

HSA@20 Episode Companion: Evolution of Emergency Management

September 1, 2023

This Insight accompanies the “Evolution of Emergency Management” episode of *The Homeland Security Act at 20* podcast series and includes background information on the issues discussed during the podcast.

Click this [link](#) to ask questions, provide feedback, or offer suggestions for future topics. You can also email the podcast team at HSA20@loc.gov. Thank you for your engagement.

Initial History

The Federal Disaster Assistance Administration (FDAA) at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was established by [Reorganization Plan No. 1 of 1973](#).

- Dissolved the Executive Office of the President’s Office of Emergency Preparedness.
- All of the office’s functions related to preparedness for and relief of civil emergencies and disasters were transferred to HUD.
- Other pieces of emergency management remained elsewhere, such as the Department of Defense and Department of Commerce.

This reorganization was the first of several driven in part by response and recovery efforts after [Hurricane Agnes](#).

Frustration remained among state emergency managers with the process of finding assistance.

FEMA Establishment

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was established as an independent agency under [Reorganization Plan No. 3 of 1978](#).

- Five agencies from the Departments of Defense, Commerce, HUD, and the General Services Administration were merged.
- The Plan noted that “Most State and local governments have consolidated emergency planning, preparedness and response functions on an ‘all hazard’ basis to take advantage

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of the similarities in preparing for and responding to the full range of potential emergencies. The Federal Government can and should follow this lead.”

Establishing the Nonfederal Share

The Mount St. Helens eruption declaration was the first time public assistance for federal disasters required a 25% monetary nonfederal cost share.

- The nonfederal share of assistance was outlined in the federal-state agreement outlining the assistance requested by the state and to be provided by FEMA.
- Since the Disaster Relief Act of 1974, a 25% nonfederal share had been required for assistance to individuals and families.
- Requiring cost-sharing was [not universally popular](#). See CRS Report R47646, *Stafford Act Cost Shares: History, Trends, Analysis*, for further discussion.

Early Struggles

[Government Accountability Office \(GAO\) criticism of FEMA management.](#)

[Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Amendments of 1988:](#)

- Renamed the Disaster Relief Act of 1974 the Robert T. Stafford “Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act,” and together, these two measures formed the foundation of current federal disaster policy.
- Put the 75% cost share for FEMA’s Public Assistance program in statute.

The [Inspector General Act Amendments of 1988](#) created a FEMA Office of Inspector General.

[GAO report on Hurricane Hugo and Loma Prieta Earthquake.](#)

Selected remarks from Senator Hollings regarding FEMA:

- [September 28, 1989](#);
- [October 2, 1989](#); and
- [October 6, 1989](#).

FEMA Elevated

Clinton Administration / James Lee Witt

- Public perception of [agency revitalization](#) under the Clinton Administration
- [Northridge earthquake and mitigation](#)
- February 1996: FEMA was elevated to cabinet status

Early George W. Bush Administration / Joseph Allbaugh

- January 2000: FEMA lost its cabinet status under the new Administration
 - Director Allbaugh maintained access to the President as [part of his inner circle](#)
 - FEMA given responsibility for [response to terror attacks](#) prior to 9/11
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FEMA Reorganized

Homeland Security Act (HSA)

- [Section 503 of the HSA](#) incorporated FEMA into DHS
- [Section 507 of the HSA](#) gave FEMA a specific role

Secretarial Reorganization (Section 872)

- In January 2004, a reorganization split FEMA's preparedness and disaster response functions.
- Secretary Tom Ridge departed, and was replaced by Secretary Michael Chertoff.
- A second reorganization in July 2005 further reorganized FEMA's preparedness functions under the [Six-Point Agenda](#).

August 2005—[Hurricane Katrina](#)

- First of a [cluster of hurricanes](#) that hit the Gulf Coast states in 2005 and 2008.
- House Select Committee report: "[A Failure of Initiative](#)"

Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act

P.L. 109-295, Title VI:

- Defined FEMA's primary mission (Sec. 611; 6 U.S.C. §313(b)(1));
- Established FEMA as a distinct element within DHS (6 U.S.C. §316); and
- Designated the FEMA Administrator as the principal presidential advisor on domestic emergency management (6 U.S.C. §313(c)(4)).
- This statutory reorganization was complemented by administrative reorganization.

FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate congressional [testimony](#) five years later:

The importance of PKEMRA to the emergency management community cannot be stressed enough. For the first time, it gave FEMA clear guidance on its mission and priorities, and provided us with the authorities and tools we needed to become a more effective and efficient agency, and a better partner to state, local, territorial, and tribal governments.

For Further Information

CRS Report WMR10001, *CRS Guide to Federal Emergency Management*, by Lauren R. Stienstra et al.

CRS Report R47646, *Stafford Act Cost Shares: History, Trends, Analysis*, by Erica A. Lee.

Next Episode

Emergency Management After PKEMRA.

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