

Emergency Management in the First State

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As a coastal state with low lying and flat geography, Delaware is vulnerable to coastal storms, floods, and various weather events impacted by the Northeast climate. These vulnerabilities encapsulate emergency management in Delaware as a complex process requiring efficient coordination and communications between government and communities. We must effectively provide resources and information statewide to ensure the safety of the public, preserve properties, and minimize the impact to restore normal activities.

All Hazards, One Response

The task of emergency management in Delaware at the state level is led by Director A.J. Schall and his team of emergency management professionals at the Delaware Emergency Management Agency (DEMA). By state law¹ DEMA is the lead state agency for coordination of comprehensive emergency preparedness, training, response, recovery and mitigation services. This allows the agency to save lives, protect Delaware's economic base, and reduce the impact of emergencies. Accomplishing this mission requires establishing relationships and partnerships with communities, all levels of government and (most importantly) the citizens of Delaware. These relationships allow DEMA to build resiliency through education, preparedness, and outreach.

DEMA works very closely with its federal counterpart, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region III, and the surrounding contiguous states (Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Washington D.C., and New Jersey) on emergency management planning and emergency/disaster operations. As FEMA Region III provides the conduit for state and federal planning and coordination, DEMA provides the state and local operational coordination with the Delaware National Guard and critical state, nonprofit, and nongovernmental agencies that coordinate emergency services within the State Emergency Operations Center.

DEMA also has a strong partnership with county and local emergency management entities, including the emergency managers of the three counties and the City of Wilmington. This core group provides an optimal emergency management team to address an “all hazards – one response” philosophy.

Focus Areas

DEMA planning encompasses three focus areas: natural hazards, technological hazards, and man-made hazards or terrorism. Each area is structured into a planning section within the agency; these areas of concentration collectively build into a holistic process of development of numerous emergency plans. It is critical in emergency management to visualize and plan for events that impact the state through actual experience, disaster and weather modelling, review of events after-actions, partnerships with technical expertise, and university research processes.

The agency makes use of two major plans: the Delaware Emergency Operations Plan (DEOP) and the Delaware State All-Hazard Mitigation Plan (SHMP) to build the planning foundation for

identification of hazards that threaten the state and the emergency operational procedures for the state's preparedness, support, and recovery for the hazards.

The DEOP incorporates hazards identified within the SHMP hazard identification process and operationalizes the threats into seven major categories:

1. Natural Hazards – Incidents/events that naturally occur by environmental conditions or which are derived from these conditions: flooding (costal and riverine), hurricanes/tropical storms, earthquakes, winter storms, tornadoes, severe thunderstorms, and more.
2. Technological Hazards – Incidents/events that originate from technological or industrial accidents: cyber attack, hazardous material facility, radiological facility (nuclear power plant) and transportation-based hazardous material accident.
3. Infrastructure Failures – Incidents/events that result in failures in critical components of infrastructure that provide the fabric of daily life: communications failure, petroleum shortage, pipeline accident, power outage/failure and structural failures.
4. Public Health Emergencies - Incidents/events involving naturally occurring or man-made pathogens that infect humans or systems used by humans: animal/plant/crop diseases, human health/pandemic emergency, and mass casualty accident.
5. Terrorism – Incidents/events that involve the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives: agricultural, biological, chemical, conventional, and radiological terrorism.
6. Transportation Incidents – Incidents/events involving the transportation infrastructure, including mass transit: air transportation, highway transportation, railway transportation, and waterway transportation incidents
7. Social and Civil Emergencies – Incidents/events derived from fire, breakdown in civil control, war, and other nominal emergencies: enemy attack, mass migration/repatriation, public disorder/civil unrest, school emergencies, and structure fires.

The DEOP's operational concept incorporates the "all hazards – one response" approach through addressing all elements of emergency support through the major categories. This plan is designed to formulate an integrated, multi-functional, multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional, and all-hazards flexible approach to incident management. DEMA activates emergency operations under a comprehensive program, which seeks to manage the totality of the emergency management process and to find ways to minimize the effects of disasters and emergencies on the state and its citizens. The plan reflects the intent to codify the process and to integrate the state's emergency response system with that of local governments, other states, and the federal government. The state utilizes the National Incident Command System structure of emergency management and is consistent with the requirements of the National Incident Management System as this ensures continuity between levels of emergency management across the country.

Conclusion

Disasters and emergencies occur at any time, with little or no warning in most cases. These events may impact small, discrete locations, or affect the entire geographic area of the state. The role of emergency management is to explore the threats and risks of each emergency and ensure levels of preparedness are established through education and information sharing, support is identified and provided through state resources, and recovery efforts are established and coordinated to return to the new normal after a disaster. Emergency management is a holistic team approach to address and survive disasters that impact Delaware. Know your role and be part of the solution, not the problem. More information can be found at the DEMA website: <http://www.dema.delaware.gov/>.

References

1. Code, D. (n.d.). Title 20, Chapter 31§3101-3130. Retrieved from: <https://delcode.delaware.gov/title20/c031/sc02/index.shtml>

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