



LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS' GUIDE

to Emergency Management



The Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) developed this guide as a resource for local government officials to use before, during, and after a natural or human-made disaster. VDEM is the lead state agency charged with coordinating disaster prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts across the Commonwealth. We stand ready to assist wherever and whenever needed.

This guide will introduce you to local emergency management concepts, and will outline your responsibilities and those of your local emergency manager. Creating a relationship with your local emergency manager is the first – and the most important – step in the emergency management process.

As a local government official, how your locality responds to a disaster will influence how citizens, government, the private sector, volunteer organizations, and the media perceive, respond to, and recover from the event.

Some of the responsibilities of your local emergency management agency include:

- » identifying hazards and evaluating risk;
- » developing emergency operations plans;
- » testing emergency operations plans through training and exercises;
- » connecting representatives from internal and external agencies;
- » building relationships with nearby localities;
- » communicating critical information to the public;
- » coordinating all local resources before, during, and after an event;
- » working with your locality's agencies to establish shelters;
- » knowing your locality's VDEM regional contact, and
- » managing your local emergency operations center.

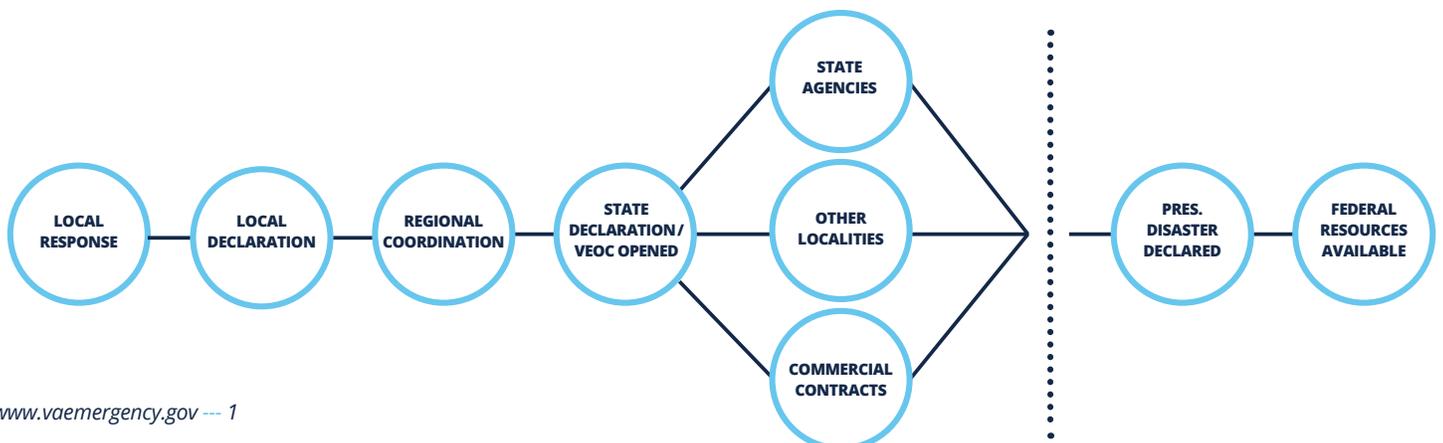


Understanding the Disaster Process

The management of all emergencies and disasters starts at the local level, which is why your role is so important. If your locality does not already have mutual aid agreements with other localities, we highly encourage you to begin that process, since those localities may often be your first resource before, during, or after a disaster.

When local resources become overwhelmed by an incident, including the resources of those localities with which you have mutual aid agreements, become overwhelmed by an incident, your local emergency manager will contact your respective VDEM Chief Regional Coordinator for further assistance. From there, VDEM regional staff will work with VDEM headquarters, the Virginia Emergency Operations Center (VEOC), other localities, and other state agencies to attempt to fill your resource requests. The state will provide commercial contract information to the locality if necessary.

Federal resources are available only if the President declares a federal disaster, which may happen days or weeks after the emergency. The basic federal declaration process overview is diagrammed below.



FIVE OVERLAPPING MISSION AREAS OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

VDEM works with local, state and federal entities and volunteer organizations to provide resources and expertise through the following five mission areas of emergency management.

1&2 Prevention & Protection

Prevention and protection often overlap. They involve the capabilities needed to avoid, prevent or stop a natural or human-made disaster. Capabilities include planning, public information and warning, risk management, operational coordination, intelligence gathering, and information sharing.

As a local government official, there are several important steps you can take to prepare yourself and your community for emergencies and disasters, such as:

- » Understanding the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Localities are not eligible for federal funds if they do not meet specific state and federal requirements, such as NIMS compliance. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) created NIMS to provide a comprehensive and consistent approach to incident management.
- » Participating in NIMS classroom training from VDEM, including ICS-402: ICS Overview for Executive and Senior Officials, and IS-908: Emergency Management for Senior Officials.
- » Getting involved with your local emergency operations plan. The Code of Virginia requires each jurisdiction to maintain and keep current an emergency operations plan that should be revisited and exercised regularly.

Code of Virginia Related to Prevention & Protection

§ 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."

3 Mitigation

Mitigation involves the capabilities necessary to reduce the loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters. Capabilities are similar to prevention and protection and include planning, public information and warning, operational coordination, community resilience, long-term vulnerability reduction, risk and disaster resilience assessment, and threat and hazard identification.

