

RESOURCES

Emergency officials will respond quickly after a disaster, but they cannot reach everyone right away. Everyone should be prepared to be self-sufficient for at least the first 72 hours after a disaster. For more information about how to prepare and other resources, visit www.ReadyVirginia.gov or download the free Ready Virginia app for iOS and Android devices.



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Virginia Emergency Operations Center (VEOC)

24/7 Access lines: (804) 674-2400 or (800) 468-8892
www.vaemergency.gov

FEMA's Emergency Management Institute:

<http://training.fema.gov>
VDEM training: www.vaemergency.gov/em/training

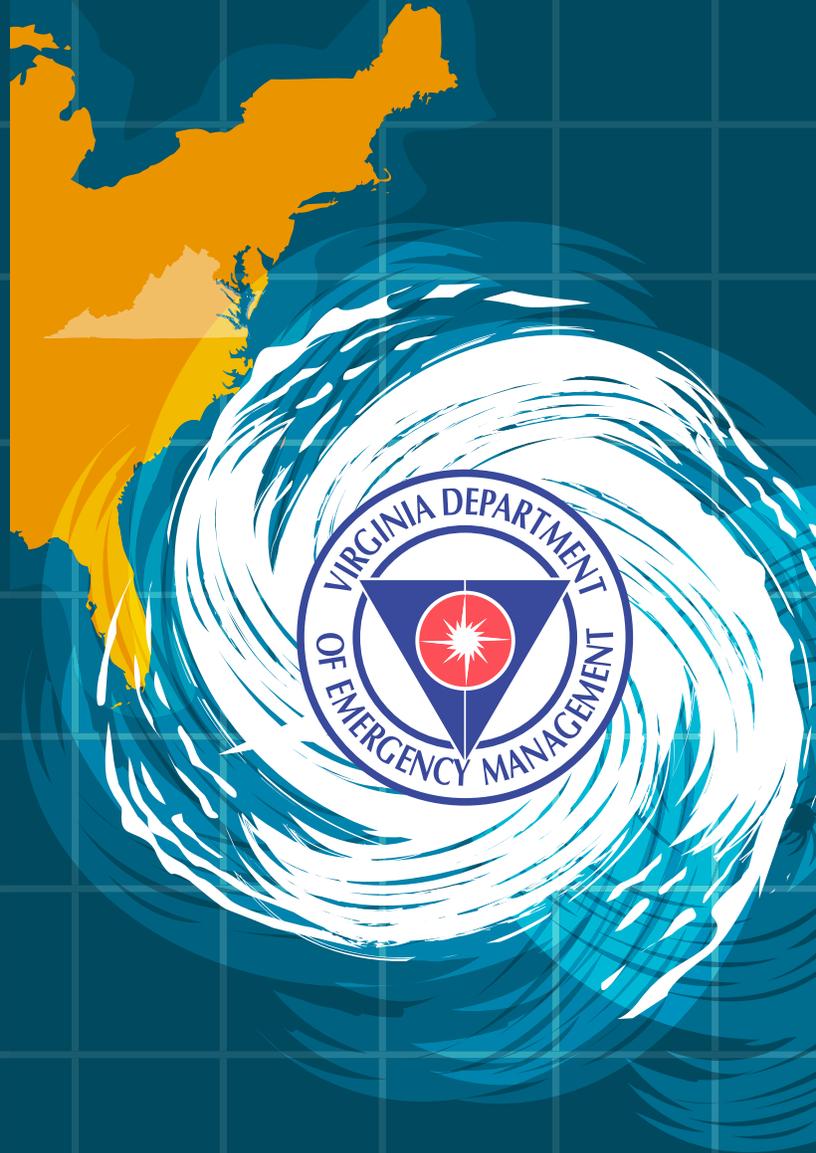


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Elected Officials' Guide to Emergencies and Disasters

The Basics of Community Response



Introduction

The Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) created this guide to inform elected officials about emergency management. VDEM is the lead agency at the state level that protects the lives and property of Virginia's citizens from emergencies and disasters by coordinating the state's emergency preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery efforts.

