



January 28, 2021

**“Political chaos is connected with the decay of language... one can probably bring about some improvement by starting at the verbal end.” – George Orwell**



Within the first six days, the year 2021 has already seen events never before experienced in the history of our country. If emergency management has learned anything in recent years, it's to expect the unexpected and then multiple it by ten.

NEMA has identified its national policy priorities for 2021 and two of them are ensuring diversity and inclusion in emergency management and clarifying the role of emergency management. As of today, these are a few areas where states want NEMA to focus time and resources. As always, we will adapt and adjust to deal with whatever other challenges may come our way.

#### **Ensure Diversity and Inclusion in Emergency Management**

The role of disaster response and recovery requires sensitivity to the needs of all disaster survivors and equitable and fair distribution of federal assistance to all those affected. To achieve this goal, there needs to be a review of all current emergency management laws and policies through an equity lens. This review should specifically focus on institutional inequities in hazard mitigation, individual assistance, and public assistance programs. Also, focus on at-risk communities in areas susceptible to future effects of climate change.

Emergency management is in real need of diversity. The makeup of personnel within emergency management agencies should reflect the communities they serve. State and local emergency management leaders must seek new and more inclusive ways to recruit and retain a diverse workforce.

#### **Clarify the Role of Emergency Management**

The response to COVID-19 highlighted many successes but also some weaknesses at all levels of emergency management. At the federal level FEMA wasn't utilized until well into the event. At the state and local level, emergency management's role in the COVID-19 response varied with some governors creating entirely new response structures rather than utilizing existing plans and systems. In many cases, this caused initial delays and confusion. The role of emergency management in all-hazards events, traditional and non-traditional, must be more clearly defined and formalized.

FEMA should be the lead coordinating agency for all multi-agency incidents across all phases of the incident, to include recovery. This includes Stafford Act and non-Stafford Act events. Congress must ensure FEMA's capacity to successfully achieve interagency coordination through adequate resourcing, staffing, and authorities.

Further, the Administration should clearly define the roles of public health agencies and FEMA during public health emergencies. Clarify roles of FEMA and the myriad public health "EM" offices, which include HHS Assistant Secretary of Preparedness and Response; HHS CDC Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response; HHS FDA Office of Emergency Operations; and the National Security Council's CBRNE unit.

**NEMA invites all our Members to join together in addressing these important national issues. If you have specific ideas, please forward those to us at [nema\\_admin@csg.org](mailto:nema_admin@csg.org). We'll highlight additional policy priorities in next month's newsletter.**

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