

Municipal Coordinator Duties

In accordance with Title 35, a municipal coordinator is appointed by the Governor upon the recommendation of the executive officer or governing body of the municipality. The coordinator shall be professionally competent and capable of exerting leadership, planning, training and effecting coordination among operating agencies of government and controlling coordinated operations. Without a doubt, the most important responsibility of municipal officials, and the municipal coordinator, is to coordinate disaster response efforts during the first 24 to 72 hours after any emergency. The municipal coordinator has a major role to play in helping the community and residents achieve the proper level of preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation activities for whatever may affect the municipality. The municipal coordinator must create interest, motivate and involve the community in these activities and keep elected officials informed and involved with these preparations. Each coordinator should use the resources available at county and state level and within the community to assist with these responsibilities.

1. Prepares and maintains an EOP for the municipality subject to the direction of the elected officials; reviews and updates as required. Develop and keep current emergency response checklists appropriate for the emergency needs and resources of the community.
2. Maintains coordination with the county EMA, and provides prompt information in emergencies, as available.
3. Coordinate with the county EMA, identifies hazards and vulnerabilities that may affect the municipality; recommend mitigation measures to reduce disaster effects; participates in the County Hazard Mitigation Team and assists in pre-disaster mitigation planning and grant submission efforts.
4. Identifies resources within the municipality that can be used to respond to a major emergency or disaster situation and requests needed resources from the county EMA.
5. Develop, maintain and ensure certification of trained staff to work in the municipal emergency operations center (EOC) when activated.
6. Mobilizes the municipal EOC and act as the Command function within the Incident Command System (ICS) structure in the EOC during and emergency/disaster.
7. Compiles cost figures for the conduct of emergency operations.

8. Attend training, workshops and seminars provided by municipal officials, county and other sources to maintain proficiency and currency in emergency management and emergency response planning and procedures.
9. Have current appropriate plans, procedures, guidance and laws issued by the county, PEMA and the Commonwealth available within your EOC. Have knowledge of the federal and state required plans for your jurisdiction and coordinate with all applicable agencies dealing with emergencies at dams, chemical and nuclear plants, schools, day cares, hospitals, prisons, nursing home facilities and special events.
10. Manage and mobilize the equipment and staff of the municipal emergency operations center (EOC) when appropriate and as directed by the municipal elected officials.
11. Provide prompt and accurate information regarding municipal disaster emergencies to the appropriate municipal, county, Commonwealth officials and the general public.
12. Participate in all tests, drills and exercises, including remedial drills and exercises that pertain to your municipality, as scheduled by the county of Commonwealth.
13. Participate in the integrated flood warning systems program as applicable for your municipality.
14. Develop mutual aid agreements, as applicable, with adjacent municipalities.
15. Encourage and ensure municipal officials declare disaster emergencies when needed and send the signed disaster declaration to the county EMA.
16. Conduct damage reporting/assessment and expeditiously, within 24-hours of a disaster, provide the information to the county emergency management coordinator or the county EOC if activated.
17. Respond to the location of a disaster as requested by municipal officials or the county emergency management coordinator.
18. Attain Basic and Advanced certification in accordance with PEMA Directive 2003-5 and Title 35.
19. Ensure municipality is compliant with the six components of the National Incident Management System (NIMS).
20. Other duties as assigned by municipal elected officials.

THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COORDINATOR

In every community, there are various groups and individuals who perform (or could perform) necessary services in an emergency. Policemen, firefighters, emergency medical personnel, and public works department personnel are common examples.

None of these emergency service groups or individuals have the legal responsibility to organize all of the others in the community. No single group has the responsibility to work closely with all other groups and individuals so that the needs of the citizens for a safe day-to-day environment are met. Also, no single group is responsible to see that during a disaster the collective response of all emergency response groups will be effectively coordinated.

A focal point for coordinating and organizing the emergency activities of all of these diverse groups and individuals was needed. The recognition of this need led to the enactment in 1978 of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Services Act, P.L. 1332. This act requires each county, city, borough and township in the Commonwealth (a total of 2,638 political entities) to select an individual to serve as its emergency management coordinator. The law states that the elected officials of each of these political entities must select a person for the job and forward the name of the individual to the Governor, through PEMA, for appointment. PEMA is the state level emergency management agency charged with the responsibility of coordinating the state's response to all types of disasters. PEMA worked with state agencies, county and local emergency management agencies, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to accomplish its goal.

While officially appointed by the Governor, the emergency management coordinator is responsible to the elected officials of the county or municipality. An emergency management coordinator is the direct representative of the elected officials. In an emergency, he must take action in the name of the elected officials until, and if, they deem it necessary to assume direction of the response effort themselves.

