

**A Study of Core Functions in Emergency Management as
Reflected in Training Requirements for Professional
Certification**

by

Walter Guerry Green III

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A STUDY OF CORE FUNCTIONS IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
AS REFLECTED IN TRAINING REQUIREMENTS
FOR PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION

by

Walter Guerry Green III

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Walter Guerry Green III

has been approved

May 1999

APPROVED:

DAVID E. BALCH, Ph.D., Faculty Mentor and Chair

NORMAN PEARSON, Ph.D., D.B.A., Committee Member

SYBIL A. MCCLARY, Ph.D., Committee Member

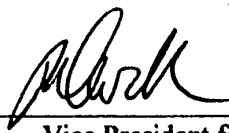
RICHARD W. LEATHERMAN, Ph.D., Committee Member

MARY V. MARSHALL, Committee Member

ACCEPTED AND SIGNED:



DAVID E. BALCH



Vice President for Academic Affairs
The Graduate School of America

ABSTRACT

This study examined emergency management certification programs in order to understand what the training requirements for state emergency management certification reveal about the core functions of emergency management as conducted by emergency managers working in local jurisdictions. Based on practices in the 23 certification programs managed by state emergency management agencies or professional associations at the time of the study, qualitative content analysis identified a range of core functions practiced by those programs that specified training requirements in terms of specific courses. The application of grounded theory techniques to interview data from certification program managers and state emergency management training officers in 50 states resulted in the development of the theory that training requirements are adopted to meet a variety of goals. These goals include those appropriate to perceived needs of the sponsoring organizations and individual emergency managers, as well as goals that seek to promote competent performance of emergency management tasks. The list of core functions identified in state-level certification programs generally agreed with a list of core functions developed from the literature, indicating that practitioners at the local, state, and federal level have a common understanding of the essential tasks of the evolving profession of emergency management as performed in local jurisdictions.

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NOTE TO READERS ON AUDIT TRAIL CITATIONS

In this study, the source of material derived from interviews of state emergency management agency personnel and state emergency management professional association officers is indicated by a citation using a reference number (e.g., 55d3.4) within parentheses. Individual numbers were assigned in the order in which the interviews were conducted. The use of a distinctive number preserves the confidentiality of interviews while providing an audit trail to assure the reader that statements in the study are grounded in respondent statements. The number, and the identification of individual subjects, is included in my field notes.

FORMAT NOTE

This document has been formatted to facilitate electronic and print publishing. As a result of that process, there have been minor changes in the spacing and location of tables and in pagination from the original dissertation.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Study

During the past forty years, certification of professional competence by organizations has exploded as a tool for individual and organizational development. At the same time emergency management, an essential public safety function concerned with the protection of life, property, and the environment in disasters, has changed its focus from national security population protection measures to a more balanced, all-hazards approach. With this change in focus has come a drive to recognize emergency management as a profession. As part of this ongoing development effort, certification programs conducted at the national and state level have emerged in the 1990s as an important component of the professionalization of the discipline.

Emergency management has not been the subject of extensive study, and even the basic demographics of practitioners in the field are not well understood. The data that have been gathered suggest that the duties and responsibilities of local emergency managers vary (Herman 1986) and that, in many cases, the personal skills of the emergency manager contribute significantly to defining the job (Drabek 1987). Even though model descriptions of knowledges, skills, and abilities have been developed for emergency management positions (National Coordinating Council on Emergency

Management 1991), these descriptions are not commonly used to define jobs. In this environment, the functions emergency managers perform have the potential to be shaped by training, tradition, local responsibilities and politics, plans, and a number of other sources.

Certification programs have the potential to become one of the influences that define the functions of emergency management. Currently, certification programs are sponsored by a national professional association, the International Association of Emergency Managers, and by state emergency management agencies and professional associations, with the number of the latter steadily increasing. It therefore becomes important to understand the emerging certification mechanisms and to identify whether the core functions on which they appear to be based are perceived to be of importance to the practice of emergency management in local jurisdictions. This study will provide a baseline for the examination of these issues by contributing to the understanding of the core functions incorporated in the training requirements of certification programs, identifying why these requirements may have been incorporated in certification, and comparing them with the core functions identified by the emergency management literature.

Background

Disasters Defined

An understanding of the roles and functions of emergency managers requires an understanding of their most demanding operational environment, the disaster. Disasters are defined in a variety of ways, based on the intended use of the definition and the roles

and capabilities of the organization writing the definition (Cuny 1986). However, an examination of comments by a variety of authors suggests it is possible to operationally define disasters based on the impacts on the jurisdiction and impacts on the emergency response resources and processes. There are also key legal definitions of disasters based on state and federal law, authorities, and actions associated with events that meet this classification.

