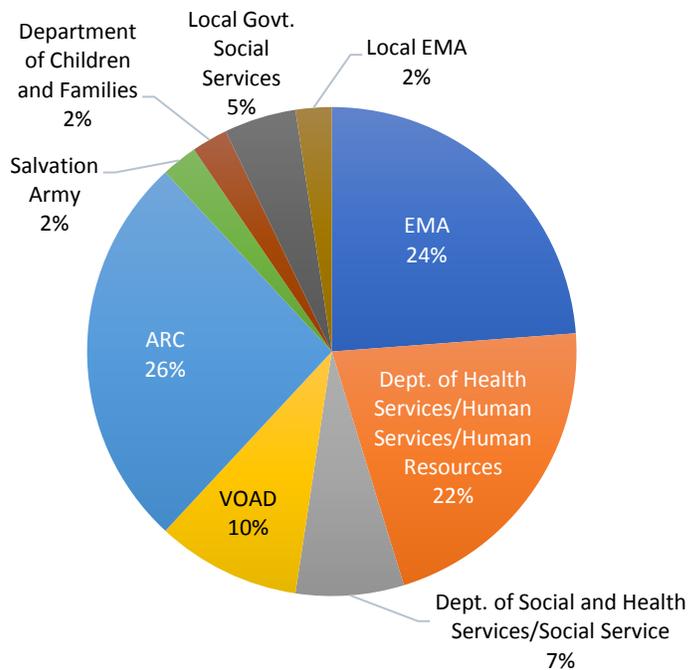


Shelter and Evacuation Plans Status

There is not a set requirement for shelter and evacuation plans in emergency management. Even the planning process is unique. As emergency management agencies construct reviews of their plans for sheltering and evacuating publics, the common denominator suggests a lack in resources within their own agency. What states and territories plan to do with the gap is where the difference lies. The planning process and implementation stems from more of an intuitive design that reflects the nature of the hazards that an area may succumb. The goal is to ensure the safety of those in the area to be sheltered from an oncoming risk or to simply be evacuated from the area until it is safe to return. Clear, concise communication and preparedness initiatives are what makes the difference between a good plan versus an effective plan. Coordination between stakeholders is a must and at times emergency management agencies will need to lean on others' expertise to prove success. Whether you are sheltering against a rabid storm or executing a sound evacuation, steps are required. Mutual aid agreements need to already be in place. And all stakeholders that the plans impact must be aware. How states and territories deal with the in between is in their hands.

It cannot be stressed enough the importance of partnership for both initiatives. State emergency management does not have the funding, resources and capabilities to run shelters and mobilize



evacuations as a single agency; it must involve a multiple agency effort and, in some aspect, various levels of government. Sixty-eight percent of state/territory emergency management agencies rely on partnerships such as volunteer organizations, public health/social services departments, and family service or educational departments. An interesting contrast to the twenty-four percent that uphold the primary responsibility of shelter and evacuation to the emergency management agency. Seven percent of the states must engage strong partnerships with their local entities since, by law and/or structure of their state framework and processes, the local governments are to lead the sheltering

and evacuation efforts. The partnership does not have to stay within the limits of volunteer organizations, but can expand to other state agencies, non-profit communities' services, faith base and higher education institutions, and/or the private sector.

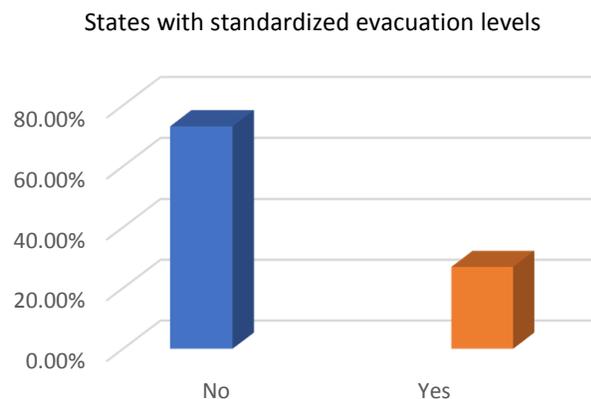
Shelter. Challenges of shelters lie in funding, providing accessibility compliance (ADA) and maintenance of the shelter structures, and not enough expertise staffing for the shelter operations. A few ways to overcome such challenges lies in the preparedness efforts. In using a service model approach, HGMP Grants funds the modification of select shelters that support accessibility or ADA compliance, which can

assist the funding challenge if properly granted. Through the involvement of partners in the planning, training, and review phases, they can easily assimilate the plan saving valuable time as representatives know their respective places, duties, and thresholds (when it is time to call in support). A way to overcome the staffing challenge is to create mandatory shelter operations and emergency preparedness training for state professionals that will be essential for such operations and/or an emergency action. For the operations of shelters, utilizing a singular, standardized method within the state promises more uniformity of shelter operations across the state. Couple that with guidance documents explaining all facets of the shelter operations, and training per that guidance, benefits the state in having one process, method, and common terminology for shelters.

Local governments are an essential partner to the shelter plan. State emergency management agencies continue to work with their local agencies in pre-identifying shelters and the assistance those places may need; ensure all partners have the appropriate local contact for the shelter; and most importantly, ensuring the local agencies have a plan. Even where statute requires sheltering as a local initiative, the state emergency management agency works alongside the local agency to coach on how to create, socialize, and implement a shelter plan to work for all their publics. In addition, the state emergency management agency implements educational guidance on how communities can work together with local partners including but not limited to outside volunteer organizations. The partnership is a team, that also supports during a disaster when shelters are in need.

