

Best Practices Review:

## County Emergency Management Activities

November 2006

# Report Highlights ■

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***A total of \$39.9 million in federal and state funds was available for emergency management in FY 2005-06.***

***In 2006, counties reported budgeting most emergency management funds for personnel.***

***Some county emergency management plans include or organize information in ways that could be helpful to others.***

***Weather-related emergencies are the emergencies most frequently reported in Wisconsin.***

Emergency management includes efforts taken by the State and local governments to prepare for and minimize the effects on citizens of hostile action and natural or man-made disasters, and to restore vital public services and facilities that are destroyed or damaged by such action or disaster. In Wisconsin, counties have primary responsibility for coordinating emergency management activities within their borders. The Department of Military Affairs (DMA) is the lead state agency in planning for and responding to emergencies and its Division of Emergency Management is responsible for coordinating federal, state, local, and private emergency management activities statewide.

Under s. 13.94(8), Wis. Stats., the Legislative Audit Bureau is required to conduct periodic best practices reviews of local government operations. This report, which focuses on assisting local governments in preparing for and responding to future emergencies:

- summarizes the state and local emergency management requirements established in ch. 166, Wis. Stats.;
- includes the results of our survey of the emergency management directors of all 72 Wisconsin counties; and
- provides information on federal emergency management grant funding awarded both by DMA and the Office of Justice Assistance (OJA).

## Key Facts and Findings

*Only 27 of the 40 emergency management directors reported spending 100 percent of their time on emergency management duties.*

*County emergency management plans contain a basic plan and 12 appendices.*

*Funding for personnel was the most significant unmet need cited by survey respondents.*

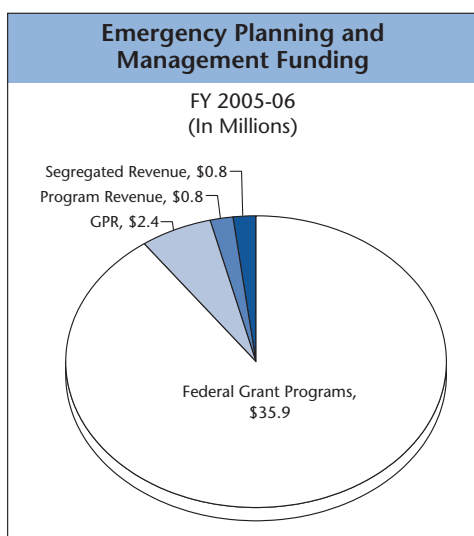
*It is critical that emergency management personnel be able to communicate with one another before, during, and after an emergency.*

*The Legislature has taken action to increase the use of mutual aid agreements.*

*We identified eight best practices for local governments to consider in planning for and responding to emergencies.*

## Funding Emergency Management

Grants awarded by the federal Department of Homeland Security are the primary source of emergency management funding available to counties through DMA and OJA, but some state funds are also provided by these agencies. Federal funds accounted for 90.0 percent of the \$39.9 million available through DMA and OJA in FY 2005-06.



Counties received \$19.4 million of the \$39.9 million available to fund emergency management in FY 2005-06. Municipalities and school districts received \$14.8 million, and \$3.9 million was provided to state agencies for a variety of

programmatic and administrative purposes. The remaining \$1.8 million was provided to technical colleges, the University of Wisconsin (UW) System, and Native American tribes.

## Use of Funding

The 36 county emergency management directors who responded to a survey question on budgets reported budgeting 60.5 percent of available emergency management funds for personnel, 16.2 percent for the purchase of equipment, and 23.3 percent for other expenses such as training.

Counties with larger populations tended to report dedicating a somewhat smaller percentage of their emergency management funds for personnel. However, 21 of 36 respondents indicated that their largest unmet financial need was for more personnel.

## Preparing for Emergencies

Emergency management literature concludes that effective plans include information to aid in preparation, prevention, coordination of emergency activities, and recovery, with the primary goal of safeguarding lives. All ten county plans we reviewed followed the

format required by DMA. Some went significantly beyond the minimum requirements for the type and amount of information included and how the content was organized to make information more easily accessible during an emergency.

For example, some county plans include checklists that delineate specific tasks, assignments, and responsibilities associated with responding to various types of emergencies. Some plans list agencies that can provide assistance such as law enforcement, human services, and communications. Other plans consolidate emergency contact information so that it is easy to find and can be updated on a regular basis.

### Types of Emergencies

More than three-quarters of the 38 respondents to our survey question reported that recent emergencies faced by their counties were weather-related events such as flooding, tornadoes, hail, and high winds.

Nineteen respondents indicated that they encountered unanticipated problems in responding to recent emergencies, including that municipalities were not sufficiently prepared for an emergency, systems

were not in place to manage volunteers, and local responding agencies had difficulty communicating because of incompatible radio systems.

### Responding to Emergencies

In response to our survey, county emergency management directors noted that the most common methods used initially to alert the public in case of emergency are television and radio messages and sirens.

Of 38 survey respondents, 19 indicated their counties can easily communicate with emergency responders, while the other 19 indicated they could not. The State Interoperability Executive Council, representing state agencies and local government emergency services personnel, has drafted a

plan to support statewide communications systems for use in emergencies. In addition, several counties have formed alliances to coordinate emergency communication efforts.

Because a single local government may find it difficult to respond to large emergencies, statutes allow local governments to contract with one another for the provision of services. In addition, the Legislature has taken action to increase the use of mutual aid agreements.

2005 Wisconsin Act 257 addresses the deployment of fire, rescue, and emergency medical services personnel and equipment to a local government that requests assistance when it cannot adequately respond to an emergency on its own. To date, at least 10 counties have entered into mutual aid agreements for these services. At least 20 others are in the process of doing so.

Initial Methods Used to Alert the Public	
Method	Number of Counties
Television/Radio Messages	36
Sirens	32
Emergency Vehicle Loudspeaker	27
Mass Telephone Calls	8
E-mail Messages	6
Other	11

## Best Practices

It is a best practice for county governments to:

- ☑ provide sufficient detail in their emergency management plans for government officials, first responders, and other emergency management staff; include checklists of established procedures; and consolidate emergency contact information so that it can be readily and regularly updated (p. 30);
- ☑ contact all municipalities in their county at least annually to discuss the municipalities' emergency management responsibilities and their resources for responding to emergencies, explain the county resources available to help municipalities respond to emergencies, and ensure municipalities' emergency management plans are coordinated with their county's (p. 36);
- ☑ conduct a formal assessment after an emergency occurs (p. 43);
- ☑ identify multiple means of alerting the public to emergencies (p. 44);
- ☑ establish interoperable communications systems for use in emergencies (p. 45);
- ☑ execute mutual aid agreements with adjacent and nearby local governments to obtain essential emergency management services (p. 47);
- ☑ include in local emergency management plans decision points that can assist officials in determining whether the full provisions of a plan should be activated (p. 48); and
- ☑ conduct emergency training that has clear objectives, is related to the types of emergencies most likely to occur within their jurisdictions, and represents everyone with responsibilities in an emergency, including emergency responders, public officials, and the private sector (p. 49).

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## Additional Information

For a copy of this best practices report, call (608) 266-2818 or visit our Web site:



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