

Preparing for Emergencies: What is Emergency Management?

With the recent hurricanes in New Orleans, Texas and Florida, people are wondering about emergency management and what it is supposed to do.

Individuals/Families

Every citizen in this country is part of the emergency management system. The system is intended to protect people and property from all types of disasters. Think of the national emergency management system as a pyramid with you, the citizen, forming the base of the structure. At this level, you have a responsibility to protect yourself and your family by knowing what to do before, during, and after a disaster. You are responsible for your safety and your family's safety above everything else. Some examples of what you can do to protect yourself and your family include:

Before a Disaster

- Know the risks and danger signs of an impending emergency.
- Purchase insurance (including flood insurance, which is not part of your homeowner's policy).
- Develop plans for what to do in response to an emergency.
- Assemble a disaster supply kit.
- Volunteer to help others.
- Take first aid and CPR training

During the Disaster

- Put your plan into action.
- Help others.
- Follow the advice and guidance of officials in charge of local emergency management.

After the Disaster

- Repair damaged property.
- Take steps to prevent or reduce future loss.

Businesses and other Entities

Businesses and other entities like local schools, churches and the University of Louisville make up the next tier on the emergency management pyramid. These entities are much like the individual, but they must extend past the protection of an individual's life and property to protection of the entity as a whole.

In the example of the University, plans have been developed to respond to large and small emergencies in order to protect its human resources and property. The goal of the University's plan moves from life and property protection in the initial stages of the emergency to a rapid return to normal operations. The University has developed plans and systems to warn people in the event of a major emergency and advise faculty, staff and students what actions to take to protect themselves. The University also has a plan to bring the University emergency management team together and respond to the emergency, directing the appropriate resources to events on any of the campuses.

Local Government

It is sometimes necessary to turn to others within the local community for help. When the disaster exceeds your capabilities to handle it yourself, or the University to handle it, you need to get additional assistance. Louisville Metro Emergency Management Agency is the third tier of the pyramid, and is made up of paid employees and volunteers from the private and public sectors. These individuals are engaged in preventing emergencies from happening and in being prepared to respond if something does occur. Most emergencies are handled at the local level, which puts a tremendous responsibility on the community for taking care of its citizens. Among the responsibilities faced by Louisville officials are:



- Identifying hazards and assessing potential risk to the community.
- Enforcing building codes, zoning ordinances, and land-use management programs.
- Coordinating emergency plans to ensure a quick and effective response.
- Fighting fires and responding to hazardous materials incidents.
- Establishing warning systems.
- Stocking emergency supplies and equipment.
- Assessing damage and identifying needs.
- Evacuating the community to safer locations.
- Taking care of the injured.
- Sheltering those who cannot remain in their homes.
- Aiding recovery efforts.

State Government



If support and resources are needed beyond what the Louisville Metro government can provide, the mayor can request assistance from the state through the Kentucky Division of Emergency Management. The state may be able to provide supplemental resources such as money, equipment, and personnel to close the gap between what is needed and what is available at the local level. The state also coordinates the plans of the various jurisdictions so that activities do not interfere or conflict with each other.

Federal Government

At the top of the pyramid is the federal government, which can provide resources to augment state and local efforts. These resources can be in the form of:



- Public educational materials, such as this guide, that can be used to prepare the public for protecting itself from hazards.
- Financial grants for equipment, training, exercises, personnel and programs.
- Grants and loans to help communities respond to and recover from disasters so severe that the President of the United States has deemed them beyond state and local capabilities.
- Research findings that can help reduce losses from disaster.
- Technical assistance to help build stronger programs.

The national emergency management system is built on shared responsibilities and active participation at all levels of the pyramid. The whole system begins with you, the citizen, and your ability to follow good emergency management practices— whether at home, work, or other locations.

The Emergency Management Cycle



Emergency management is a cyclical system that includes four points:

Preparation is any activity taken in advance of an emergency that develops operational capabilities and facilitates an effective response. This includes having emergency plans, weather radios and other emergency equipment like personal disaster supplies.

Mitigation is any activity taken to eliminate or reduce the degree of long-term risk to human life and property from natural and man made hazards. Mitigation assumes that society is exposed to risks whether or not an emergency occurs.

Response is any action taken immediately before, during, or after an emergency occurs to save lives, minimize damage to property, and enhance the effectiveness of recovery.

Recovery is short-term activity designed to return vital life-support systems and long-term activity designed to return life to normal or improved levels.

Each tier of the emergency management system uses this cyclical system to prepare and respond to major and minor disasters.

In the case of the University, severe weather preparation has been an important part of emergency management. The University has prepared for severe weather by having building emergency action plans (BEAPs), weather radios in every building and having tornado drills annually. The University has mitigated some hazards by pruning trees that could become missiles during a wind storm and putting concrete barriers up to prevent flood water from entering buildings along Floyd Street on Belknap Campus. The University Police, DEHS and Physical Plant staff are ready to respond to a severe storm. Employees in buildings are ready to respond (using their BEAPs) in the event they are warned of a tornado. Finally, the University will work to return to normal business as soon as possible.