

# Local Elected and Appointed Officials Emergency Management Checklist



This checklist was developed to help senior officials prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters and emergencies. The checklist is not necessarily sequential and not every item will apply to every jurisdiction or community. Essentially, this is a list of reminders for questions to ask, immediate steps to take and points to keep in mind when leading the community to prepare for, respond to and recover from a disaster. These items should be reconsidered as needed.

This is an excerpt from [FEMA's Local Elected and Appointed Officials Guide: Roles and Resources in Emergency Management](#), which has additional information on this topic.

## Before Disaster

Senior officials are responsible for protecting the lives and property of their community. Executing the following tasks can prepare the local government to respond to and recover from disasters:

- Make planning for disasters a priority throughout the entire community.
- Provide resources and necessary authority to support a comprehensive emergency management program.
- Meet with the emergency management team and policy group, which provides guidance, resource prioritization and other executive functions, to learn about the hazards and unique vulnerabilities that threaten the jurisdiction. Update contact lists annually.
- Work with emergency managers to learn planning processes, timelines and planning update cycles for emergency operations plans, continuity of operations (COOP) plans and continuity of government (COG) plans; provide any support to help keep plans up to date.
- Create a strategy to support mitigation, continuity and recovery planning.
- Coordinate with senior officials and the emergency management agencies in neighboring jurisdictions, to review relevant emergency management plans, hazard mitigation plans or any other planning documents related to preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation in the community.
- Become familiar with the jurisdiction's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and 911 center.
- Review applicable legal authorities and responsibilities relevant to disasters and emergencies.
- Provide policy direction for prevention, protection, response, recovery and mitigation-related activities based in part on information provided by the emergency management agency.
- Encourage individuals, families and businesses to develop emergency plans and be able to protect themselves during the first 72 hours after a disaster.

## Senior Officials Emergency Management Checklist

- Develop a communications strategy, including sign and foreign language interpretation, in coordination with emergency management officials and Public Information Officers (PIOs).
- Learn about state, tribal, territorial and federal disaster assistance programs.
- Learn about the damage assessment process and how it impacts obtaining federal assistance.
- Participate in emergency and disaster drills, training and exercises. Encourage local government agencies and community partners to also participate.
- Personally develop and maintain an individual/family emergency plan.<sup>1</sup> Senior officials are encouraged to create a more specific “Go-Kit” to address their unique needs when supporting EOCs during responses.

### “Go-Kit”: What to Bring to Your Disaster Work Location

The following list is intended to help senior officials prepare personal go-kits of essential items to bring to their anticipated work locations for extended disaster operations. It is recommended that they have enough personal items available to be self-sustaining for several days. They should evaluate the contents of their kits based on individual needs.<sup>2</sup>

- Backpack, bag or case (to put all items in);
- Work items: cell phone and charger, laptop, radio and charger, emergency job aids (e.g., checklists, guides, contact information) and identification;
- Clothes and shoes fit for the weather and a change of clothing (e.g., for press conferences);
- Food and snacks based on any special dietary needs (confirm whether the disaster work location has arrangements for providing food and hydration);
- Glasses and an extra pair of prescription glasses;
- Personal medications, supplements and hygiene items (e.g., toothbrush, toothpaste);
- Personal money (e.g., credit cards, cash in small bills);
- Pencil, pen and notebook;
- Contact list of family, friends and professional contacts; and
- Favorite personal and/or comfort items.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see “Build A Kit” at <https://www.ready.gov/kit>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on personal preparedness, see <https://www.ready.gov/>.

## During Disaster

### INITIAL ACTIONS

- Establish contact with the emergency management agency as the situation permits, if this has not already been done:
  - Contact Name and Phone Number(s) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Contact Email \_\_\_\_\_
- Obtain assessment information and priority objectives (evaluate the situation).
- Determine situation status (obtain from the EOC/emergency manager):
  - What is the nature of the incident—what happened?
  - What hazards are present?
  - What area is impacted? How large an area is affected?
  - Is the situation getting better, stabilizing or getting worse?
  - What are the impacts on individuals, households and families?
  - What is the status of local hospitals? Assisted living facilities and nursing homes?
  - What are the impacts on first responders?
  - What are the impacts on businesses and the supply chain?
  - What are the impacts on people with disabilities, people with access and functional needs and traditionally underserved populations?
  - What is the number of casualties?
  - What are the impacts on critical infrastructure?
  - What is the status of local government agencies?
- What are the response actions currently?
  - What public protection actions are currently in progress and what actions need to occur?
  - Have the notifications, alerts and warnings been completed? Are additional notifications or warnings needed?
  - What is being done to assist individuals, families and businesses?
  - What is being done to assist people with disabilities, people with access and functional needs and traditionally underserved populations?
  - Are there resource shortfalls or gaps (e.g., personnel, equipment, commodities, services)?

## Senior Officials Emergency Management Checklist

- What is being done to bring in outside assistance or offer help to other communities?
- Begin and maintain a personal log of all incident actions (e.g., contacts, directives, decisions).
- Contact PIO to coordinate strategic public messaging, including American Sign Language, captioning and foreign language interpretation as needed.

### EMERGENCY TASKS

During the activation and operational phases of the EOC, senior officials should consider the following tasks and actions and consult with the emergency manager to support as needed.

