



September 22, 2026

MEMORANDUM FOR: All FEMA Personnel

FROM: Cameron Hamilton
Administrator 

SUBJECT: **FEMA Definition of Emergency Management and Professional Framework**

Purpose: Emergency Management requires consistency and alignment with mission requirements as well as the legal framework of existing authorities. Until now, the field has struggled to articulate the scope of work, which has diluted our credibility, capability, and professional development. This memorandum solidifies the definition of Emergency Management as well as core characteristics of Emergency Management as a profession.

Background: FEMA describes **Emergency Management** as “the strategic coordination of emergency services to protect life, property, and continuity of operations.” This definition establishes a clear scope for emergency management and provides a common foundation for the profession.

Over time, the field of emergency management has expanded well beyond its original operational purpose, evolving to include new programs, responsibilities, priorities, and expectations, driven in large part by the solution-oriented approach of professionals working in crisis response. Despite this growth, operational and functional characteristics should guide what is appropriately included within the broader emergency management mission space.

We must return to the basics.

Clear requirements, supported by core objectives and principles, are essential to building and sustaining a stronger profession. Emergency managers should share a common understanding of their purpose, responsibilities, professional skills, and relationship with the emergency services they coordinate. This standard should apply regardless of where an emergency manager serves, including government, healthcare, education, private industry, critical infrastructure, nonprofit organizations, or other sectors.

Defined operational boundaries strengthen emergency management partnerships and improve interoperability.

Emergency services partners, executives, policymakers, and other stakeholders should understand what capabilities to expect from an emergency manager and where emergency management responsibilities begin and end. Likewise, emergency managers must understand the capabilities, authorities, limitations, and expectations of the organizations they coordinate.

This clarity is particularly important for FEMA. As the Nation's lead emergency management agency, FEMA has a responsibility to clearly articulate the profession it represents and ensure its programs, doctrine, training, and operations reinforce that standard.

Through this coordination framework, emergency managers provide direct execution and project management activities within the disaster lifecycle. Emergency managers work in emergency operation centers, in the field, and in every sector across the Nation. Defining FEMA's emergency management scope does not exclude or prevent career specific avenues that create fulfillment in the many spaces that support lifesaving work. Rather, it enhances the ability to accomplish work in these spheres of influence.

National Preparedness Month provides an appropriate opportunity to do so. As FEMA promotes readiness across the Nation, it will also strengthen the professional foundation responsible for coordinating that readiness.

Framework: Professional emergency managers should expect to deliver support through the following activities listed below as:

- *12 Coordination Responsibilities and;*
- *Professional Skills of Emergency Management*

These are not siloed responsibilities, but rather cohesive functions that provide problem solving capacity and consistent outcomes. The aim of emergency managers should be to create the greatest opportunity to minimize impacts of disasters on individuals and systems.

12 Coordination Responsibilities of Emergency Management

1. Capacity Building

Activities conducted before an incident to enhance readiness. This includes planning, training, exercises, resource inventories, mutual aid agreements, continuity planning, and education. Emergency managers aggregate and analyze information to understand the operating environment, identify information gaps, develop data-backed hazard vulnerability assessments, understand natural, manmade, and technological hazards through a risk informed approach and translate identified risks into plans, priorities, and multi-year program objectives.

2. Laws, Policy, and Regulation

Understanding and applying the laws, authorities, regulations, policies, and doctrine governing the emergency management environment and working with leadership and policymakers to improve operational outcomes.

3. Threat Protection Management

Actions taken to avoid, deter, or stop an incident, and actions related to people, facilities, systems, and critical infrastructure. Examples include security measures, threat monitoring, access controls, protective planning, and risk reduction activities. Emergency managers must understand how identified threats and vulnerabilities may create broader

consequences and coordinate appropriate protective actions across emergency services and supporting organizations.

4. Public and Crisis Communications

Communicating with the public and media to facilitate protective actions, provide timely information, reduce risk, manage expectations, maintain credibility, and persuade populations to take necessary action. This includes alert and warning notifications and information sharing.

5. Disaster Impact Reduction and Consequence Management

Management and reduction of the effects of hazards and incidents, especially impacts to people, property, infrastructure, and operations. This includes collecting, validating, analyzing, and sharing timely information regarding incident conditions, risks, needs, resources, and cascading consequences.

6. Operational Response

Immediate actions to save lives, stabilize the incident, protect property, maintain continuity, and meet basic human needs. This includes managing the disaster through coordination of emergency services organized as Emergency Support Functions and organizing stabilization efforts of the eight Community Lifelines.

7. Damage Assessment and Impact Analysis

Assessing physical, operational, and human impacts to guide operational priorities, assistance requests, decision-making, cost documentation, and immediate and short-term recovery. Emergency managers leverage assets such as technologies and teams to accomplish this work.

8. Incident Command and Decision Authority

Use of organized structures of command and control such as the Incident Command System. This includes multiagency coordination in Unified Command groups that align priorities, assign responsibilities, and support or provide decision-making actions. Emergency managers work across government, private-sector, nonprofit, faith-based, military, community, and other organizations to unify efforts and address shortfalls in lifesaving, life-sustaining disaster operations.

9. Resource Management and Logistics

Identifying, requesting, prioritizing, deploying, tracking, sustaining, and demobilizing personnel, equipment, supplies, facilities, and services necessary for emergency operations.

10. Continuity of Operations

Maintaining essential operational functions before, during, and after a crisis, including succession planning, alternate facilities, priority economic investments, communications, critical dependencies, and restoration of essential services.

11. Immediate and Short-Term Recovery

Actions necessary to stabilize affected organizations and communities, restore critical services and essential functions, address immediate consequences, and transition longer-term responsibilities to the appropriate organizations of domain.

