



FLASH POLL & COMMENT:

What role should federal agencies have in a disaster?

February 2020

Underwritten by



12 February 2020

Memo to DomPrep readers:

On December 31, 2019, I published another end-of-the year message. This one was different. I worry that many federal agencies created to prepare and respond to man-made and natural disasters have returned to pre-9/11 status. Too many important positions are filled by acting personnel or are vacant. Discontent is on the rise and retention is low. That is why my message was negative and critical.

Mr. James M. Rush, Sr. replied. Jim has over 45 years of healthcare administration and community emergency management experience in the U.S. armed forces, the U.S. public-health community, and the nation's civilian healthcare industry. Having served as the Region III project officer for the National Bioterrorism Hospital Preparedness Program, and the CDC's National Pharmaceutical Stockpile, he is always dedicated to assisting healthcare and public health organizations prepare for "all hazards" events and incidents. He has written for DomPrep and his articles are always spot on.

His letter moved me. He provided logical and reasonable explanations and solutions to my concerns. As a follow on to his points, we asked DomPrep's readers to answer a flash poll and provide comment on the role that federal agencies should play in a disaster. We received a good response, with over 100 professionals taking the time to provide insightful feedback.

This report includes (1) my end of year message, (2) Jim's reply, and (3) flash poll responses, and comment from DomPrep readers and friends, without analysis. Many of the responses are disturbing.

If you find this to be valuable, please share with your colleagues or friends on social media. Also, let me know if you would like more of this type of content.

Best regards,
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December 31, 2019

Dear DomPrep Readers,

On behalf of the staff and many writers of DomPrep, I wish you a safe, healthy, and secure 2020. We are about to finish our 21st year of publishing information for first responders, medical receivers, emergency managers, local-state-federal authorities, nongovernment organizations, and the private sector. Our goal still is, as it has been since 1998, to publish edited, peer-to-peer content relevant to those who serve and protect the nation. Thank you to the many who help me satisfy that mission.

I would be negligent, though, if I did not point out a few concerns about the national security status. The Department of Homeland Security, as the lead federal component of the homeland enterprise, is not what it was envisioned to be, when and why it was established. There still is an inability to formulate and execute policy and programs in cyber, infrastructure, weapons of mass destruction, biodefense, and other high threat/risk areas. Congress too is not without blame. Their inability to streamline legislative responsibility through oversight, procurement, and mission requirements has created a broken body without commonality of effort. And finally, a downright awful [2019 OPM Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Agency Management Report](#) leaves me perplexed and in wonderment.

These disappointments are only a few of the ones I have. Centralized decision making, for example, has created single points of failure, with leadership that is either acting or vacant. That means that local and state authorities must carry the burden for preparedness and resilience and step up to the vacuum created in Washington, D.C. DomPrep readers know all too well that too many tasks in their day-to-day operations make long days even longer. This leaves little or no time to plan for the unthinkable. Additionally, retention, resignations, and retirement make lessons learned, lessons forgotten.

I hope that the faults and failures I see within the homeland enterprise are not tested in 2020. Regardless, we will press on and continue to share critical information even before it becomes mainstream news. For example, the public recently became concerned about the genetic test kits that have become popular gifts only after the Department of Defense issued warnings for its military personnel. Why is this news now when in 2016, experts warned in DomPrep about the security of genetic databanks, emerging genetically engineered threats, and other dual-use concerns related to such “gifts”? In 2020, DomPrep will continue to give voice to the knowledgeable practitioners who may not always say what the politicians want the public to hear, but what emergency preparedness professionals need to know to protect their communities, with or without national homeland security support.

As always, I look forward to your feedback and remain ready to serve as a conduit for sharing critical information with all those who must prepare for the worst, but still hope for the best.

Warmest holiday regards,
Martin (Marty) Masiuk
publisher@domprep.com

January 7, 2020

Hi Mr. Masiuk,

That was a wonderful Publisher's Message you wrote. I thought I'd put down some ideas of how federal agencies got to the point where an employee survey would produce such dismal results.

I started my career as Air Force Medical Service Corps (MSC) Officer and later as an Army civilian employee, in charge of medical reserve stocks in Europe for wartime and humanitarian use (stationed in Germany). When I came back to America in 1991, it was clear to me that those in leadership positions at HHS, FEMA, and later DHS was predominately filled with academics rather than operations folks. After thinking about our leadership deficiencies, I came to the following conclusions regarding the current state of leadership at federal agencies.

After World War II, and throughout the Cold War, many of the returning men and woman used the GI Bill to get their college education and then brought their operations and leadership experience along with their education to government positions at state and federal levels of the health and emergency management career fields. These are the folks who supported our service members in European and in the Pacific areas of operations. They knew how to care for mass casualties, build bridges, institute public health programs, and assemble/disassemble mobile hospitals in both theaters of operations. This generation developed our Civil Defense enterprise associated with the Cold War. The World War II leaders began retiring in the 1970s.

