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Advocacy Position Statement

Public Works and National Preparedness

Statement of Purpose

The American Public Works Association (APWA) seeks to inform elected officials, regulators, stakeholders and the public at-large of its stated position on the importance of developing and enforcing national preparedness policies and guidelines that reflect what is needed in ‘real time’ to deal with catastrophic incidents.

Statement of Position

APWA supports comprehensive national preparedness policies and guidelines that seek to protect our nation against terrorism, natural disasters or manmade hazards; and strengthen our communities’ emergency management capabilities through state, tribal and local engagement. The following three principles should be incorporated into national preparedness policies or guidelines:

All Hazards Approach: APWA believes that national preparedness should be based on an all hazards approach, as emergency planning, response and recovery operations must be capable of handling different types of hazards.

Mitigation: APWA believes that any national preparedness policy or guideline should include mitigation and consider it to be as equally important as preparedness, response and recovery operations.

State, Tribal and Local Engagement: APWA believes that state, tribal and local engagement is key for national preparedness to be effective in protecting our nation’s communities against terrorism, natural disasters and manmade hazards.

Background and Rationale

National preparedness guidelines and policies have a significant impact on public works professionals, as they play a key role in emergency planning, responding to and recovering from natural and manmade disasters. Accordingly, national preparedness

policies and guidelines should help enhance public works' ability to maintain critical infrastructure systems, save lives and reduce damage costs when disaster strikes. This can be accomplished in the following ways:

All Hazards Approach: National preparedness policies and guidelines should be based on an all hazards approach that covers the full spectrum of emergency management. This would include federal, state, tribal and local coordination efforts working to efficiently and effectively protect communities. Importantly, an all hazards approach would emphasize the emergency capabilities and tools (training and exercises, personal protective equipment, emergency response equipment, etc.) necessary to prepare for and respond to a broad spectrum of incidents including terrorism, natural disasters or manmade hazards. For example, a public works agency can be charged with numerous critical infrastructure oversight responsibilities such as maintaining the transportation, water supply, sewage and refuse disposal systems, and public buildings. Each of these critical infrastructure systems—which are vital to a community's livelihood—require specialized preparedness capabilities. Accordingly, public works agencies often build their emergency management plans around what is needed to protect a specific infrastructure system.

Mitigation: National preparedness policies and guidelines should include mitigation, for it is as equally important as preparedness, response and recovery operations. Mitigation practices are a daily function for public works, as maintaining critical infrastructure systems help safeguard communities before disaster strikes. Importantly, mitigation reduces loss of life, personal property damage and reliance on funding from actual disaster declarations. Effective mitigation efforts can not only break the cycle of repeated damage and reconstruction that can paralyze communities, but also improve recovery times if a community is damaged.

State, Tribal and Local Engagement: National preparedness policies and guidelines naturally have a trickledown effect, impacting states, tribal territories and localities. However, trying to translate national level preparedness and response criteria can be complicated, confusing, and ineffective when “one size fits all” emergency management practices become the general rule. No two communities are alike and can be affected by the same type of disaster in very different ways. The key to obtaining state, tribal and local input on national preparedness policies and guidelines is ensuring representation from state, tribal and local partners which include elected officials, agency personnel, subject matter experts, non-profit organizations and the private sector.

For example, cooperation and cross communication between emergency service disciplines (Fire, Law Enforcement, Emergency Medical Services, Public Works, etc.) and the Department of Homeland Security's Critical Infrastructure and Key Resources (CIKR) Sectors helps to ensure that during the development and execution phases of emergency plans, multiple parties are able to work together—which will prove to be invaluable. Parties involved will gain an understanding of communities' emergency capabilities and their capability gaps—and why mutual aid agreements between communities are so valuable, comprehend lessons learned from past experiences, and

recognize the importance of conducting risk assessments and after action reports. Consequently, situations where information is restricted to one key group/partner will put response and recovery operations at additional risk of not being handled efficiently and properly. A framework for open dialogue between partners will minimize disruptions to communities and institutions.

It is hoped that these elements will be incorporated into national preparedness policies and guidelines; improving the efficacy of these doctrines. Readiness begins with local level responders—building up to tribal, state and federal level preparedness. Therefore, national preparedness is a bottom up rather than top down policy making process that is only effective when states and localities impart their experiences and expertise.

Sponsor

Emergency Management Committee