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Montana Disaster and Emergency Services Using EMPG to Engage Elected Leaders

All disasters are local. For that reason, among many others, it's critical to effective emergency management to prioritize developing and maintaining solid relationships with local elected officials so that they are aware of their roles and responsibilities before, during, and after disasters. Montana has made this effort one of its central priorities to execute through the **Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG)**.



Montana Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) has chosen to prioritize this outreach in recent years because EMPG funding is limited and requires buy-in through local investment. To engage with elected officials on both the benefits of existing programs and the comprehensive responsibilities of their local emergency managers, Montana uses a two-pronged approach.

Every other year, DES staff partner with statewide local associations for county commissioners and mayors to conduct workshops on emergency management. Topics have included mitigation, recovery, and the local officials' roles in community preparedness and requesting assistance in the event of a disaster. Often, counties that have experienced disaster or managed mitigation projects are on hand to provide lessons learned.

During the years where DES does not conduct a broader workshop with officials, staff target individual counties that may have seen elected official or local emergency management turnover for outreach. In these years, staff conduct executive briefs with the official and their local emergency manager to provide information on locality-specific issues and all-hazards planning, response, recovery, and mitigation, as well as the importance of maintaining a current Hazard Mitigation plan. Relatedly, Montana conducts on the ground visits between DES leadership, district field officers, and locals to provide continued education to counties beyond the more introductory-level information on what emergency management is and what it can do when appropriately supported.

Last year, Montana was able to conduct the broader workshop in February 2020 before the cancelation of mass gatherings. With the cancelation of gatherings due to COVID-19 over the past year, this year Montana is looking to conduct its biennial more targeted county outreach later in the summer and fall when the pandemic has reached a level conducive to intra-state meetings.

As we have learned, all disasters involve the entire community. Elected officials are a necessary partner when it comes to successful emergency management activities and DES has developed a comprehensive strategy to stay engaged with officials at a local level.

Building sustainable cities - and a sustainable future - will need open dialogue among all branches of national, regional and local government. And it will need the engagement of all stakeholders - including the private sector and civil society, and especially the poor and marginalized.

-Ban Ki-moon

If you have a state practice you'd like to highlight as part of this ongoing series, please contact [Lauren Goodwillie](mailto:Lauren.Goodwillie).

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