Kramer and Bahme (1992, 2) define a disaster as “a sudden and unfortunate event that affects many people.” In materials designed for the training of third-world disaster managers, Cuny (1986, 13) defines a disaster as “a situation resulting from an environmental phenomenon or armed conflict that produces stress, personal injury, physical damage, and economic disruption of great magnitude.” Fischer (1994) highlights disruption to the daily routines of a large segment of the community as the basis for considering an event to be a disaster. When compared to emergencies, Kramer and Bahme (1992) point out that disasters are generally broader in the scope of geographical area and population affected and may have a wider variety of causation.

Hoetmer (1991) suggests that the definition of a disaster depends on the capabilities for response of the community to which the event happens. The size of the jurisdiction, the resources it has available for response, and the degree to which it is experienced in dealing with a particular class of event all determine what the threshold is that makes a disaster different from a routine emergency (Hoetmer 1991). Auf der Heide (1989) emphasizes that disasters are characterized by the need to perform emergency tasks in nonroutine ways in situations demanding rapid response. Herman (1982)

suggests that the critical aspect is that a disaster inflicts a sudden strain on normal emergency response systems. This is consistent with the commonly accepted emergency medical definition of a disaster as an event large enough and complicated enough to overwhelm the ability of existing resources to respond effectively (Seliger and Simoneau 1986). As a result of this overload on existing systems, Kramer and Bahme (1992) point out that disasters require more complex planning than other types of emergency events.

In addition to operational definitions, there is a specific legal definition, the federal version of which is embodied in the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Public Law 93-288, as amended):

“Major disaster” means any natural catastrophe (including any hurricane, tornado, storm, high water, wind-driven water, tidal wave, tsunami, earthquake, volcanic eruption, landslide, mudslide, snowstorm or drought), or, regardless of cause, any fire, flood, or explosion, in any part of the United States, which in the determination of the President causes damage of sufficient severity and magnitude to warrant major disaster assistance under this Act to supplement the efforts and available resources of States, local governments, and disaster relief organizations in alleviating the damage, loss, hardship, or suffering caused thereby. (U. S. Federal Emergency Management Agency 1996, B-4)

The specific process of determination that a disaster exists, as referenced in the Stafford Act, has parallel processes in local jurisdictions and states (see, for example, Michigan, Department of State Police, Emergency Management Division 1990). These legal determinations typically result in the release of funds to allow effective response and recovery actions, suspension of personnel and purchasing rules (Commonwealth of Virginia 1997), and authorization to use unusual procedures to resolve the emergency condition (Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Health, Office of Emergency Medical Services 1990).

Emergency Management

At its most simplistic, it is possible to describe emergency management as those things that government does to manage emergencies and disasters. Emergency management is thus a governmental public safety activity, in much the same context as the provision of law enforcement, fire prevention and suppression, and emergency medical services. The Federal Emergency Management Agency provides an explanation of the management element of the definition when it describes emergency management as the:

organized analysis, planning, decisionmaking, and assignment of available resources to mitigate (lessen the effects of or prevent), prepare for, respond to, and recover from the effects of all hazards. The goal of emergency management is to save lives, prevent injuries, and protect property and the environment if an emergency occurs. (U. S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, Emergency Management Institute 1990b, I-6)

Hoetmer, in the introduction to the influential, International City Management

Association text Emergency Management: Principles and Practice for Local Government,

broadens the definition to include applications of science and technology when he describes emergency management as:

the discipline and profession of applying science, technology, planning, and management to deal with extreme events that can injure or kill large numbers of people, do extensive damage to property, and disrupt community life. (Hoetmer 1991, xvii)

Although not cited in these definitions, it is important to understand that emergency management is an activity that is conducted by all levels of government, including local jurisdictions (cities, towns, and counties), regional authorities, states, and the federal government. Therefore, emergency management should be both horizontally integrated

(by mutual aid agreements between local jurisdictions and between states) and vertically integrated (local jurisdiction to state to federal government). The full range of modern emergency management programmatic and response activities can be described in terms of three theoretical constructs.

Comprehensive Emergency Management. The first of these, and probably the best understood in today's environment--Comprehensive Emergency Management--is described by the Federal Emergency Management Agency as including three components:

- (1) An all-hazards approach that incorporates joint planning for natural, technological, and national security hazards,
- (2) An emergency management partnership between all three levels of government--local, state, and federal; and
- (3) An emergency life cycle consisting of four phases-- mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery (U. S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, Emergency Management Institute 1997b).