Many of us, in the Vietnam generation (my generation) were trained by the World War II veterans who knew how to build entire emergency management enterprises and develop preparedness, response, and recovery systems. We either did a poor job training the next generation or we weren't allowed to recruit and train them. As we began retiring, it seems that operations leaders were replaced with folks from "think tanks" or universities. These folks are good people with advanced degrees, but little experience in operations, logistics, maintenance, communications, and inventory systems.

Over the years, federal regulations and processes have made leaders' duties more difficult and, in many cases, fraught with danger. If a leader begins taking official administrative action on an employee for substandard performance, the leader may be charged with unfair or discriminatory management practices. Just a charge of wrongdoing may cast a shadow on a leader, or worse, end the leader's career. While fear of taking required management action to remedy performance issues is not an excuse for not doing the right thing, it does exist and I believe it adversely affects employee morale.

From what I have witnessed and read over the past 20 years, I believe federal agencies have evolved to view themselves as "advisory" organizations. As such, they are not capable of building

robust response systems, or deploying their members into disaster locations to set up, operate, and expand resilient infrastructure systems. Federal infrastructure systems need to cope with maturing disasters and expand their services until the jurisdiction's infrastructure recovers and returns to full service. I don't know how federal agencies plan to meet their Emergency Support Function ([ESF](#)) missions outlined in the National Response Framework.

Imagine sending HHS, FEMA, and DHS personnel to manage the aftermath of a nationwide disaster like a multi-terrorist cell attack on critical infrastructure elements of the United States. I know that laws like the Stafford Act, restrict services federal agencies can provide. However, we have to remember that laws can be changed to fit the current realities. Congress needs to expand the missions of agencies tasked in the National Response Plan ESFs to include standing up jurisdictions that have been significantly damaged during any disaster and maintaining them until they recover.

I think many of the challenges federal agencies face today, reflected in the 2019 OPM employee survey, are self-inflicted. I don't see anything on the horizon that offers a solution to the overall negative morale of federal employees.

Jim Rush

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

January 16, 2020

Dear DomPrep Readers,

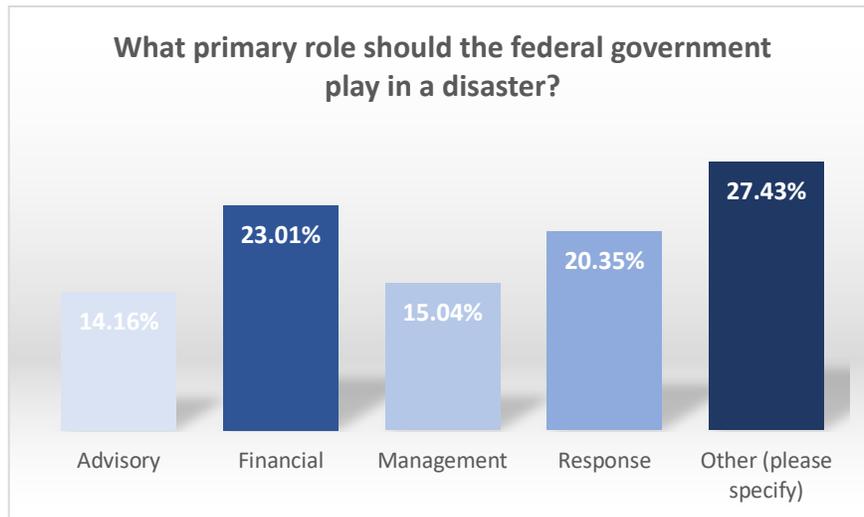
On Wednesday, January 1, 2020, I published a six-month review along with a publisher message. I received a thought-provoking reply from Mr. James Rush that I need to share with you. Jim is very well known and respected in the emergency management arena and is a frequent contributor to DomPrep.

I agree with his points and ask if you agree as well. Please find a link to a flash poll that I encourage you to take before February 11, 2020. Please feel free to forward this email to your colleagues to also get their input. Let me know if you find this useful.

Best regards,

Martin D. (Marty) Masiuk, Founder & Publisher
publisher@domprep.com

Question ONE



Other (edited for duplication)

Limiting the federal government to a specific primary role would be short sighted. The federal government has an obligation to provide guidance and funding. We the People pay taxes to the federal government and have a right to see those funds returned in whatever capacity that would help a community prepare for, respond to, and recover from a disaster.

~ ~ ~

The federal role is much more complicated than just those 4 categories. It should be adaptable to respond to whatever the local's needs are. It is too large of a train to do that I fear and too distanced from locals to really understand our perspective. response in terms of deployable infrastructure i.e. communications systems, food services, G.I.S. and other as well as management for these systems.

~ ~ ~

Response in terms of deployable infrastructure i.e. communications systems, food services, G.I.S. and other as well as management for these systems

~ ~ ~

Provide support to state/local agencies for incidents that exceed their capacities. That could include all of the above based upon the scenario/location.

~ ~ ~

Support to local governments – all disasters are local. ESFs are to SUPPORT locals.

