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February 7, 2025



THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON:

Building Relationships

Like much of Washington, we're still evaluating the many implications from the multiple Executive Orders (EO) and other directives that I highlighted in last week's newsletter. Since the announcement of the establishment of the FEMA Review Council, there have been a wide variety of takes and opinions from across the emergency management and policy worlds. Some emergency managers and other policy experts have expressed concern about the calls to restructure FEMA or even eliminate the agency, while also acknowledging necessary reforms. We're hopeful that as the nature of the Review Council becomes clearer, NEMA and our partners can help support solutions that improve FEMA, and the broader emergency management system.

Much of our team at NEMA was in Alexandria, Virginia this week for two events with many of our critical partners. On Tuesday, we participated in the NEMA/Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO)/Governors Homeland Security Advisors Council (GHSAC) Joint Policy Work Group meeting. That was followed on Wednesday by the National Homeland Security Consortium meeting. Not only do these meetings promote increased communication and coordination between emergency management, public health, and homeland security officials—they also help us build and maintain the critical relationships that we regularly leverage in support of our shared policy priorities.

We'll continue to grow these relationships and seek out opportunities to collaborate and share information in support of our shared goals.

[Upcoming Congressional Hearings...](#)

Examining the PRC's Strategic Port Investments in the Western Hemisphere and the Implications for Homeland Security, Part I

House Committee on Homeland Security
Wednesday, February 11; 10:00AM (ET)

Business Meeting to Consider Bills Related to SBA's Disaster Loan Program

Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship
Thursday, February 12: 9:30AM (ET)

[More News from the Nation's Capital...](#)

JUDGE HALTS FREEZE OF FEDERAL SPENDING, DESPITE WHITE HOUSE RETRACTION

On Friday, a federal judge blocked the Trump Administration from pausing federal grants, even after the White House walked back an OMB memo call for the freeze. In a temporary restraining order issued Friday, the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island sided with the opponents to the funding freeze, despite the rescission of the memo from OMB. The temporary restraining order remains in effect until further order from the court. It allows the administration to continue its review of funding programs, as identified in the OMB memo, but bars the government from withholding the money. Earlier last week, another federal judge issued a separate temporary restraining order against OMB's directive, shortly before the freeze had been set to take effect.

On Monday, a U.S. judge [extended the pause](#) on the administration's plan to freeze federal loans, grants, and other financial assistance, saying it may have "run roughshod" over Congress's constitutional authority over government spending.

DHS OIG REPORT: GOVERNANCE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

On Friday, the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) released a [report](#) examining federal agency use of artificial intelligence (AI). Federal agencies use AI to increase mission capabilities and improve services provided to the public. From 2022 to 2023, DHS reported increased use of AI to complete its critical mission of securing the homeland. The DHS OIG conducted this audit to determine the extent to which DHS has developed and implemented governance for the management of AI.

The report found that DHS has taken steps to develop guidance and establish oversight for AI use, but more action is needed to ensure DHS governs and manages AI use appropriately. DHS issued AI-specific guidance, appointed a Chief AI Officer, and established multiple working groups and its AI Task Force to help guide the Department's AI efforts. However, more action is needed to ensure DHS has appropriate governance for responsible and secure use of AI.

Additionally, DHS established an AI strategy to guide enterprise-wide AI goals and objectives, but it did not effectively execute the strategy because it did not develop an implementation plan. Further, DHS did not have adequate governance processes to monitor AI compliance with privacy and civil rights and civil liberties requirements due to resource challenges.

Lastly, DHS developed processes to track and report its use of AI to the public, as required, but the processes did not identify and track some of the data needed to report the Department's AI use cases. DHS also had limited evidence to demonstrate why it considered its AI use consistent with federal requirements, as DHS and its components did not have a formalized process to identify, review, and validate data included in the Department's mandated AI reporting.

FEMA RELEASES EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER SKILLSETS

On Tuesday, FEMA's National Integration Center released its updated NIMS Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Skillsets. The NIMS EOC Skillsets provide a flexible approach to EOC qualifications. EOC leaders can mix and match skillsets, combining them together to form EOC Position Task Books (PTB) that reflect the needs of their EOC. This update is based on best practices and lessons learned related to operations, the assessment of processes and transitioning, capabilities, infrastructure (technology), personnel, and comprehensive training to support temporary or extended virtual EOC operations or replace the typical EOC model with a hybrid/virtual option.

