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## NEMA: Come for the Fame, Stay for the Glory

**Dawn Brantley**  
Acting Director  
Massachusetts Emergency  
Management Agency



Shortly after **Director Brantley** earned her role as acting director, her new office chair was not yet warmed up when she agreed to Co-Chair the **NEMA Diversity & Equity Committee**. But NEMA is not the only association to be honored by her leadership, she also is the Co-founder and Vice President of the **International Association of Mass Care Professionals**. Her lead as a mother, emergency manager, association supporter, attorney, team player, inclusivity, humorous, and...well, we will just allow her to tell you her story, but inspirational should be one of the descriptors used.

### What makes you the proudest of your emergency management team?

The MEMA team is absolutely incredible. Everyone in the organization from Dispatch to senior leaders steps up and pitches in any time it's needed. For example, when we had a surprise, rapid fire mission to validate the contents of more than 5,000 boxes of KN95 masks at multiple warehouse locations within 24 hours, we put out an agency-wide call for volunteers because even though our logistics team is the best in the country, this would have been an impossible task for them. We put out the call for help in the afternoon and by 4pm that day, we had more than 30 MEMA team members, including many of our agency's senior leaders, our Secretary of Public Safety and all the Undersecretaries, MA State Police, MA National Guard, and Dept of Corrections staff all stepped up to get the work done. The team worked until about 1 am and then many came back to finish the mission the next day. It was incredible; I've never seen anything like it.

This agency's unofficial motto is **"one team, one mission"** and I see that lived out during every activation, every mission, and in the work this team does every day.

### What excites you most about being a NEMA member?

The fame and glory! Just kidding. As a new state director, I am looking forward to what I'm sure are your usual answers - contributing to policy discussion, developing practical guidance and tools for states and localities to use, and meeting and learning from other leaders in our field. Ultimately, as a member I'd like to contribute to other leaders' understanding of inclusive, accessible emergency management and their power as leaders to champion change in their own organizations. As an emergency manager who has served in EM roles at the local, regional, state, and federal levels, I can assist other leaders with implementing improvements to inclusivity and accessibility. That opportunity excites me more than anything else.

### As Co-founder & Vice President, International Association of Mass Care Professionals, can you briefly explain this association and why you decided to help bring it in to existence?

After more than a year of helping facilitate a monthly nationwide conference call for state mass care coordinators, several of us discussed the need for an organization that focused on mass care and mass care professionals. We pulled together a core team of mass care coordinators to begin the work of developing the association. The original team had representatives from numerous states including Peter Newman (FL), Alynda Ponder (MS), Sam Doyle (GA), and Carole Totzkay (NH).

As an attorney, emergency manager, and mass care professional, I felt I was uniquely suited to help bring this Association to fruition. I worked with Peter Newman to develop the founding documents in early 2020, but, as with most things that year, COVID-19 brought us to a grinding halt. By mid-2021 we were able to resume with a new initial Board of Directors and finally get the International Association of Mass Care Professionals off the ground. Quite the feat while we were all still knee deep in COVID response!

The IAMCP's mission is to bring together emergency management professionals and practitioners to improve and strengthen mass care through research, collaboration, education, training, and the development of tools and guidance. This year we are launching a training program, have already launched an online collaborative community for members, and will be developing tools for practitioners built by practitioners. Through this Association we are striving to build a strong and diverse cadre of professionals and practitioners who are effective operators and leaders in mass care who come together under the umbrella of the IAMCP to provide each other fellowship, guidance, and leadership.

It's a very exciting adventure!

### When someone finds out what you do, what question do they always ask you? And what is your typical answer?

When anyone hears that I am in emergency management or I'm an emergency manager, I always get, **"Ummm. Ok. So..... What do you do?"** Even family still can't quite wrap their heads around it after more than 14 years. I used to reference the movie Volcano and explained, "You know the character running around the city telling people what to do and where to go? That's not us. Do you remember the guy with the headset on, TVs and phones everywhere? That's us." It's hard to explain what we do to folks who haven't been a part of this in some way and now that it's been 25 years since that movie was released (wow - I feel old), I had to find a new way to help people understand. Now, I share NYC's excellent video [The Essential Emergency Manager](#). If you haven't seen it, it's worth watching and sharing.

### What is the longest trip you have been on?

Not sure about longest in terms of miles but one certainly felt like the longest trip in history. One summer my then-fiancé and I decided to take a road trip with all our kids. There were 6 of them, 4 girls ages 5, 13, 14, and 16, and 2 boys both age 10. We decided it would be a great idea to take a van - full of kids - from Virginia to Louisiana to New Mexico and back in July. We were not brilliant. At all.

One of my daughters discovered she gets motion sickness in the back of vans. The 5-year-old spent the entire trip turned around trying to see what the older kids were doing and then complaining because they were ignoring her. And all the girls were doing so that's what they did - for hours at a time. If you aren't sure how long the trip from VA to NM is, technically it's 1,895 miles but let me tell you, it's an eternity long with 6 kids in a van. I don't recommend it.

### What is the most amazing fact you know?

As we move from pandemic to endemic in some states, here's a fun fact to keep in mind: on average, every adult human body contains two to nine pounds of bacteria. I have bleach for sale if you're interested 😊.

#### **Volcano** 1997 Action Thriller

**Roger:** (Dayton Callie) You're not happy unless you're declaring an emergency, are you!

**Mike:** (Tommy Lee Jones) No, actually I enjoy motor sports, music and the company of close friends...sir.

**Stan Olber:** (John Carroll Lynch) 30,000 people think they're taking the train home tonight. What am I supposed to do for them?

**Mike:** (Tommy Lee Jones) Put on extra buses.

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