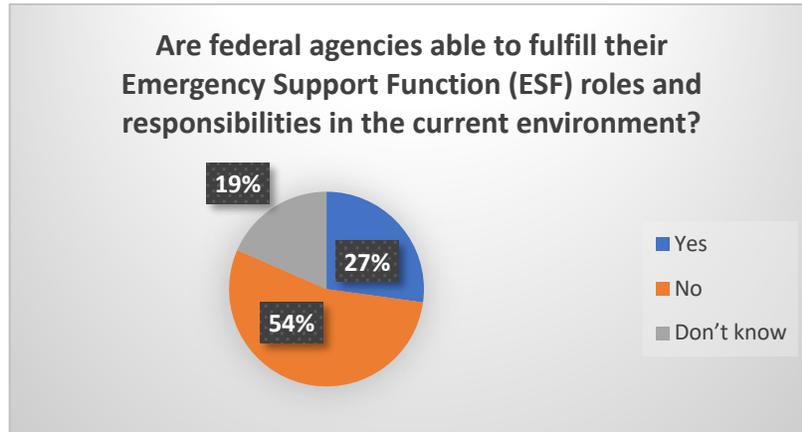
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US Government should be prepared to do all of the above for cases in which states/local/tribal is disabled.

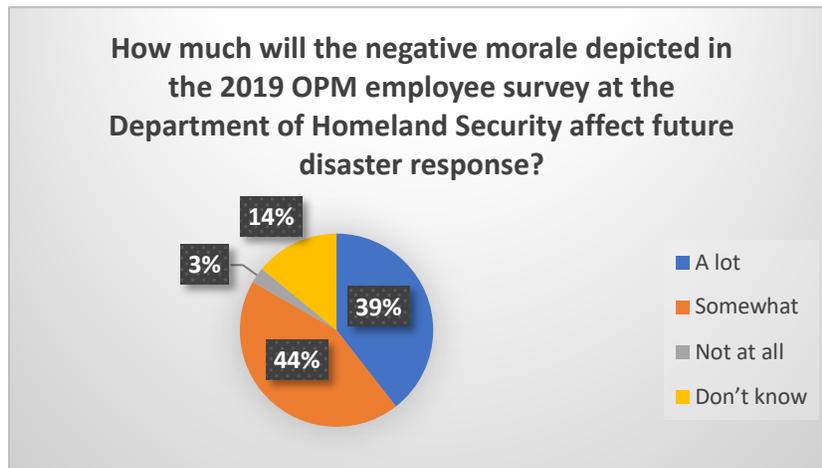
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Oversight and support exactly as they do now: advisory, financial, and response when states are overwhelmed and EMAC resources not available.

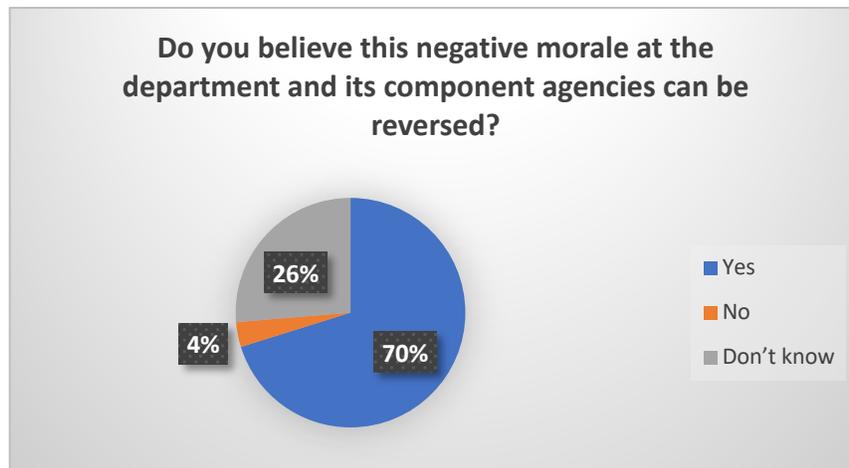
Question TWO



Question THREE



Question FOUR



Question FIVE
If you answered yes to question four, how?

Morale building comes from the top. Therefore, the President must support and promote positive morale throughout the federal agencies.

~ ~ ~

Strong leadership. SEC Kelly was the best chance to fix DHS, but he was not there long enough.

~ ~ ~

Put the Coast Guard back in Transportation, Secret Service back in Treasury, and the law enforcement disciplines in DOJ; make the DHS Director an emergency management professional with experience managing real disasters - James Lee Witt and Craig Fugate would have been the appropriate models, not Judge Chertoff. Military background does not prepare a person for the current personnel policy environment - no acceptable losses, no command. Improve the leadership, Congress has to properly fund DHS, and the Department has to be manned at 80% or greater.

~ ~ ~

Remove folks who speak but don't know how to act (meaning understanding or responding to operations effectively and efficiently). This isn't a place for bureaucrats!

~ ~ ~

I believe we need to have a core focus on hiring tough, competent people who are unquestionable subject matter experts in their field. The days of hiring someone based solely on education, background, veteran or disability status, etc. needs to end and the focus needs to be finding the best possible candidate for each position.