As an elected official, your response to a disaster will influence citizens, the government, the private sector, voluntary organizations and the media.

This guide will introduce you to the local declaration process and the responsibilities of a local emergency manager, but the best way to learn about disaster response is to meet with your local emergency manager.

Reaching out to your local emergency manager should be your first step when a disaster occurs.

Understanding the disaster process

All emergency and disaster response begins at the local level.

If local mutual aid agreements with neighboring localities and other local resources become overwhelmed, a locality can call the Virginia Emergency Operations Center (VEOC) for assistance at (804) 674-2400 or (800) 468-8892.

The VEOC will reach out first to state agencies and other local governments, and then to commercial contractors to fill requests. Federal resources are available only if the president declares a federal disaster, which may happen days after the emergency.

No matter where assistance originates, it is important to remember that those resources may be limited.

Virginia Emergency Laws

There are a number of sections in the Code of Virginia, specifically the Emergency Services and Disaster Law of 2000, as Amended, Title 44: Chapters 3.2 to 3.5, that cover local emergencies and the declaration of a local emergency by political subdivisions. Key areas to consider:

Authority

§44-146.19

(A) "Each political subdivision in the Commonwealth shall be within the jurisdiction of and served by the Virginia Department of Emergency Management and be responsible for local disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. Each political subdivision shall maintain in accordance with state disaster preparedness plans and programs an agency of emergency management which, except as otherwise provided under this chapter, has jurisdiction over and services the entire political subdivision."

Declaration of local emergency

§44-146.21

(A) "A local emergency may be declared by the local director of emergency management with the consent of the governing body of the political subdivision. In the event the governing body cannot convene due to the disaster or other exigent circumstances, the director, or in his absence, the deputy director, or in the absence of both the director and the deputy director..."

More details can be found in the Virginia Department of Emergency Management Laws 2015 Edition.

Public and Media Inquiries

For many disaster survivors, information is their first need, and it is vital that information be consistent.

One of your main jobs as an elected official is to help manage public expectations about what government can or cannot provide during or after a disaster. Knowing your locality's emergency operations plan will help you answer questions more confidently and accurately through the process.

What you say to the media can significantly impact the public's perception of response and recovery efforts. You can support response agencies and reassure the public by talking about:

- Only what you know.
- What emergency responders and community leaders are doing.
- What the public can do.
- Positive actions – avoid focusing on problems that can impact the recovery process.

Emergency Management

Emergency management is the managerial function charged with creating the framework within which communities reduce vulnerability to hazards and cope with disasters.

Preparedness

As an elected official, there are several important steps you can take to prepare yourself and your community for emergencies and disasters.

- Understand the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Localities are not eligible for federal funds if they do not meet annual NIMS requirements. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) created NIMS to provide a comprehensive and consistent approach to incident management.

As an elected official, you should take NIMS classroom training from VDEM, including ICS-402: ICS Overview for Executive and Senior Officials.

- Get involved with your local Emergency Operations Plan. The Code of Virginia requires each jurisdiction to maintain and keep current an Emergency Operations Plan.

Code of Virginia

§ 44-146-.19 P. 25

(D) "The director...may, in collaboration with (i) other public and private agencies within the Commonwealth or (ii) other state or localities within other states, develop mutual aid arrangements for reciprocal assistance in case of a disaster too great to be dealt with [alone]. Such arrangements should be consistent with state plans and programs, and it shall be the duty of each local organization for emergency management to render assistance in accordance with the provisions of such mutual aid arrangements."

(E) "Each local and interjurisdictional agency shall prepare and keep current a local or interjurisdictional emergency operations plan for its area. The plan shall include, but not be limited to, responsibilities of all local agencies and shall establish a chain of command..."