These three components provide a basis for the development and exploration of the core functions of emergency management described in this study. An all-hazards approach requires that emergency managers be prepared with knowledge and skills needed to address a wide range of disaster conditions. The emergency management partnership between state and local emergency management provides a framework that accepts state level administration of certification aimed primarily at local emergency management personnel. At the same time, federally developed, professional training programs are delivered at the state level to train local emergency managers in the

essential duties purportedly evaluated by certification. Finally, the emergency life cycle provides a widely understood model of emergency management processes that serves as a functionally oriented framework for the analysis of the incidence of core functions and supracategories derived from these functions.

Integrated Emergency Management System. An Integrated Emergency Management System provides a framework for a community to use all of its resources, both governmental and private, to translate comprehensive emergency management into action. By providing guidelines for action and encouraging each community to build upon its existing capabilities, the integration process attempts to ensure local efforts fit into a national approach to emergency management. At the same time integration provides maximum flexibility to meet local needs in partnership with state and federal programs (Hoetmer 1991; U. S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, Emergency Management Institute 1997b).

Civil Defense. Civil Defense is the measures taken by government to protect the population, infrastructure, economy, and government from attack. The focus of Civil Defense is sustainment of national civilian capability as a key component of national security strategy (Mitchell 1966; Craig 1987). Today Civil Defense is seen as an interrelated component of the all-hazards approach of Comprehensive Emergency Management (U. S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, Emergency Management Institute 1997b).

Who Are the Emergency Managers?

As a population, emergency managers have been the subject of only limited

studies. Drabek's (1987) work during the 1980s described a sample population, with a focus on what made emergency managers successful in their organizational, social, and political environments. In 1991, the National Coordinating Council on Emergency Management surveyed emergency managers to gain basic data as part of the process of designing a national professional certification program (Chartrand August 1991). This effort addressed only primary emergency managers, and did not consider responses from all respondents. Again, in 1997, the National Coordinating Council on Emergency Management surveyed its own membership, but the results of this survey reflect a potentially elite population of local emergency managers mixed with supporting industry representatives, consultants, and state and federal employees. And, in 1998, the author surveyed 233 emergency managers,¹ deputy emergency managers, and administrative and technical staff members from Virginia cities and counties listed in the Virginia Department of Emergency Services (1998) directory of local emergency managers.

The Virginia survey offers the most recent and most in-depth look at working emergency managers in local jurisdictions. The majority, 58.6% (n=75), were employed in other positions, with emergency management being only one of their responsibilities. For these individuals, emergency management generated a median of 18.5% of their work load (with a range from 1% to 80%). The next largest group was full-time emergency managers, comprising 25% (n=32) of the work force, followed by part-time employees, 10.2% (n=13), and volunteers, 6.3% (n=8). The median part-time employee worked 14 hours a week. The work force was 87.5% (n=112) male, with a median age of 48.0 years.

¹ Return rate of this postal survey was 54.9% (n=128) from a single mailing.

The range in age (from 26 to 75) indicates that emergency management is not the initial form of employment and that, when volunteers and part-time employees are removed from the pool, individuals do not spend their entire working career as emergency managers. The mean salary, \$43,455, may well indicate why, especially as the median for full-time emergency managers was lower.

Only 3.1% (n=4) had a High School Diploma as their highest educational level. The rest had some higher education, including 16.4% (n=21) with Associate's degrees, 33.6% (n=43) with Bachelor's degrees, and 24.2% (n=31) with Master's degrees. Significantly, completion of specific emergency management training was relatively infrequent. Only 17.2% (n=22) of the emergency managers had completed the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Professional Development Series, a baseline series of courses designed to teach the fundamentals of developing an effective local emergency management program (U. S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, Emergency Management Institute 1997a). A smaller percentage was professionally certified, with 14.1% (n=18) having completed the International Association of Emergency Managers's Certified Emergency Manager credential.

A Summary History of Emergency Management in the United States

The Civil Defense period 1941-1970. Modern emergency management in the United States originated with the establishment of the Office of Civil Defense under the leadership of Fiorello LaGuardia in May 1941. During World War II, Civil Defense was one of many components of a large-scale mobilization of the civilian population for self-

protection and the preservation of infrastructure and manufacturing capabilities (Cohen 1991). Even before the cessation of hostilities, however, state and local Civil Defense programs were deactivated because of the perceived lack of a German or Japanese threat to the continental United States. At the national level, the Office of Civilian Defense was deactivated on June 30, 1945. Components of the federal system started to cease operations as early as May 29, 1944, when the Aircraft Warning Service was demobilized (Schlegel 1949).