~ ~ ~

Executive realignment and empowering the work force.

~ ~ ~

Through open and honest communications and collaboration among State, Local, Territorial, and Tribal stakeholders.

~ ~ ~

Fix hiring and invest in the workforce. Current hiring practices are not rigorous enough to recruit top talent, and the agencies don't invest enough in their people to keep them around. Steady leadership with support from senior elected and appointed officials. Educate the public to the roles AND limitation of the DHS in a disaster.

~ ~ ~

Allow mid-level managers the freedom and empowerment to make appropriate decisions. Show more concern for correct tactics than "political correctness".

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Focus on mission and training. Don't over commit but bring value to each response. Reduce paperwork.

~ ~ ~

Stop letting it be a whipping post of the state. Example New Orleans in Katrina and recently Porto Rico.

~ ~ ~

Consistent leadership that empowers their employees, along with consistent application of Stafford Act resources to ALL Americans, whether CONUS or OCONUS (e.g. Puerto Rico) The new "We Are FEMA" publication is a great start – a well done publication Start focusing on the efforts and the outcomes, not just the initial response.

~ ~ ~

Comment 1) Modify the political appointment of leadership to proficiency based 2) Evaluate reasons for negative morale to identify changes that benefit the organization over the individual.

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As stated in the US Constitution, "We the People" makes it perfectly clear that our government derives its powers from the "whole people". It affirms that the government of the United States exists to serve its citizens. We all have relationships that build our communities, resources to share, roles to play, and responsibilities not only to ourselves but to each other. Respect begets respect.

~ ~ ~

Too many senior officials think they personally must be consulted before disaster relief occurs. Push the decision-making to the lowest level possible. Then ensure your response officials are actually trained to perform their assigned duties.

~ ~ ~

Treat people like you want to be treated and listen to their suggestions, even if you do not agree. You never know what may come up from someone who thinks that they are not worthy of an idea. The best ideas come from the most unlikely sources!

~ ~ ~

Unfortunately, in some areas we now have a fourth arm of government - the bureaucracy - which transcends changes in administration. Required changes are cultural and require a willingness to look outside of the current paradigms.

~ ~ ~

Leadership that has field experience and not just in-the-box experience.

~ ~ ~

The federal government should determine the cause of what is making the employees so disgruntled. Once this is determined, is it something that they can realistically change? If so, engage the staff on what changes they feel will make their work environment better.

Include more NGO's such as Amateur Radio (ARES/RACES) and other Local "Well Trained" Organizations.

~ ~ ~

At one time, FEMA had a great logistics division. It was destroyed when NDMS was pulled into HHS. Best thing for FEMA, pull it out of DHS. FEMA didn't fail in Katrina, DHS did. By hiring former qualified responders rather than political hacks into leadership positions. Change in mindset. Put response capable people at the top. Emergency Management shifted from operational minded people to education minded people. This sounds good, but you are seeing the impact. The same is true across a wide swath of public safety and healthcare organizations.

~ ~ ~

Let FEMA be a disaster agency with trained professional career staffers and take politics out. Rebuilding a culture among all agencies, trust, clear mission & goals. Respect for other missions and abilities.

~ ~ ~

Everyone needs a clear mission. Create a model of world class preparedness using the latest technologies to reduce response failures and ask everyone to engage in the implementation as well as practice of this single multivariate model. Start by getting rid of waste and bureaucracy and bring in teams from the bottom up where jobs are based on performance.

~ ~ ~

Gubernatorial engagement. Training/leadership development for local emergency management. Create an emergency preparedness curriculum for pre-K to PhD.

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Regional liaisons with the various agencies within the purview of DHS, should be driving best practices and giving training and procurement dollars. They should not paint the picture that they will be the answer to the problem. Coordination should be their main metric and leadership should be the main modality.

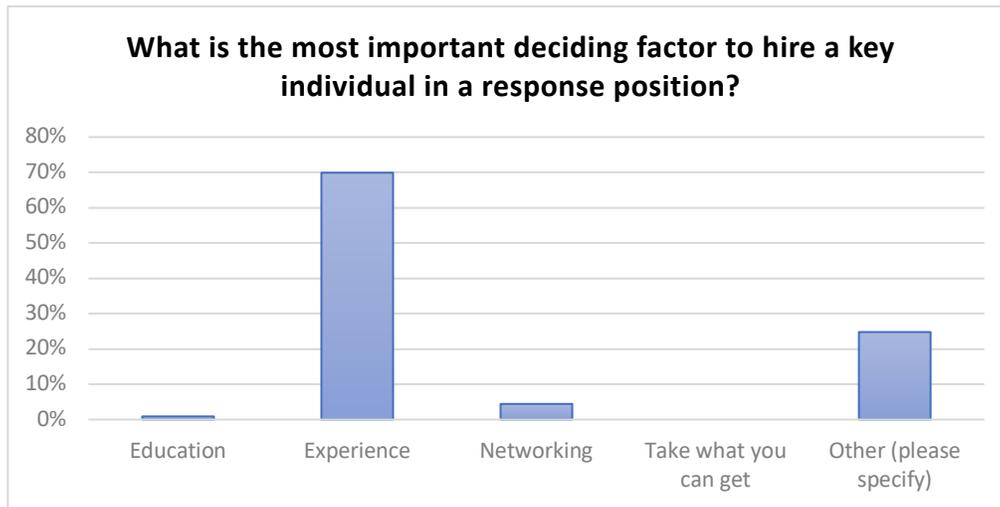
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I believe that the current climate is a result of the current political environment. I believe that a majority of DHS employees want to do a good job, and with a good leader in the White House and a Congress that can get work done, the climate can improve.