12. Continuous Improvement

Evaluating performance following exercises and incidents through after-action reporting. This includes identifying lessons and capability gaps, implementing corrective actions, and continuously improving tactics, techniques, procedures, technologies, plans, and operational approaches.

All FEMA components will review and update applicable doctrine, policies, guidance, training, websites, workforce materials, planning and exercise products, publications, presentations, and other internal and public-facing materials to align with this definition and framework.

FEMA will adopt this refined scope along with the 12 Coordination Responsibilities and Professional Skills of Emergency Management established in this memorandum. The definition will also be incorporated into FEMA Acronyms, Abbreviations and Terms: A Capability Assurance Job and Field Aid, as well as other foundational Agency references. Future development of FEMA doctrine, training, workforce standards, and professional development efforts will use this framework as their foundation.

Future instruction and policy will provide additional guidance defining FEMA's scope by applying this definition to the Agency's authorities, programs, and responsibilities, and by establishing how FEMA will interpret and apply its role in helping disaster survivors through greater state governance.

Professional Skills of Emergency Management

Emergency managers should maintain a high level of proficiency in:

- **Command, Control, and Coordination** — Operate effectively within NIMS, ICS, Unified Command, EOCs, multiagency coordination structures, and other command and coordination systems appropriate to the operating environment.
- **Consequence Analysis and Management** — Anticipate primary, secondary, and cascading consequences of incidents; understand impacts across people, property, infrastructure, operations, and continuity; and identify actions that can reduce those consequences.
- **Planning and Plan Development** — Develop and maintain Emergency Operations Plans, primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency (PACE) plans, operational decision matrices, exercise plans, continuity plans, hazard mitigation plans, multi-year program objectives, and supporting procedures appropriate to their organizations.

- **Decision-Making Under Pressure** — Make defensible decisions with limited or incomplete information and within time constraints while identifying what additional information is needed and understanding the consequences of action, delay, or inaction.
- **Risk Analysis and Hazard Vulnerability Assessments** — Aggregate, analyze, and interpret quantitative and qualitative data to calculate risk, identify vulnerabilities and information gaps, understand cascading impacts, and build a risk profile unique to the operating environment.
- **Technical Writing** — Develop clear, actionable assessments, plans, procedures, reports, executive products, operational documents, and recommendations appropriate for technical and nontechnical audiences.
- **Information and Intelligence Analysis** — Collect and validate relevant information, recognize intelligence gaps, distinguish fact from assumption, reconcile conflicting information, and develop a holistic understanding of the operating environment.
- **Complex Problem Solving** — Define ambiguous problems, identify root causes, anticipate consequences, develop courses of action, evaluate tradeoffs, and translate challenges into executable solutions.
- **Cross-Functional Coordination** — Coordinate emergency services, executives, government, military, private-sector organizations, technical specialists, nonprofits, community organizations, and other stakeholders with different authorities, terminology, priorities, and capabilities.
- **Communication and Translation** — Communicate clearly across disciplines and levels of leadership; translate technical and function-specific information into common language; manage expectations; conduct operational briefings; and communicate complex conditions and recommendations concisely.
- **Public and Crisis Communication** — Communicate effectively with stakeholders, the public, and media to provide updates, communicate risk, facilitate protective actions, maintain credibility, and persuade populations to take appropriate action.
- **Project and Program Management** — Manage complex, multi-year, multi-functional initiatives, deliverables, budgets, dependencies, timelines, performance measures, and competing priorities involving multiple organizations.
- **Resource Management and Logistics** — Identify requirements and understand the requesting, prioritization, deployment, tracking, sustainment, and demobilization of personnel, equipment, supplies, facilities, and services, including supply-chain and resource limitations.
- **Situational Awareness and Common Operating Picture Development** — Aggregate operational information, identify critical information requirements and gaps, analyze changing conditions, and develop products that provide leadership and emergency services with a common understanding of the situation.

- **Geospatial and Operational Information Interpretation** — Read and interpret hazard maps, GIS products, weather information, infrastructure maps, force and resource lay-downs, damage information, models, forecasts, and other operational products.
- **Training and Exercise Design** — Develop and conduct training, tabletop exercises, functional exercises, full-scale exercises, simulations, and other activities that build capability, validate plans, test decision-making, and identify operational gaps.
- **After-Action Analysis and Corrective Action** — Objectively evaluate exercises and incidents, identify root causes and capability gaps, develop corrective actions, assign measurable improvements, and validate whether identified deficiencies have been corrected.
- **Organizational and Operational Analysis** — Understand an organization's mission, people, facilities, systems, dependencies, budgets, logistics, supply chains, authorities, capabilities, and limitations and how they affect emergency operations.
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Information Collection** — Identify who possesses necessary information and authorities, build effective working relationships, ask the right questions, extract relevant information, reconcile competing priorities, and convert stakeholder knowledge into operational understanding.
- **Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTP) Development** — Continuously evaluate and improve TTPs, processes, technologies, and operational approaches to increase effectiveness, efficiency, coordination, and readiness.

Continuous Professional Proficiency: Emergency Management is an operational profession. Emergency managers must maintain proficiency through continuous training, exercises, practical application, professional education, and study of major incidents and lessons learned.

Professional development must remain current with natural, manmade, and technological hazards; applicable laws and policies; NIMS and ICS; emerging technologies; emergency communications; and evolving tactics, techniques, and procedures.

Conclusion: Through a more standardized approach, the field of Emergency Management, as well as operational stakeholders, will be further empowered to achieve success and excellence in the delivery of mission objectives in times of crisis or disruption. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities as well as foundational alignment will produce better results, and ultimately a more secure homeland.