The World War II experience set in place three important governmental practices that have influenced the perceptions and functions of emergency management to this day. First, the emergency management function was seen as transitory--an effort that could be started, closed down, and restarted when necessary, rather than a continuous commitment. Second, the need for civil defense was clearly threat driven; the absence of a credible, immediate threat obviated the need for a civil defense infrastructure. And finally, the role of civil defense was clearly national security, not disaster response. Forest fires provide an excellent example of this. Prior to World War II forest fires had been fought to protect settled areas from such disasters as the great Hinckley fire of 1894 (Swenson 1994; Cohen 1993). Once the United States was engaged in the War, protection of forests became a national security (and civil defense) priority because of the value of wood to the war effort (Neprud 1948).

The reestablishment of Civil Defense in 1949, following the explosion of the first Soviet nuclear weapon, set in motion a roller coaster of changes in organizational structure, strategy, and funding that was to haunt federal Civil Defense efforts until the

creation of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Three critical elements in United States Civil Defense planning appear for the first time in this period. First, Civil Defense emerged as a primarily local government responsibility. Second, Civil Defense at the federal level never developed a stable organizational home in one agency; between 1949 and 1979 a total of twelve government offices had primary responsibility for some or all of the nation's Civil Defense program (Dowling 1987). And third, basic strategy for response to the perceived threat (nuclear attack by ballistic missile and Long Range Aviation assets of the Soviet Union) alternated between blast sheltering, fallout sheltering, and evacuation, with changes in administrations and agencies (Blanchard 1985).

Transition 1970-1990. As perceptions of the threat of nuclear attack waned after the Cuban Missile Crisis, local and state emergency management personnel started to put increasing pressure on their federal counterparts to provide increased attention to the problems of disaster response. By 1971, a doctrine of dual use had been generally accepted, with capabilities designed for wartime being used to improve peacetime preparedness for natural and technological disasters. Gradually, the balance tipped further and further toward peacetime response activity, as successive administrations saw Civil Defense as potentially destabilizing the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction. In 1979, the consolidation of emergency management related functions in a new Federal Emergency Management Agency marked the effective end of Civil Defense as a significant national strategy and the start of a more proactive federal government policy toward natural disasters. However, even though the Soviet Union had clearly collapsed

as a military threat during the years of the Bush administration, the final elimination of Civil Defense as a primary subject area in professional training did not occur until 1993 (Gilboy 1998).

Comprehensive and Integrated Emergency Management. The 1990s marked the completion of the transition from a wartime to a disaster role for emergency management. The event that revolutionized emergency management's role was almost certainly Hurricane Andrew, which devastated south Florida in 1991. Widespread criticism of the federal response may have cost President Bush reelection (Longshore 1998) and fundamentally changed how the Federal Emergency Management Agency responds to catastrophic disasters. Subsequent federal responses to Northridge Earthquake and the 1993 Mid-West flooding highlighted improved performance in all four phases of the emergency management cycle and brought favorable attention to state and local emergency managers. The elevation of the Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency to cabinet status in 1997 meant that emergency management had finally emerged from the federal basement and to become a significant player in governmental circles.

Impact of history on function. Over the last twenty years, emergency management has played an increasingly important role in protecting lives and property and in preserving the economic infrastructure vital to community survival and recovery in disasters. However, the years of governmental perceptions of the irrelevance of preparing for nuclear attack have had a significant impact on the functions that emergency management performs and how it operates within local government. This impact extends

to the natural disaster threat. Because disasters are rare, many communities see little purpose in investing in a full time, educated, qualified professional to prepare for an event that may happen once in a decade (21a1.1).

Traditional Recognition in the Field

Prior to the development of professional certification and higher education degree programs, the de facto certification for emergency managers was completion of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Professional Development Series. First offered 1985, this sequence of eight training courses, including a capstone course at the National Emergency Training Center, resulted in the award of the Professional Development Series Certificate (U. S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, Emergency Management Institute 1997a, 83). An average of 8,000 students a year enroll in one or more courses, and, since 1987, a total of 1,598 individuals have completed the series (Gilboy 1998). Although the curriculum has changed, with deletion of Civil Defense, finance, and capstone courses, and addition of an exercise design course, the Professional Development Series remains part of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's training effort. However, the advent of the Certified Emergency Manager credential caused some emergency managers to reevaluate the need for Series completion (01a2.1). Certification requires 100 hours of professional training (as opposed to 142 hours for the Series) (U. S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, Emergency Management Institute 1997a) and does not specify completion of the Professional Development Series (International Association of Emergency Managers 1998).

The other long-standing form of recognition for emergency managers has been