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I wish I knew!

Question SIX



Other (Edited)

Experience, but not necessarily in disaster response. Many former military personnel have the experience to manage complex, projects under high stress, with minimal support or resources.

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At least a BA in public administration, political science or related field and real world experience in disaster management - which is not war fighting.

~ ~ ~

A combination of experience and personality – purposefully omitted education as I have seen too many people with a college degree in emergency management and know nothing of the Stafford Act! Really? Interest and attitude – you can always train skills.

~ ~ ~

Depends on person, but experience goes a long way, education also helps.

~ ~ ~

Someone who knows their limitations, confident in their strengths, willing to work as a team, and most importantly puts others before her/himself. To say experience trumps education or vice versa results in only seeing the tree and not the forest.

~ ~ ~

You can't pick just one factor. Experience, training, and judgment combined with an ability to clearly articulate in English are key factors. Many officials have very poor communication skills, probably as a result of texting too much.

~ ~ ~

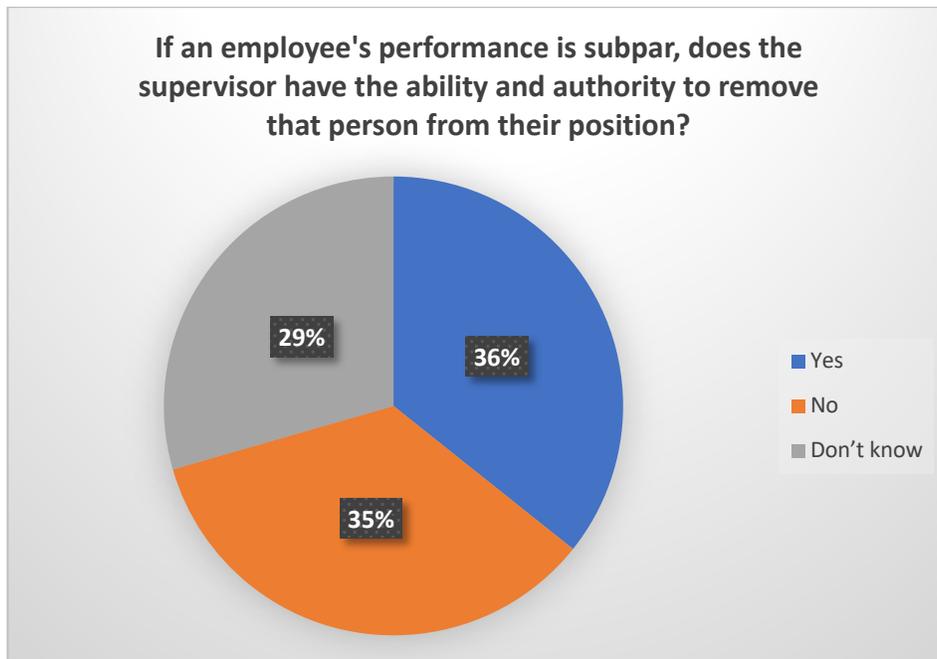
The ability to lead appropriately for the planned level of response. This would be a combination of successful experience, training & education, skills, and personal attributes.

~ ~ ~

Question SEVEN



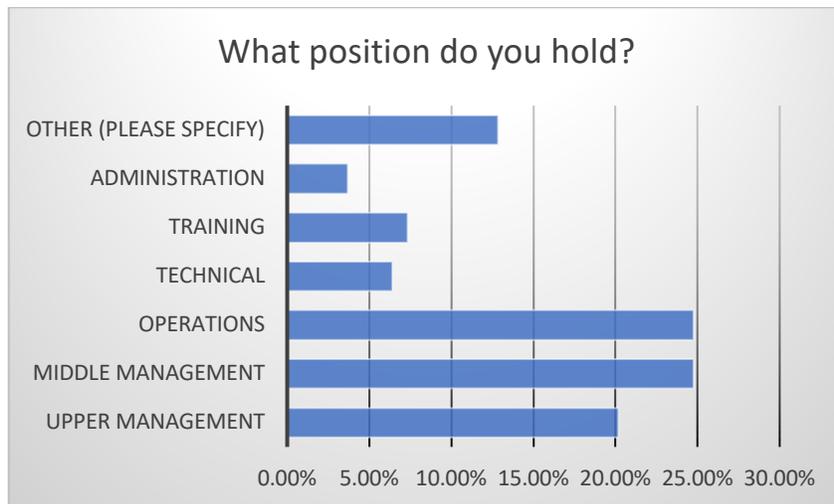
Question EIGHT



Question NINE
Where do you work?