- Maintain situational awareness regarding the disaster by staying informed.
- Trust and empower your emergency management officials to make the right decisions.
- Address/support response and recovery priorities.
  - Collaborate with emergency managers to collectively develop guidance regarding priorities and strategies for dealing with incident response and recovery (e.g., emergency declarations, large-scale evacuations, access to extraordinary emergency funding, waivers of ordinances and regulations, adjudication of scarce resources).
  - Initiate requests for extraordinary resources or outside assistance, such as mutual aid, state or federal assistance.
  - Provide for the well-being, safety and health of the members of the community and visitors.
  - Ensure continuity or rapid resumption of essential local government services.
- Review the legal responsibilities and authorities of senior officials.
- Confirm implementation of appropriate administrative procedures and financial safeguards.
- Issue or arrange for issuance of a local, tribal or territorial disaster declaration if warranted.
  - Focus on protecting, saving and sustaining lives; protecting property and the environment; stabilizing the incident and maintaining essential services.
  - Consult with emergency management staff regarding strategic courses of action, while leaving tactical decision making to emergency response officials.
  - Consult with jurisdictional counsel regarding potential legal issues and courses of action.
  - Determine when to issue protective measures (e.g., curfew, shelter-in-place, evacuation, access control, quarantine, isolation, emergency orders) based on information provided by the emergency management agency.
  - Share situation information and actions and coordinate with neighboring senior officials, the governor and other key partners.
  - Use emergency powers and authorities of government as appropriate.

## Senior Officials Emergency Management Checklist

- Suspend and waive rules, regulations and statutes as needed and allowed.
- Monitor the situation to determine the need to update or modify emergency orders/protective measures.
- Review and determine appropriate emergency response expenditure limits.
- The following information, derived at the local level, may help inform the governor or tribal chief executive to request a Stafford Act declaration:<sup>3</sup>
  - Description of the situation and conditions.
  - Geographic boundaries of the incident.
  - Outline of the resources being used.
  - Initial damage assessment outlining the physical and financial impacts and losses.
  - Details of the emergency powers and authorities enacted (including their effective time periods and copies of the requesting governor's or tribal chief executive's disaster declaration).
- Determine the need for and establish new policies to support response and recovery.
  - Ensure the EOC has clear policy direction. Issue direction and policy in support of response and recovery actions through the emergency manager.
  - Consider use of the EOC policy group (multiagency coordination [MAC] group) for making policy decisions.
  - Chair and/or participate in EOC policy/MAC group meetings at the EOC or designated site.
- Monitor the progress of emergency/disaster actions from messages, reports and information charts received by and issued from the EOC.
- When safe and when it will not interfere with response efforts, visit impacted areas, shelters and other temporary facilities to demonstrate leadership's commitment and to identify issues with service delivery.
- Ensure that a continuous stream of timely and accurate information is being provided by the EOC, PIO and the Joint Information Center (JIC).
  - Approve emergency public information news releases and other messages as appropriate.
  - Serve as a community spokesperson as planned in coordination with emergency managers.

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<sup>3</sup> Federally recognized tribal governments are empowered to make declaration requests directly to the President as explained at <https://www.fema.gov/about/organization/tribes>.

### Delivering Effective Messages<sup>4</sup>

- *Lead the interview.* Present the main points; avoid speculative “what-if” questions.
- *Use simple sentences.* During times of high stress, people are more likely to remember short, concise bits of information.
- *Speak naturally.* Avoid using terminology unfamiliar to those working outside of emergency management or government.
- *Be honest and direct.* Exaggerated facts and misleading information can threaten lives in disaster situations.
- *Be genuine, personable and conversational.* Avoid using “no comment” and similar evasive phrases. Credibility is vital to effective disaster communication.

### CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS/CONTINUITY OF GOVERNMENT

- Ensure continuity of essential services—which may be provided or supported by private sector organizations—and local government operations.
- Support local government departments and personnel in obtaining resources necessary to continue essential services, as needed.

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on CDC’s Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication program, see <https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/training/index.asp>.

### After Disaster

After a disaster, members of the community expect their local government and their senior officials to maintain an active role in the delivery of recovery resources and services, and to provide innovative, efficient and inclusive leadership. Each senior official's recovery tasks should include:

- Convene key stakeholders to establish a vision, strategy and plan for the recovery process and for the future of the community.
- Work with the emergency management agency to convene and maintain a recovery task force and a recovery organization structure.
- Work collaboratively with all groups of people affected by the disaster to promote inclusive and accessible outreach to their communities and address issues relevant to them.
- Lead the recovery process and appoint a recovery manager if needed.
- Establish a recovery office to effectively manage long-term regulatory, fiscal, infrastructure, community development and human services recovery functions.
- Continue to assess unmet needs through close coordination with jurisdictional agencies and non-governmental (NGO) partners with significant long-term recovery support roles.
- Optimize the benefits of state/federal programs along with private sector and NGO contributions.
- Understand the federal disaster declaration and assistance processes and what funding may be available to assist during recovery.
- Identify opportunities to rebuild the community better and mitigate impacts of future incidents.
- Ensure codes, regulations and finances are properly managed during the recovery process.
- Communicate coordinated information to the public and media (both traditional and social media) to generate confidence in the process, secure buy-in for recovery priorities and establish accountability. Include American Sign Language, captioning and foreign language interpretation as needed.
- Work with emergency management, other jurisdictional agencies and NGO partners as appropriate to conduct public meetings to determine unmet needs and identify current or future actions related to the disaster.
- Ask questions; the recovery process and programs can be complex.
- Support the community through the recovery. The process may take multiple years.