Local government personnel making national emergency response to Sandy possible

The collaboration between local, state and the federal government is widespread and ongoing in response to Sandy. This partnership is critical to helping prepare our communities to better respond to future emergencies and disasters, and to recover more quickly.

Hundreds of trained and equipped emergency response personnel across the country – primarily employed by counties and cities – have been mobilized in collaboration with the states to communities suffering from loss of life, infrastructure and property as a result of this week’s landing of Hurricane/Superstorm Sandy. More local personnel are standing by to respond to authorized calls for local assistance.

The response of search and rescue teams, swift water rescue teams, All Hazard Incident Management Teams (AHIMTs), and other resources – made up primarily of personnel and equipment from local government – is being coordinated with the assistance and collaboration with state governments through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC).

Established in 1996, EMAC provides assistance during governor-declared states of emergency through a responsive, straightforward system allowing states to send local government personnel, equipment, and commodities to help disaster relief efforts in other states. Deployed local resources (like emergency managers, fire, law enforcement, public works, and other key stakeholders) are provided to affected communities in order to support the response. These capabilities provide relief from the effects of Sandy were created or augmented by local governments through the use of local funding as well as grants such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG), the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG), and the Department of Homeland Security’s homeland security grant programs.

As of this week, local response resources have been marshaled from Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Washington with additional resources from other states are standing by.
The National Association of Counties (NACo), the International Association of Emergency Managers, the American Public Works Association, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, and other local government organizations stressed that the overall response to a major event like Sandy requires seamless and timely federal-state-local coordination and collaboration, which has been on display for Americans to see. Much planning and intergovernmental policy development and cooperation, as well as sufficient resources, are necessary to ensure that the proper framework is in place when emergency responders are called into action.

The groups point out that emergency responders – often firefighters, emergency managers, emergency medical service workers, search and rescue teams, public works and law enforcement personnel – provide an enormous service to the communities they serve. Upon arrival at a scene in often extremely stressed and dangerous conditions, they must – at great risk to themselves – immediately assess and assist victims and prevent further danger in emergency situations while calling for the appropriate backup assistance.

Since local governments are responsible for much of what constitutes a community (i.e. roads and bridges, water and sewer systems, courts and jails, healthcare, parks, libraries), these officials routinely work side-by-side with state and federal officials to respond accordingly when disaster strikes.

“Our hearts go out to the people in the local communities affected by this storm,” said IAEM-USA President Jeff Walker.
“We want to make sure our local government resources and people are there to help them in their time of need.”

“The devastation brought to our communities by Sandy is unimaginable,” said NACo President Chris Rodgers, commissioner, Douglas County, Neb. “Yet it has been heartening to witness the professionalism, skill and bravery our first responders are displaying to protect and rescue the people and places in our communities and recover as best we can from this natural disaster. We cannot thank enough our county sheriffs and deputies, firefighters, EMTs, emergency dispatchers, 9-1-1 operators and all emergency responders for their service to their communities and the country.”

“This disaster is a stark reminder of how important public works and infrastructure systems are to the day-to-day survival of people and our communities,” said APWA Executive Director Peter B. King. “The American Public Works Association (APWA) recognizes the scope of this catastrophe, and pledges to support all public works officials and other local, state and federal government first responders, as we work together to respond in an effective, unified manner. APWA supports the EMAC local deployment efforts across the U.S. We are also offering an Emergency Management ‘Peer Database’ to our members in the region who need assistance. The database includes members who have offered to provide their professional emergency management expertise to all public works emergency responders who would like additional advice or expertise.”

“While the damage and suffering from Sandy has been immense, the effective response to this incident in a multitude of states and localities demonstrates the importance of the principle of neighbor helping neighbor,” said Chief Hank Clemmensen, President and Chairman of the Board, International Association of Fire Chiefs. “The spirit of the men and women of the fire and emergency service along with their colleagues in law enforcement, emergency management, public works, and charitable organizations working together and with community members is what serves as a beacon in dark times.”

For more information on EMAC, please visit the EMAC website at http://www.emacweb.org.

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