

## NATURAL DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Waiting for the inevitable is not a plan when it comes to natural disasters. The right time for state and local governments to lay the groundwork and craft a sustainable response and recovery strategy is before the hurricane, heatwave, blizzard, flood or tornado strikes.

Specific recovery actions for a community will vary based on the precise nature of the event, the damage it inflicts, and what the community was like before the disaster; however, taking the time to develop a preparedness plan can assist in quickly getting the community on the track to recovery following a disaster. For people within communities impacted by the disaster—struggling to rebuild their lives, homes and businesses while trying to make ends meet—a preparedness plan can make all the difference. Starting this plan before the disaster strikes allows stakeholders to ask critical questions and seek responsible answers.

### The Evolution of Federal Hazard Mitigation and Planning

Life-altering disasters in recent years have reinforced the importance of preparedness planning to help communities recover more quickly when faced with natural disasters.

“In the early morning hours of December 26, 1802, fire ripped through the city of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, destroying large areas of this important seaport. The fire was a devastating event and threatened commerce throughout the northeast section of the newly founded Nation. Nineteen days later, Congress suspended bond payments for several months for the merchants affected by the fire, thus implementing the first act of federal disaster relief in American history.”

The federal government has been involved in hazard mitigation and preparedness in the United States for over 200 years. There is an equally long history of states and communities wanting to fully prepare for both natural and human-induced disasters. Despite this long history of increasingly frequent events that have devastated communities, states, and—most importantly—people, the level of importance placed on preparedness has only recently gained significant momentum.

The federal government has been taking steps to develop a process that will not only assist communities in the recovery process, but help them to be resilient to future disasters. Understanding the evolution of the efforts and considerations of the past 40 years will help us all as we move forward with disaster preparedness.

In 1970, President Nixon introduced the **Disaster Assistance Act (DAA) of 1970**, which would codify all disaster relief legislation to date and make hazard mitigation a federal priority. It introduced hazard mitigation as a federal priority and authorized federal loans and tax assistance to individuals, tax revenue replacement for local governments, and temporary housing and relocation for disaster victims.

After Tropical Storm Agnes struck the Eastern Seaboard, the **Disaster Relief Act (DRA) of 1974** was enacted which amended the DAA of 1970 to distinguish emergencies from major disasters, establish the disaster declaration process, and emphasize long-range recovery for the first time. The legislation included the following facets, among others: the introduction of long-range economic recovery programs for major disaster areas; encouragement of mitigation planning and projects; and providing grants to states for the development of plans, programs and capabilities for disaster preparedness and prevention.

The **Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act of 1988** amended the DRA of 1974 to encourage states and localities to develop comprehensive disaster preparedness plans, prepare for better intergovernmental coordination in the face of a disaster, encourage the use of insurance coverage, and provide federal assistance programs for losses due to a disaster.

The **Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000** amended the Stafford Act to repeal the previous mitigation planning provisions and require local mitigation plans as a condition of increased federal funding.

Hurricane Katrina grew from a local tragedy to national disgrace as it became apparent that our federal emergency management system had failed miserably. The **Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act** (PKEMRA), enacted in October 2006, required the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to develop improved disaster recovery planning guidance. Subsequently, FEMA developed the National Disaster Recovery Framework and, more recently, the Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 201, Disaster Recovery Planning.

In March of 2011, President Barack Obama signed and released **Presidential Policy Directive 8: National Preparedness** (PPD-8). This directive and its component policies is intended to guide how different levels of government and local citizens can work to “prevent, protect against, mitigate the effects of, respond to, and recover from those threats that pose the greatest risk to the security of the Nation.” These threats include terrorist acts, natural disasters and human-induced incidents. This Policy Directive works to support the PKEMRA.

Over 200 years of history, legislation and presidential directives make it clear: communities, municipalities and states can no longer delay the work needed to prepare for natural disasters. The right time to create a response strategy is before the hurricane, heatwave, blizzard, tornado, flood or other disaster strikes. A plan can help mitigate the aftereffects, and for people impacted by the disaster—struggling to rebuild their lives and make ends meet—it can make all the difference in achieving a successful recovery.

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This post is Part One of a six-part series by ProSource Technologies to assist state and local governments with disaster recovery planning. Please e-mail [disasterseries@prosourcetech.com](mailto:disasterseries@prosourcetech.com) to receive electronic notifications of each article as they are released.

ProSource is a professional consulting firm specializing in right of way/site acquisition, relocation, environmental, and disaster and emergency management services for public and private clients. Experience with large-scale recovery efforts around the country has given ProSource the knowledge and capability to help other communities with disaster preparedness planning, as well as manage their critical, finite resources when disaster strikes.