Fire Service	8.26%
Law Enforcement	3.67%
Emergency Management	14.68%
Medical and Hospital	10.09%
Public Health	13.76%
Federal Government, including Congress, Executive, DHS, DOD, HHS, and DOJ	13.76%
Military, including National Guard, Reserves, and Coast Guard	1.83%
State/Local Government	7.34%
Non-Government Organization	7.34%
Privately Owned Company	7.34%
Publicly Traded Company	0.00%
Think Tank	0.00%
Self-Employed	1.83%
Media	0.00%
Academic Institution	2.75%
Student	0.00%
Retired	4.59%
Not Currently Employed	0.00%
Other (please specify)	2.75%

Question TEN



Comments:

We need to change the culture to one of preparedness.

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As climate change impacts increase in the form of disasters, more staffing will be needed at all levels of government. The federal staffing in particular will need to increase due to the many deployments they are experiencing.

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We are hooked on federal funding and this makes the situation worse. The federal government is backfilling a shortage of investment in emergency management at the state and local levels.

~ ~ ~

As long as the Federal Agencies fail to meet their mission goals, they will continue to experience sub-standard performances. It is time to value real-world operational experience over the academics who have never had boots on the ground. Look at the returning Military Veterans who have specialized in Logistics, Personnel Management, and Leadership and have this real-world experience have a measure in the hiring process. Let's reward outstanding performance and remove those who have substandard performance despite education and training. It's time to say not everyone is going to get a trophy today, the mission is first and foremost the primary concern and not your hurt feelings! This will never see the light of day because some academic will bury it! Good luck to the USA and may God bless us all!

~ ~ ~

The fire service has had a red card qualification requirement. That's how competent leadership is developed. Why isn't this practice used in every part of Government?

~ ~ ~

Why train hundreds of people in each state to perform a function that they are unlikely to perform more than once in a career? You should combine highly trained, experienced DHS specialists with locals in pairs for a dynamic response based on needs, experience, locale and specific situations.

~ ~ ~

Some of these questions cannot be answered by a simple yes or no or don't know. Under the Clinton administration, FEMA was elevated to a cabinet position. James Lee Witt, a practicing emergency manager, made significant positive changes. Then, the politics of the Bush administration degraded FEMA. Further degradation came with the creation of Homeland Security and the result was the response to "Katrina". Now, politics continues to negatively affect Homeland Security and FEMA. We cannot let politics continue to affect our disaster response and recovery...Puerto Rico. The Department of Homeland Security needs to be shaken up to its core and FEMA needs to be elevated and sanitized from politics!

~ ~ ~

The keyword remains "coordination". It implies collaboration and honest vertical and horizontal communications.

~ ~ ~

DHS was created as a New Public Management organization, first problem. Federal employee unions are a reality that must be managed with, second problem. Grant and financial DHS roles were handled by an accounting firm for the first number of years, the ultimate bean counters - outputs not outcomes, third problem!

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The states want the money but not the restrictions that come with the funding. Then they blame FEMA for being responsible for their state's lack of response.

~ ~ ~

I left FEMA because of deteriorating morale.

~ ~ ~

To have the best possible staff, a combination of interest in the mission, skills and experience need to be established.

~ ~ ~

It seems like no one in the public sector is held accountable except by the press, and that's usually after response to an event has stalled or failed. It seems like everyone is just interested in "maintaining" until they hit their retirement date.

~ ~ ~

In the past 27 years of serving federal emergency managers, and being one myself, the biggest issue I have encountered is a refusal to learn the job officials are hired to perform. I had one SES official (continuity coordinator) brag when he retired that he had never taken a single FEMA course in his 28 years of federal service. Yes, he bragged about it, and it showed in his incompetence. I've seen the same attitude in the five federal agencies in which I have served. The best employees are those with prior military service - they have the best work ethic and are mission-oriented. While it's difficult to fire incompetent federal employees, I've done it twice. Despite the HR rules, federal employees are normally hired through their friendship or other connection with the hiring official. Competent federal officials are rare, especially at the SES level. As a minimum, I would bring back competency exams for all levels of employment. I have had to work with recent college graduates who are unable to write a single grammatically correct sentence. The colleges and universities are graduating students with few skills useful to any office. The least they can do is ensure their graduates can read and write competently in English. Sorry for the rant; it eventually gets old to have to work with so many incompetent people.

~ ~ ~

Employee satisfaction comes from the top down. Upper management needs to have an active role in positively motivating staff. Instead of focusing on the lower level employees, maybe some attention should be directed to the upper management.

~ ~ ~

I witnessed the morale "buzz kill" at DHS over the last couple of years, and in my organization it was traced to the oppressive and restrictive policies of the highest levels of management. Political appointees failed to heed the advice of their very experienced middle managers.

