

Emergency response



Emergency Response Disasters and emergency situations are not new in America. The country has been hit by several natural and manmade disasters over the years. Due to rate at which some of these disasters occur, the federal government has put in place measures that are meant to help deal with emergency situations. Emergency response is one of the aspects of disaster management. It entails the mitigation of the impact of a disaster on property, the environment. These mitigation measures are designed to prevent further loss of lives or property (Haddow, Bullock and Coppola, 2010). The decisions taken during the response phase in disaster management should help restore order and re-establish a state of normality mainly through rehabilitation and reconstruction. In the United States, the Department of Homeland Security is responsible for planning for and conducting emergency response services (Perry and Lindell, 2003). During the emergency response phase, first responders are posted in the disaster area, while the necessary emergency services are mobilized. Some of the core services during this phase include policing, ambulance and firefighting services. Recent research information shows that although the federal government has put measures in place to aid in efficient response during emergencies, there is much more that needs to be done to ensure that further loss of life and damage to property and the environment does not occur (Waugh and Streib, 2006). During recent times, the government's response to disasters such as the Florida floods in 2004 and Hurricane Katrina a year later has drawn a lot of criticism from what is seen as lackluster efforts from government to respond to the disasters in time (Sene, 2008). For homeland security, scholars argue that since the country is at risk of domestic and international terrorist attacks, more should be done to

enable quick response in case a September 11 disaster occurs again (Radvanovsky, and McDougall, 2010). There is general concurrence that a lack of a strong response strategy for terrorism attacks in the country's emergency management plans can lead to massive loss of lives and property.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency or FEMA is the federal organization charged with the responsibility of dealing with emergencies. The agency coordinates government's efforts in the preparation for, prevention and mitigation of the effects of disasters that occur on American soil (Sene, 2008). The body is also responsible for response and recovery measures from domestic disasters. The disasters or emergency situations that FEMA is responsible for include both natural and man-made, such as terrorism acts. FEMA's history goes as far back as 1803 when the Congressional Act was passed (der Heide, 2007).

Since 2003, FEMA has been an agency operated under the Department of Homeland Security (Miskel, 2008). It is an integral part of the Response Directorate in the department. The agency's response system is based on teams that are decentralized and are trained in areas such as Mobile Emergency Response Support. These response teams take care of the safety of the local public by providing communications support. FEMA offers a wide range of training for emergency responders under its Training and Education Division (Radvanovsky, and McDougall, 2010). Due to its perceived failures during Hurricane Katrina, the Post-Katrina Emergency Reform Act was passed to help seal some of the gaps in the agency that made it inefficient in disaster response (Phelan, 2008). Emergency response plans in future should involve well coordinated efforts between the government and volunteer or

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non-governmental organizations (Burns, 2010). FEMA should also have plans to coordinate communication more effectively during the response stage of disaster management so as to minimize loss of lives and property.

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