"...Each political subdivision having a nuclear power station or other nuclear facility within 10 miles of its boundaries shall, if so directed by the Department of Emergency Management, prepare and keep current an appropriate emergency plan for its area for response to nuclear accidents at such station or facility."



Response

During an emergency, your locality may declare a local emergency, which allows your emergency manager and first responders to respond more quickly to the event.

In addition, the governor may declare a state of emergency to speed state agency assistance. In some cases, the governor may make an emergency declaration prior to an emergency, such as a hurricane. A governor's declaration of emergency is a required step toward receiving a federal disaster declaration.

Code of Virginia:

§ 44-146-.21 P. 27

(c1) "Whenever a local emergency has been declared, the director of emergency management...may control, restrict, allocate or regulate the use, sale, production and distribution of food, fuel, clothing and other commodities, materials, goods, services and resource systems which fall only within the boundaries of that jurisdiction and which do not impact systems affecting adjoining or other political subdivisions..."

Recovery

Recovery involves all of the cleanup, repair and financial assistance needed to return an area back to pre-disaster conditions. It will take time and a community-wide effort to recover from a disaster. The priorities after a disaster are:

1. Life safety
2. Critical facilities (systems)
3. Private property damage

After initial response efforts, your community must determine the amount of damage. Your locality must submit an initial damage assessment to the Virginia Emergency Operations Center, usually within 72 hours. If the damage appears significant, then a team of state and federal personnel may visit the area to perform additional assessment.



As an elected official, you should get regular briefings on the extent of damage and status of the recovery process from your local emergency manager. These briefings will help you answer questions from your constituents and the media.

If the damages appear to meet the criteria, the governor may request a federal declaration. Only the President of the United States has the authority to approve the request, and an approval is not automatic. Many disasters in Virginia have not received a federal declaration.

A federal declaration must include the locality's name for it to receive aid. There are two main types of federal disaster assistance: Individual Assistance and Public Assistance.

Individual Assistance for individual citizens and businesses

By law, federal assistance cannot duplicate any coverage provided by private insurance. To receive Individual Assistance (IA), registrants must live in the localities named in the federal declaration.

The majority of assistance to individuals comes through low-interest loans from the Small Business Administration and all registrants will be asked to fill out an application for an SBA loan.

Other federal assistance comes through direct grant and reimbursement programs:

- **Housing Assistance**
- **Other Needs Assistance**
- **Federal Disaster Assistance and Small Businesses**
- **Federal Disaster Assistance and Agriculture**

If Individual Assistance is available, citizens should register by calling toll-free: 1-800-621-FEMA, TTY: 1-800-462-7585 or register online at www.fema.gov.

Public Assistance for state and local governments and certain non-profits

Public Assistance reimburses local and state governments and certain private non-profits for the expenses involved in response and recovery efforts.

In Virginia, state and local governments will combine funds to match 25 percent of the federal reimbursement amount. How much the local government will contribute depends on its fiscal stress. Talk to your local emergency manager about your locality and matching funds.

To be eligible, the work must be the result of the disaster, be located within the designated disaster area and be the legal responsibility of the applicant. Projects that may be reimbursed include:

- **Debris removal from public roads and rights of way and from private property when determined to be in the public interest. Encourage your locality to develop a debris-removal plan in advance of an emergency. Note: debris removal on private property is the property owner's responsibility, unless the debris poses a hazard to the community at large.**
- **Emergency protective measures, including search and rescue, warning of hazards, and unsafe structure demolition. Zoning and ordinance issues can play a major role with rebuilding.**
- **Public infrastructure repair, including roads, bridges, water control facilities and public utility distribution systems.**

Mitigation

Mitigation is taking sustained actions to reduce the impact of natural hazards on people and property. Mitigation activities can save lives and money. For example, maintaining strong building codes and enforcing them can reduce property damage from storms, and storm-water management can minimize flooding risks.

As an elected official, you should be aware of the mitigation issues in your community. Learn the high-risk areas, the existing or potential mitigation projects, and how they are funded.