~ ~ ~

"I am a plank owner for DHS (have my "Founding Member" cert from Tom Ridge. I am no longer in .gov service but also worked for DHHS. I was spent the majority of my life in public service and public safety. The focus on education minded people vs operation minded people has been the downfall. You see in social media colleges offering degrees in EM like they are getting an "I Voted" sticker. It's not that easy. It takes time to understand the operational environment, develop the networks, see changes. Data matters, but you do not need a masters degree to read data. I have zero degrees but 25 years experience in Fire, EMS, Tactical Medicine, WMD, Healthcare EM but cannot get a job because I do not have a degree. I have seen educational people flounder in exercises and real world events because they cannot process the fast paced rapidly evolving environment of a disaster.

~ ~ ~

I think at times our government responds to disasters outside the US faster than homeland ones. Supervisors should be individuals with 'boots on the ground' experience themselves. They are no longer there but able to fully understand and manage details to providing appropriate guidance for their staff. Additionally, they or a board should promote or demote individuals who are not performing as expected at their level and/or positions.

~ ~ ~

You have a Congress more bent on keeping things stirred up than getting things done. Because of this, it is hard for agencies to get things done. Allow these agencies more freedom to design and implement and hold them accountable for results. Build 5 and 10 year models that are agreed upon by Congress so that they are not changed with every new leadership position change. Design an ecosystem of preparedness where private companies are largely responsible where possible (long term food storage, mobile industrial water systems, mobile hospitals, energy centers, telecom, etc.) and spend more time keeping oversight than scurrying around after a disaster.

~ ~ ~

In FEMA, supervisory ability to assign, promote and reassign is far greater in post-disaster field operations than in the blue-sky regional or HQ office settings.

~ ~ ~

If we are going to be able to come together and solve the various problems we will be facing, we need well trained problem solvers, not the "I am in charge" types.

~ ~ ~

Mr. Rush is right in his assessment and correctly pictures the direction in which we are headed. We need to continue to hear from him and gain wisdom and make changes based upon his recommendations.

~ ~ ~

Federal agencies need to **STOP USING CONTRACTORS!** There are enough FTEs that can be cross trained. Contractors mess things up and give bad advise and milk jobs to get paid more. Keeping a large cache of medical equipment fully operational is expensive and labor intensive. The logistical issues in getting disaster medical supplies where they need to be is labor intensive and expensive. We need to remember in general the public's memory of a disaster is very short. The next natural disaster is not an if but a when.

~ ~ ~

Federal government does not have a good plan in how to get equipment where it needs to be in an emergency. The second issue is what good is the equipment if you don't have the medical personnel to use it? Hospitals staff for having just enough medical personnel to meet their current need. Anytime there is a influx of patients or a large disaster the Federal response is based on how many medical personnel to the area in need. The 3rd and most important thing the Federal government does not have an effective way to protect their disaster personnel and equipment.

~ ~ ~

Today we are challenged in ways not seen with prior eras - political, financial, legal, personal and social. I too wrestle with academic brilliance, translated into "required" guidance, but not operational at the ground level. Nationally rethinking emergency management is legitimate - and at the end of the day it is local success that builds state and then federal success.

~ ~ ~

I agree with Mr. Rush's points. I see it even worse in HHS (NDMS). You need to do some research and an article on NDMS. From my perspective, it's been falling apart for several years. Ever since it was pulled back out of FEMA and put back into HHS, it has been gradually pulled down to where it is now. ASPR/OEM is the most dysfunctional organization I've ever worked in. That's all I better say. But do it, you'll be shocked. (Talk to us team leaders.)

~ ~ ~

Collaboration between the main characters in order to create a unique role for handling issues that will affect the whole group and set up standards for the resolution of the problem.

~ ~ ~

I believe Mr. Rush is spot on. Our federal agencies do have a capacity to respond with professional and experienced personnel. Our position that we do not invest in preparedness funding has robbed us of the ability to train staff that cannot get the experience in the field. Our current political situation in Washington has frozen any ability to cooperatively discuss and pass reform to broken federal programs like the flood insurance program and we keep trying to solve problems with antiquated rules and regulations.

~ ~ ~

This world is going downhill fast and we need some good people who are willing to stand up for America and her rights. Not go with every little thing that comes along which hurts our country in the long run.

~ ~ ~

The emergency management profession is undergoing a phase III revolution. Phase I 1960s - 70s. Phase II 1980s - 90s. Phase III post 9-11 demands requirements and realities. Our education skill sets and desired leadership KSAs must change

~ ~ ~

All supervisors need to keep an open mind, especially to ideas that seem to be outside the box. Those are the ones that usually work the best, and the safest. Listen to the new members, they do not have the bad habits many others do.

~ ~ ~

Civil service personnel rules are not conducive to merit-based promotion. In my agency, in order to promote, one has to leave current division/branch for an open vacancy. Supervisors are not willing to waste time on paperwork to remove a poor performer; that person simply gets ignored and allowed to continue. Nowadays, "leaderships" is all about leaving a mark (like a puppy on a tree) rather than creating visionary and inspirational environments. Can we reverse this? Possibly. How? By rewarding Visionaries, not Functionaries.

