



General Awareness Information

Opportunities for Civil Service Engineers in Emergency Preparedness

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**U.S. Public Health Service
Engineering Professional Advisory Committee
Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee**

Disclaimer

This document provides guidance on the Engineering Professional Advisory Committees (EPAC) current thoughts on the subject. An alternative approach may be used if such approach satisfies the situation. Periodically, EPAC will review this document and modify it according to comments submitted.

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Background

Common citizens and federal employees have rallied together since September 11, 2001 to better prepare for local emergencies and disasters. Fire chiefs and emergency planners say, “All disasters are local.” All professional organizations have a local organizational component, comprised of members who volunteer their time. In addition, a variety of other means exist by which engineers and others can serve their communities and countries and be paid as a part of the federal work force.

Many different organizations conduct concurrent and parallel efforts to prepare for aiding the communities they serve in a time of disaster. In the United States, the engineering community, for example, has consciously made attempts to organize and prepare itself for such a purpose. With a vast quantity of knowledge, expertise, resources, and contacts, engineers and others are leveraging their skills to form networks of federal, professional, and local partners.

Professional Organizations

Professional organizations provide civil servants with an opportunity to serve their communities. Professional organizations can link engineers, for example, in government, academia, industry, and consulting practices. One example of such a professional organization is the Society of American Military Engineers (SAME). SAME includes engineers (civil servant and commissioned) from the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, and the Public Health Service (PHS), as well as from the private sector that frequently contracts with the federal government. SAME works with other engineering organizations such as the National Society of Professional Engineers and the American Society of Civil Engineers. Such professional organizations foster a culture of open communication, knowledge, productivity, and friendships by exchanging information and learning about one another’s authorities, roles, and capabilities during work group meetings, dinner meetings, conferences, and outings.

Another example is the Public Health Service’s Emergency Preparedness Subgroup of the Engineering Professional Advisory Committee. That subgroup has undertaken a formal project to share and enhance information sharing among three federal engineering groups: those of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Department of Health and Human Services. The subgroup is using SAME as the neutral facilitator to provide an open forum for outreach, in-reach, and collaborating and networking. This venue also allows engineers from the Department of Defense and the private sector to see the improvement and learning that takes place.

A third example of such an organization is The Infrastructure Security Partnership (TISP). TISP is the outgrowth of a proposal by a dedicated group of public and private sector organizations to establish an "association of associations and agencies," a partnership, to collaborate on issues related to the security of the nation's built environment. The purpose is to act as a national asset to facilitate dialogue on domestic infrastructure security and to offer sources of technical support and sources for comment on public policy related to the security of the nation's built environment. The partnership collaborates on issues related to the security of that environment and leverages members' collective technical expertise and research and development capabilities. It is a fundamental goal of the partnership to reach and include all stakeholders potentially affected by any disaster and to provide technical assistance and information to the Office of Homeland Security. For more information, on TISP, visit www.tisp.org.

A fourth example is the Washington, DC area's Volunteer Technical Action Group (VolTag), a newly formed group that is similar to TISP but that differs in that its client is not the Office of Homeland Security.

The ongoing work of such professional organizations shows how the engineering community may come together at all levels to demonstrate the principle of "people making a difference."

Agency Response Programs

Federal workers (both commissioned and civilian) often play a role in emergency preparedness, planning, training events, exercise, or response. Various agencies may utilize three types of employment categories: (1) commissioned officers, (2) civil servants, and (3) non-federal employees, or any combination of these. Examples of how the different agencies accomplish emergency or disaster work by making use of various federal employment categories are discussed here.

The Department of Energy uses a "reach back capability" system within the agency to augment its civilian primary responders. The people whom DOE reaches back to are DOE civil servants and contractors.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) may federalize individuals during a disaster to help staff a disaster field office. These individuals are typically locals who are recovering from some tragedy.

In addition to locals helping FEMA, the National Disaster Medical System is used to train and deploy individuals. Teams in which a civil servant may participate while maintaining pay status include Disaster Medical Assistant Teams (DMATS), consisting of volunteer medical professionals and support personnel with the ability to move into a disaster area quickly to provide medical care; Disaster Mortuary Operational Rescue Teams (DMORTs), which aid a response by providing victim identification and mortuary services; and Veterinary Medical Assistance Teams (VMATs), which provide treatment of search-and-rescue dogs at disaster sites.

Additional opportunities exist for civil servants to become involved in regional operations as emergency coordinator augmenters or as liaison officers staffing the Department of Health and Human Services Secretary's Command Center. Augmenters receive formal and informal training in HHS emergency operations and in staffing at regional operations centers and disaster field offices.

The Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers dedicate civil servants and contractors for emergency response activities. Some civil servants and contractors are employed full time in supporting federal response programs, while others who are not directly supportive of classic, complex, or high profile actions can volunteer their time.

Volunteer Organizations

Donating time in one's community provides the greatest opportunity for engineers to be involved with emergency response. Engineers, for example, typically are excellent planners, are good

with managing budgets and providing technical support, and are excellent emergency response resources for their communities. The following are examples of opportunities for engineers to donate their time in support of their communities:

Citizen Corps—After September 11, President Bush encouraged every American to donate 2,000 hours in service. The Websites www.citizencorps.org and www.freedomcorp.gov provide information about volunteer opportunities with the following programs:

- Volunteers in Public Service (VIPS)
- Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT)
- Medical Reserve Corps
- Neighborhood Watch
- Citizen Corps Councils

Local Emergency Planning Commissions—These units were created to assist communities in dealing with oil and chemical accidents. Chemical engineers, industrial engineers, or any other type of engineers can assist local emergency planning commissions. The Web site www.nrt.org provides more information.

Urban Search and Rescue—Visit www.fema.gov/usr/nusrs.shtm for more information.

Volunteer Fire Departments—Visit www.nvfc.org for more information.

National Guard—Provides an opportunity to get paid while serving the country. Civil servants receive two weeks of military pay in addition to regular salary while activated, and they are assured their jobs upon their return. Interested individuals may visit the Web site www.arng.army.mil to get started with a second, part-time career.

Other—All federal employees, both civilian and commissioned, are not precluded from “outside activities,” provided appropriate forms are completed and agency approval is granted. Individuals should consult their local ethics advisors for more information.

Participation of a federal employee in activities not related to work may be at the discretion of the supervisor or agency. Some civilian organizations are very supportive of volunteer activities. For example, one Ivy League university’s policy allows employees who are volunteer firemen to miss work the following day if they are responding to a call past 3 a.m. The federal government, however, may not be as supportive of such endeavors because complex legalities and rules govern civil servants. A federal employee’s local department of human resources or the Web site www.opm.gov may be of help in providing guidance. Many managers at federal organizations will support employees who do their work well and meet their deadlines. After all, balancing time and money and bringing credit and recognition to federal programs are often the focus of management.