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

4 Response

During a disaster, when your locality is about to be overwhelmed, you should consider declaring a local emergency, which gives your emergency manager and first responders more tools and resources to manage the event. In addition, the Governor may declare a state of emergency to activate additional state agency assistance. In some cases, the Governor may make an emergency declaration prior to a disaster, such as a hurricane, which allows the Governor to pre-deploy resources. A Governor's declaration of emergency is required in order to pursue a federal disaster declaration, which opens up federal financial assistance and resources.

Code of Virginia Related to Response § 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..."

5 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 main priorities following a disaster are:

1. Ensuring life safety;
2. Addressing the needs of critical infrastructure; and
3. Assessing damage.

After initial response efforts, your community must determine the scope and magnitude of damage caused by the event. Depending on the severity of the incident, damage assessments must be submitted to the Virginia Emergency Operations Center within 72 hours, as referenced in the Commonwealth of Virginia Emergency Operations Plan (COVEOP). As a local government official, you should get regular briefings on the extent of damage and the status of the recovery process from your local emergency manager. These briefings will help you answer questions from your constituents and the media, and will help ensure that your locality is meeting the 72-hour reporting deadline.

Given the complexity and corresponding timelines, it is beneficial to establish a long-term recovery plan prior to a disaster. There are many non-profits, faith-based groups, and volunteer organizations such as the Virginia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) that can assist with recovery efforts. Creating relationships with these groups beforehand can prove helpful when a disaster strikes.

If the damage appears significant, then a team of state and federal personnel may visit the area to perform additional assessments. VDEM's regional staff members will be in the field assisting you and your team with damage assessments, and will help facilitate the interaction with federal agencies.

If the damages appear to meet state and federal 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.

A federal declaration will identify localities eligible to receive federal assistance. There are two main types of federal disaster assistance: public assistance and individual assistance.

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.

Public Assistance involves federal reimbursement with a percentage matched by state and local funds; the match

proportion takes the scale of the disaster and the community stress index into consideration. 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 position.

To be eligible, projects must (1) be the result of the disaster, (2) be located within the designated disaster area, and (3) 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 from private property is the property owner's responsibility, unless the debris poses a hazard to the community at large.
- » Localities are encouraged to create a FEMA-approved debris management plan. Having an approved plan increases the likelihood of collecting a greater federal cost share for debris removal following a federally-declared disaster. Localities should contact their VDEM Chief Regional Coordinator for further information on establishing a FEMA-approved debris management plan.
- » Emergency protective measures, including search and rescue, hazard warnings, and unsafe structure demolition. Proactive zoning and ordinance issues can play pivotal roles in the success of recovery and rebuilding efforts.
- » Public infrastructure repair, including roads, bridges, water control facilities and public utility distribution systems.

Individual Assistance for citizens and businesses — By law, federal assistance to individuals cannot duplicate any coverage provided by private insurance. For those without insurance, there are two primary routes for assistance: low-interest loans and "individual assistance." Funding for individual assistance projects must also be approved by the President of the United States, but historically is reserved for the most devastating of incidents. Therefore, the majority of assistance to individuals comes through low-interest loans from the Small Business Administration (SBA).

There are other federal assistance programs that may be activated subsequent to an event, and VDEM can help provide information when those become available.

If individual assistance is available, VDEM will work with your locality and will help coordinate federal resources to ensure the timely and accurate communication of information.



Virginia Emergency Laws

There are several statutes in the *Code of Virginia* that pertain to emergency management. The most relevant are located in Title 44 starting at § 44-146.13. This section is known as the Emergency Services and Disaster Laws, and the two following subsections are critical for local government officials:

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 deputy director, any member of the governing body may declare the existence of a local emergency, subject to confirmation by the governing body at its next regularly scheduled meeting or at a special meeting within 45 days of the declaration, whichever occurs first. The governing body, when in its judgment all emergency actions have been taken, shall take appropriate action to end the declared emergency.”



Public and Media Inquiries

One of your primary responsibilities as a local government official is to help manage public expectation regarding your locality's role during or after a disaster. Your ability to quickly communicate accurate information is essential, and understanding your locality's emergency operations plan will help you answer questions more confidently throughout the process.

What you say to the media or share through social media, can significantly impact the public's perception of your response and recovery efforts, as well as the public's response following a local or state directive. If the Virginia Emergency Operations Center (VEOC) is activated, the Joint Information Center is a good resource for local Public Information Officers (PIOs) and government officials to ensure messaging is unified and consistent across the Commonwealth. You can support response agencies and reassure the public by communicating:

- » Confirmed facts;
- » Actions taken by emergency responders and community leaders;
- » How the public can help; and
- » What to expect next (hours, days, weeks).

Citizen Preparedness

Emergency officials will respond quickly after a disaster but they cannot reach everyone right away. You should encourage your citizens to be prepared to be self-sufficient for at least 72 hours after a disaster. Pertinent information should be shared via various media platforms to reach the widest possible audience. VDEM produces numerous informational publications that can be found at VAemergency.gov/threats. Social media can be extremely useful before, during, and after a disaster. Also, please encourage your citizens to sign up for your local mass notification system such as Reverse 911 and CodeRED.

For more information about how your citizens can prepare, visit: VAemergency.gov [f](#) [VAemergency](#) [@VDEM](#)