

How emergency management evolved from a centralized to a decentralized approach

[Business](#), [Management](#)



This essay will discuss how emergency management evolved from a centralized to a decentralized approach. It will also discuss the pros and cons of a decentralized approach. I will give my thoughts on the advantages of this approach.

Disaster Management was first introduced during the War of 1812 in the form of civil defense (Sykes, 2015). When the Cold War started many communities were forced to continue civil defense (Sykes, 2015). President Truman and President Dwight were the first to ensure the nation prepared for a nuclear attack against the U. S (Sykes, 2015). In 1950, the Civil Defense Act of 1950 was enacted which gave states most of the civil defense responsibility (Sykes, 2015). From the act arose the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA), which developed policies to guide states (Sykes, 2015). At the time the government wanted to ensure states were not becoming dependent on the federal government, a term Sykes (2015) call self-help. During the Truman reign funding from the federal government remained minimal.

The Federal Disaster Relief Act of 1950 set up the first framework and process for state and local authorities to request financial assistance from the government (Sykes, 2015). The act made requesting funds from the federal government a bit easier and was to be used primarily for supplemental support. Governors were now able to request assistance directly from the President without intervention from congress (Sykes, 2015). When President Johnson came in office there were several natural disasters that took place, due to this more focused was put on providing help to local

citizens who experienced disasters. The outcome was the Disaster Relief Act of 1966. Sykes (2015) explains the act linked the civil defense warning systems with threats from natural disasters, which created a dual-use policy. In 1973, DoD merged civil defense and natural disaster management (Sykes, 2015). In 1978, history was changed as the Civil Defense Act of 1950 was amended and now state and local authorities could request funding for natural disaster preparedness. This was significant as this funding for many years was restricted and only used to prepare for military attacks (Sykes, 2015).

During the 1960s and 1970s the government focused less on building structures to prevent natural disasters and more on environmental factors that played a role in natural disasters (Sykes, 2015). The Disaster Relief Act of 1974 included the Individual and Family Grant (IFG) program. This program helped provide cash to people who were affected by natural disasters. The cash could be used to purchase furniture, clothes and essentials. It also mandated local, state, and federal agencies to develop strategies to prevent disasters (Sykes, 2015). In 1979, President Carter established the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (Kapucu & Ozerdem, 2013). A single agency designed to prepare and respond to all major civil emergencies (Sykes, 2015). Most of the presidential responsibility during a natural disaster went to the director of FEMA.

Local communities were the first to start emergency management. As years went on, assistance from federal government increased. As it increased the federal government declared certain procedures and resources for local and

state authorities. The government became more involved more so as a support system to local authorities. Federal agencies went from providing shelters to issuing states to provide strategies for disaster prevention. States were slowly relying on the governments assistance due to a lack of local resources. To increase coordination and more effective measures for disaster management the federal government thought a single agency FEMA may be more effective than several agencies working together. Now states have all the initial responsibility but can request assistance from the federal government as needed.

Pros to the decentralized approach include local authorities can better respond to those in need. For example, if a flood happens local authorities may be able to respond to people who are unable to get out of their flooded communities. The local authorities know the area and can better navigate to help communities in their area, they have more knowledge. The federal government would need more time to do so and they would not be as efficient, as they will need time to understand the area and situation.

Another pro is the decentralized approach offers more effective policies and procedures. In a centralized approach emergency managers focus is more so strategic. Guidance may be broad and general. In a decentralized approach, local emergency managers may provide more in-depth procedures and guidelines (Day, 2016). They also may be able to adjust policies more frequently as they do not have to go through stricter policy rules than federal government. They could also find solutions faster than a federal agency as they are the ones on the ground doing everything.

As for cons local authorities sometimes lack the resources needed to deal with a natural disaster. Often, they require the assistance of federal government. This makes local authorities somewhat dependent on the federal assistance. Therefore, using them not simply as a support system but as their main response to a disaster. Another con is sometimes local authorities do not have a unified system or procedures for all emergency managers. Methods used amongst different agencies may be different. They may not use the same communication tools, have different strategies and tactics on how they approach a natural disaster which can result in confusion and local authorities not being able to effectively respond to natural disasters.

An advantage to the decentralized approach is it gives the local authorities a chance to become dependent on themselves. This way they can create more effective policies and procedures. After, have several emergencies occur. Local authorities will figure out how to handle emergencies themselves. As you see with many states, after a disaster occurs they've acted and started to develop more effective strategies and tactics for future encounters.

A disadvantage is not having accessible resources needed at the time of a disaster. If a local authority has limited resources, it may be difficult for them to handle certain disasters. It's quite difficult and frustrating when you are unable to help citizens effectively prepare for or post a natural disaster. Local agencies will have to continuously go through hardship until their state or local authority has an effective plan in place.

All agencies should be involved in the emergency management process.

Unified and organized measures should be in place to help ensure effective plans and policies. No matter what the approach is we need to understand having systems in place that all levels of government can follow is key.