~ ~ ~

Q7. When a person is paid through a grant, there is little to no flexibility for promotion. Q8 leaves too many questions unanswered. What has been done to improve the performance of an employee? How has he/she been engaged in the improvement process?

~ ~ ~

I have to agree with the author's views. We have forgotten how to train from real-world experience. We'd rather write about it and sit in a classroom and learn what's in the book than talk to or listen to those that have actually lived it! Needs to be more of the listening to those with experience as those people are becoming fewer and farther between.

~ ~ ~

Spot-on observations about the increasing preference for the politically correct hand-waving hot-air-blowing types over old-school operators, who are rapidly being pushed out and marginalized across the federal enterprise. The result is that we now have many agencies dominated by pencil-

pushers who can do no more than run to general counsel while wring their hands in consternation when faced with something that isn't in their handbook, rather than apply some common sense within the intent of the law and help the public that we are sworn to serve.

~ ~ ~

Those are some reasons I retired – so sad and frustrating.

~ ~ ~

You're doing a great job...

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

17 January 2020

Dear DomPrep,

Hell yes, I agree and believe everything said holds weight. It is great to have educated leaders but, unless they have been in the trenches or close to and with the boots on the ground, there will be problems and misunderstandings. Think, what does management do? They manage the “troops.” If they have never experienced being a troop, they can be (at times and excuse me) clueless.

Our leaders and leadership organizations need to take a really good look at things. Look at the hazard vulnerability analysis, review some after-action reports. Now, seriously, think about how you (collectively) will respond. All the problems: will you have the solutions? All your resources and partners: will they be able to stand up as it appears on paper or in the plan? How long can you respond in this posture? What will you need to do so?

Now, take all that and give it to your responders. Perhaps put them all together and watch and listen. They will tell you what they need, not just in materials and support, but from each other, each agency. If this is not possible, how about conducting drills. Knock out power and see how your agency functions. Try spending a day eating “disaster cookies and packaged water” with little or no AC or heat.

We cannot take it easy on ourselves or our response partners. When the real thing happens, mother nature and the public will not go easy on you; not for one moment.

James (JIMI) Johnson RN
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US Army Vet and Disaster Healthcare Volunteer.
(yeah -- I'm “the boots”)

So Why Start From Scratch?

By David Ladd

So here we are with yet another crisis du jour, a novel virus, a new communicable disease. The experts and consultants are lining up with new methods, training and PPE to combat this virus and protect "workers" (i.e. public health, public safety and others who are exposed to the public) for, mere, six-figure prices.

This is exactly what is wrong with our approach in America and where DHS, CDC, and ASPR have failed. Despite millions of dollars and two decades of opportunity, we have failed to integrate CBRN training and capabilities into our healthcare system and society. We have failed to establish missions for private, local, county, tribal, state and federal agencies as to their roles in a wide array of contemporary threats. Thus with every new threat, we seek to re-invent the wheel at a high cost.

New divisions of federal agencies seek to figure out their mission, while simultaneously and as a result, retarding the development of capabilities at smaller levels. The selection of leadership for homeland security does not draw upon the broad base knowledge required, and instead, focuses on a federal only response.

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David M. Ladd is Principal/Owner of Blackthorne Services Group, LLC. He retired from service with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Fire Services, as the Director of Hazardous Materials and Counterterrorism Response (1999 - 2016). Over his 17 years of service, David built what is reputed to be the best hazardous materials response system in the nation. As the Chief of Operations for the City of Boston's Emergency Medical Service, Mr. Ladd advanced rapid response techniques, implemented Incident Command System concepts ahead of national acceptance and created much of the doctrine, still used today, in managing mass casualty incidents. His experience in this realm extended beyond local disasters, to national disasters as an early pioneer of the National Disaster Medical System.



February 13, 2020

Editor's Note:

Thank you to all the readers who shared their valuable comments and recommendations. You all are the experts in your fields, so you know what works and what does not. As was revealed in this poll, there is a general consensus from those inside and outside the federal government that the federal government needs to embrace multiple roles in a disaster. Low morale and hiring decisions play critical roles in the nation's state of preparedness. According to those tasked with performing emergency preparedness, response, and resilience duties and responsibilities, experience in the field and ability to remove those who do not fulfill these crucial responsibilities will determine how prepared the nation is, how well agencies will respond, and how quickly communities will recover from a disaster. However, federal agencies are not as prepared as they need to be for the next disaster, which could already be at our door in the form of the new coronavirus.

In Question 4, most of you believe that the negative morale in DHS and its component agencies can be reversed. Together, we can initiate the process by informing federal, state, and local leadership on what has not been working, and what would work to raise the nation's preparedness to a new level. There is no way of knowing what natural, human-caused, or technological disasters have yet to emerge, but we do know that we are less than fully prepared. Let's collectively continue to make every effort to change that.

If you have a solution to share, DomPrep wants to help disseminate it. Please contact me if you would like to share your lessons learned, best practices, and new solutions.

Sincerely yours,
Cathy

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