased in frequency, severity and cost. On average, 24 percent of counties have experienced at least one disaster in each of the last three years. The past three hurricane and wildfire seasons have included six hurricanes that combined to cost over \$330 billion in damages and more than eight wildfires causing over \$40 billion in damages. These disasters showcase the need for government officials, particularly county governments, to renew their focus on planning and response readiness activities. Consequently, the U.S. has learned the importance of certain tactics and strategies that include scenario planning, land use planning, evacuation planning, building code adoption and enforcement, internal and external communication planning, citizen preparation, controlling information on social media, tracking volunteer hours and the impact of disaster on goods movement and industry.

In order to remain healthy, vibrant, safe and economically competitive, America's counties must be engaged in all aspects and phases of emergency management: planning, preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery. This report presents findings of current U.S. counties' activities in these areas from the Survey on Emergency Management in County Government.

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In May 2018, NACo conducted a survey to assess key aspects of county emergency management, including organizational structure, budgets and funding, personnel and training, use of technology and ways counties collaborate with other government entities and nongovernmental organizations. NACo received completed responses from 397 counties in June 2018, representing all census divisions and 45 of the 50 states. The responding counties ranged in size from nearly 500 residents to more than 4.6 million, thus allowing NACo to identify general trends for small, medium and large counties. Of large counties – or counties with populations of over 500,000 – 26 out of 131 responded. Of medium counties – or counties with populations ranging from 50,000 to 500,000 – 126 out of 821 responded. Of small counties – or small counties with populations of under 50,000 – 245 out of 2,117 responded.

There are several major findings of this survey:

- 95 percent of counties formally endorse the National Incident Management System (NIMS) which provides government, nongovernmental and private sector organizations with the resources and tools needed for collaborative incident management.
- Ahead of a disaster, 62 percent of counties adopt administrative and financial procedures that allow the EMA to expediently request, apply for, receive, manage and expend funds during a local emergency or disaster.
- The majority of counties (over 90 percent) maintain insurance against disaster damage for buildings and infrastructure.
- At the federal level, counties most often engage FEMA – on recovery and education and training – and NOAA – on education and training and planning – on emergency management.
- Counties engage with other local governments and organizations on planning more than three times as often as they do on response – the phase on which they next most engage.
- 99 percent of counties report having an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP). Additionally, 56 percent of counties report that they have integrated their HMP into their county comprehensive plan.
- About two-thirds of counties use social media to communicate risk before and after a disaster; although 12 percent of counties do not have social media accounts.
- 64 percent of counties have held a county-wide disaster preparedness drill within the past year. 19 percent have not done so in more than two years.
- While 77 percent of counties have pre-designated shelters for disaster evacuees, only 8 percent indicate that they have adequate housing stock to support temporary housing for local residents, non-local volunteers, federal employees, etc.
- 22 percent of county respondents indicate that they do not regulate land use and 24 percent indicate that they do not regulate buildings codes. Correspondingly, 6 percent of counties report that they are not legally allowed to regulate local land use per state law and 8 percent report that they are not legally allowed to regulate local building codes per state law.

Find full report online at
www.naco.org/EMSurvey



Snohomish County, Wash., March 25, 2014 -- The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) of Snohomish County was activated in response to the Oso Mudslide. Steve Zumwalt/FEMA

Methodology

NACo prepared the survey instrument with input from the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia and emergency management practitioners from local and federal emergency management agencies. Requests with instructions for completing the survey went out in May to each of the 3,069 U.S. counties. The requests were sent to county clerks, board presidents and emergency management directors. Instructions requested that the clerk and/or board president send the request, which was signed by NACo Resilient Counties Advisory Board Chair and Sonoma County Supervisor James Gore, to the appropriate emergency management professional. NACo received completed responses from 397 counties in May and June 2018, representing all Census divisions and 45 of the 50 states.