DHS OIG REPORT: OVERSIGHT OF COVID-19 EMERGENCY PROTECTIVE MEASURES GRANTS

The DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) recently [released a report](#) examining FEMA's oversight of COVID-19 emergency protective measures grants. DHS OIG conducted this audit to determine whether FEMA ensured federal funds for COVID-19 emergency protective measures reached intended recipients and subrecipients and were used as required. During fiscal years 2020 through 2023, recipients and subrecipients of FEMA's COVID-19 emergency protective measures grants that the OIG reviewed received federal funds as intended. However, FEMA over-obligated at least \$1.5 billion in funds for one state's medical staffing grant and did not determine the cost allowability of the \$8.1 billion in funds drawn down by the state. Additionally, the OIG reviewed a sample of 20 other grants and identified approximately \$32.8 million in improper payments. Finally, FEMA did not issue determination memorandums when denying or reducing reimbursement requests, as required.

These issues occurred due to the unprecedented circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and FEMA not following established requirements when delivering PA funding. For example, for the medical staffing grant, FEMA did not validate the reasonableness of cost estimates provided by the state before obligating funds. Further, FEMA experienced delays in its improper payment reviews of the state's expended funds due to an increased workload from COVID-19 and other major disasters. FEMA also delayed taking action to recoup unsupported costs it identified in its improper payment reviews and instead worked with the state to maximize reimbursements during the review process.

Insufficient oversight of the PA grants resulted in FEMA obligating \$1.5 billion in funds that could have been put to better use for other disasters, disbursing \$8.1 billion in questioned costs that have yet to be determined allowable, and making \$32.8 million in improper payments.

RAND RELEASES REPORT ON STATE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Recently, the RAND Corporation [released a report](#) providing a foundation for new thought leadership in emergency management. It aggregates top issues in the emergency management field and identifies priority issues for building a research agenda.

The literature review conducted for the report differs from others in that it includes both peer-reviewed literature and practitioner-oriented sources such as after-action reports (AARs) and congressional documents. It also draws on text-as-data methods using machine learning in addition to more traditional human-coded analysis. The report concludes with recommendations for future research and for how best to implement a thought leadership approach to the emergency management field.

This research was sponsored by the National Disaster and Emergency Management University (NDEMU) within FEMA and conducted in the Disaster Management and Resilience Program of the RAND Homeland Security Research Division (HSRD), which operates the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center (HSOAC).

FEMA WEBINAR: USING EXERCISE AND INCIDENT DATA TO DRIVE CHANGE FOR RISK ASSESSMENTS

FEMA is hosting three 60-minute webinars on the connections among continuous improvement activities, exercises, and the Threat Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment/Stakeholder Preparedness Review. The webinars will also consider how data from these activities can feed into the National Preparedness System.

This webinar is designed to support state, local, Tribal Nation and territorial partners, non-governmental organizations and the private sector's efforts to use exercise and real-world incident data to drive change through the Threat Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment/Stakeholder Preparedness Review and Integrated Preparedness Planning processes.

To register for the webinar, click on the "Register" link below:

- Webinar 1: 10-11 a.m. ET on Monday, Feb. 10 - [Register](#).
- Webinar 2: 2-3 p.m. ET on Thursday, Feb. 13 - [Register](#).
- Webinar 3: 4-5 p.m. ET on Tuesday, Feb. 18 - [Register](#).

Participants can download or read the National Continuous Improvement Guidance by visiting the [National Continuous Improvement Guidance Preparedness Toolkit](#).

Other News from DC and Around the Country...

Long Beach Post: [Investigation Targets LA County Emergency Alert System After Repeated Failures, False Alarms](#)

The Hill: [Republicans from Disaster-Prone Areas Back Trump's Push to Overhaul FEMA](#)

StateScoop: [State and Local Governments Should Prepare for Changes to CISA, Cyber Experts Say](#)

CIO Dive: [How Arlington County Used AI to Improve Emergency Preparedness](#)

Federal News Network: [CISA Hires Former DHS CIO into Top Cyber Position](#)

Bloomberg: [Don't Eliminate FEMA. Reform It.](#)

NextGov: [CISA Among DHS Offices Exempt from Taking OPM's Deferred Buyout Offer](#)

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