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CALM DURING THE STORM



Photo courtesy of the State of Alaska

With gubernatorial elections coming up in a host of states this fall, it is likely that some state emergency management directors will be preparing new governors for what to do in the event of a disaster in the coming months. In December 2018, Alaska experienced just that when a major earthquake struck Anchorage only days before now-Governor Dunleavy's inauguration.

As part of that preparation, Alaska's Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management (DHS&EM) developed their Governor's Disaster Playbook to provide at-a-glance information on a variety of topics, including the Governor's own executive responsibilities in a disaster; a checklist of information DHS&EM will seek to provide for an initial briefing; the state's disaster declaration process; the National Incident Management System (NIMS); the Incident Command System (ICS); state and federal funding sources; and the regular work conducted by DHS&EM to promote a more resilient Alaska.

The Playbook opens with step-by-step initial actions for the Governor to take in the event of a disaster, including who to contact on both local and federal levels to initiate emergency response measures. It also provides additional actions to be considered early on, such as assembling the Disaster Policy Cabinet, notifying state legislative leadership, and visiting the disaster site. Because Alaska does not operate a 24-hour Emergency Operations Center (EOC), it also includes information on the notification protocols for a local duty officer who may need to initiate incident notifications outside of the State EOC's regular operating hours so that the Governor can be prepared for that possibility.

It then provides detail on the next phases, including how state and federal counterparts coordinate for the response and early recovery phases and the process of working with state legislative leadership to develop a Finance Plan for the Legislature to appropriate any additional monies requested from the Alaska Disaster Relief Fund to meet the state's recovery needs.

The Playbook is a living document that serves to inform the Governor and the appropriate state commissioners and staff on state emergency management mechanisms and provide benchmarks for notifications from DHS&EM to the Governor for efficient emergency response – the current document was adapted from previous iterations to best fit the current Governor's information needs and can be adjusted for future administrations.

As Alaska state director Paul Nelson noted, "Chaos breeds chaos, you want the Governor to try to be the calm in the middle of the storm," and using a detailed, step-by-step playbook for an executive's responsibilities in a disaster allows an elected official to do that on Day One.

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