Long-Term Sheltering and Catastrophic Events. A disaster that creates a setting for long-term sheltering regardless of catastrophic level will exhaust all current capabilities. Even for states that rarely encounter the need for shelters or have seen a low percentage of people going to shelters, there is an underlying concern of a potential event that will exhaust all shelter support. In advancing initiatives now and adding a little creativity, states can create a more complex model of how they will handle large mass sheltering.

Evacuation. Evacuation challenges are in the variants of authority within states and territories, and the lack of standardizing evacuation processes. A challenge for some areas may be state law. For example, if there is no forced evacuation authority, law enforcement may have few alternatives to use to persuade people to evacuate. Seventy-three percent of responders do not have or implement standard evacuation levels for moving people out or re-entry. For those that do, they operate on “Ready, Set, Go” or a similar model. Those that do not participate in “Ready, Set, Go,” instead obtain evacuation zones and may go with the tagline, “Know Your Zone.” The zone approach is to assist in evacuations for nuclear hazards as well as hurricanes. In consideration of bringing residents back to a community, there really are no significant standard practices for re-entry, unless it is a radiological incident. Instead the states either reverse “Ready, Set, Go” or evaluate the need on a case-by-case basis. The unwritten idea is for all agencies to work together to ensure that



the community is safe for their people to come back. The lack of standardization for evacuation at a state level are mostly due to localities having primary roles for evacuation. When the locals are responsible for the evacuation levels, they may set different criteria for various hazards. Even in times where the Governor issues mandatory or voluntary evacuations, it is up to the local community to establish the specific zones and how that interplays with the evacuation. This is where it is necessary to encourage local agencies within the state to establish ‘one voice’ in the roles and responsibilities, and evacuation levels.

Contra Flow. Temporary traffic changes to encourage one-way flow out of an area that a disaster will impact not only requires engineering brilliance, but also provides a way to push people out quickly. The concept, however, has only been in acceptance by thirty percent of those states who potentially can manage the act. If you live on an island with no bridge to mainland, for example, contra flow is not a consideration. The number is even lower for states that have utilized the theory in action when considering the states that have plans but are fortunate to not have a real-world event that would cause implementation. Those that manage contra flow well have the experience and infrastructure in place to proceed in operation with success.

Where the stop lies? Although great in theory, the practicality of contra flow may be in question. This occurs even in cases where the plan only affects one road or a large city. In looking at infrastructure and inadequate staff to support the plans, some state agency concerns prevent the use of contra flow. For example, the highway infrastructure is not keeping pace with the growing population which affects evacuation times; thus, expediting the need for further study to make sure the state/local warnings to evacuate come at a time where everyone can comply. In addition, states that adopt contra flow plans and test those plans find challenges in the communication and coordination across the state and local agencies.

“68% of state and territory programs look to their partners to assist.”

Evacuation for Nuclear Incidents. Nuclear incident evacuation plans contain standard-practice in procedures for evacuations and re-entry due to the nature of the incident. The evacuations are chemical and plume specific as opposed to a storm path. Those plans are similar to all hazard evacuation plans but may have additions in the details such as a site for radiation screening to be in place to ensure the contamination does not spread; as well as when to know an area is safe for people to return. Guidance comes from agencies such as the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, FEMA’s radiological emergency preparedness program, and the CDC. Other areas that differ from hazard specific incidents are timing, traffic control points, and sheltering options. These areas need to stay flexible in case of plume movement (high winds). Agencies that oversee mass care, reception and decontamination centers may be more active as primary roles to ensure the subject matter experts are engaging in the event. When local jurisdictions are primary for evacuations, the response to evacuate dependent on size of impact provides the opportunity to have incidents be managed solely at the local level, but still with the state in a supportive role. Due to standard active details of nuclear incidents, some states have separate plans for this type of hazard.

The Takeaway. Planning initiatives are equally as important as the implementation of the plan. An effective plan takes stakeholder input, one voice terminology, training, and socializing the plan. Partnership is key as 68% of state and territory programs look to their partners to assist. During the critical review of plans, seek out gaps to see if mutual agreements can be made prior to a disaster – it may be from another state agency. A thorough analysis will provide the evidence of those gaps and encourage creative thinking where to find those resources. In a long-term event such as a catastrophe, having plans that are laid out down to the last detail (i.e. mission ready packages to submit to EMAC, MOUs with neighbors and local businesses) will promise a faster response initiative. Where there is a lack in standardized technique, encourage it. When people are speaking the same terminology and operating with the same process, communication becomes a best practice and not a learned lesson. Training to the plan is equally as important. Gather all stakeholder representatives to exercise the plan and ensure training efforts to those who need the proper certifications. Lastly, make sure the public and the elected officials are aware that a plan is in place and educate those terms and process in preparedness initiatives. Design a plan that makes an impact.

Planning Process

- ✓ Be as detailed as possible during the planning process by conducting a thorough needs assessment and gap analysis of existing shelter capabilities and evacuation possibilities, expected impacts from your most common hazards to your worst day, and work to bring a variety of stakeholders and partners (non-profits, citizens with access and functional needs, supply-chain representatives, and public safety) into the planning, training, and exercise process.
- ✓ The use of common terminology to describe everything from evacuation posture to the types of shelters available will make coordination easier and help put the public a little more at ease during a stressful time by eliminating confusion or contradictory messages.
- ✓ Large evacuation and shelter operations may overwhelm even the most capable jurisdiction. Consider mutual aid compacts like EMAC, develop pre-scripted mission assignments, and lean forward to support neighboring jurisdictions when they have been impacted by catastrophic disasters.