Local and county governments are recognized as the first line of official public responsibility for emergency management activity. In an emergency, state and federal governments can be counted on for major support only when the damage has been unusually widespread and severe. The role of the county and local emergency management agency coordinators, as the focus of the planning effort, is to develop and maintain an ongoing program of mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. The emergency management agency serves the chief executive by working with the departments of county and local government and private sector organizations in the development of plans and capabilities responsive to those hazards which seriously threaten the jurisdiction. Prior to a crisis, hazard mitigation programs can reduce the vulnerability of people and property. In a crisis, effective response is often a result of what has been accomplished prior to the emergency.

The emergency management coordinator is the vital ingredient in the development of an effective emergency program. He or she serves as: key leader in planning, coordinator of operations, chief of staff to the jurisdiction's executive during emergency response, community liaison to build the emergency program, and supporter of mitigation efforts. The emergency management coordinator has the responsibility for coordinating all the components of the emergency management system in the jurisdiction. These components consist of fire and police, emergency medical services, public works, volunteers, and other groups contributing to the management of emergencies. The parts of the emergency management system are no different than the parts of government and the private sector that manage the day-to-day affairs of the community. The task of emergency management is to organize those resources that already exist. The coordinator must make certain that the components of the emergency management system know the threats to the jurisdiction, plan for emergencies, can operate effectively in an emergency, and can conduct recovery operations after a disaster.

His job is accomplished by performing the specific actions outlined in Chapters IV, V, VI, and VII.

The emergency management coordinator will work closely with other departments such as the fire department, police department, planning department, and department of public works. During an emergency, the coordinator should coordinate the operations among these departments. The police, fire, and other emergency service agencies are independent. They have their own mandates; they have their own responsibilities to fulfill. In an emergency, however, all of these emergency responders must work together like a well-oiled machine. The public safety is poorly served by competitiveness and organizational jealousy before, during, or after a disaster occurs.

Coordination of police, fire, public works, etc. throughout emergency management is a matter of personal style. Frequent contact, sharing advice, and combined training are all ways to make coordination easier. Most important of all, however, is to know the boundaries of coordination. For example, coordination means police and fire cooperate in setting up a security or crowd control line. The emergency management coordinator should make certain that responsibility is assigned and action taken without conflict or controversy. The coordinator is definitely not to tell a police chief how or where to set up security.

The emergency management coordinator serves as coordinator when more than one emergency organization is involved. This always takes place in major disasters but can also occur in minor emergencies. For example, even in a fire, he/she may be called upon to coordinate the temporary housing of victims with the Red Cross or other social service agencies.

Equally important as coordinating agencies is the role of the emergency management coordinator in maintaining private sector interest in the emergency program. Emergency management partners in the private sector range from business and industry to civic organizations and individuals. The relationship with the local news media also cannot be overemphasized. A good working relationship with the press is a most important resource.

Finally, the emergency management coordinator is unique because he or she has a role in hazard mitigation as well as emergency preparedness and response. While most mitigation efforts are the primary responsibility of other departments of local government, the emergency management coordinator still has crucial roles in mitigation - that of motivator, coordinator, and monitor. He/she must be alert to risks and monitor opportunities to avoid hazardous conditions. No other agency or organization in government or the private sector has the responsibility to look at all hazards and all risks; no other agency or organization has the mandate to protect the public against any emergency condition.

The emergency management coordinator serves the jurisdiction as the cement that holds together all the various components of a mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery program. He/she draws together the various emergency response managers who apply their resources during an emergency into an effective coordinated response program. The coordinator, as well, keeps a conscientious eye out for opportunities available to avoid disasters through hazard mitigation. In short, the emergency management coordinator draws on a wide body of resources to produce the most effective emergency program possible.

Your coordinator will probably serve as a volunteer or may receive a token stipend, except for county coordinators who, for the most part, are full-time paid employees. Because of the importance of the coordinator in the saving of lives and the protection of property in the event of an emergency, it is important for elected officials to pay particular attention to the selection of their coordinator, be he paid or volunteer.

First of all the coordinator must have the respect of the various emergency response groups in the community, and must be capable of rallying the total resources of the community in a coordinated, concerted effort to bring about an effective community response to an emergency. Without this leadership ability, any person designated as an emergency management coordinator will have an impossible task. He will not only fail as an individual, but the entire community will fail to effectively respond to an emergency.

Additionally, a person selected must have both planning and training abilities. He must not only be able to coordinate the development of an emergency operations plan, but he must be able to coordinate the training necessary to enable the community's emergency operations plan to be a workable document.

Finally, a coordinator must also possess administrative abilities. In the development of the plan, the conduct of the training necessary to implement the plan, and in actually responding to an emergency situation, a coordinator must manage administrative work. Failure to do so properly may result in the community being “short changed” and result in an ineffective response to an emergency.

It is not an easy task to select the proper person to be an emergency management coordinator. But it is an important, vital task. Selecting a person to fill this important post with little or no thought to ability is not fair to the person so selected, to the county or municipality, or to the people who reside there. The lives of these people may be placed in jeopardy, or even lost, by the selection of the wrong person to be the coordinator.

What of selecting the police or fire chief to the post of emergency management coordinator? Certainly such individuals can probably do the job. However, in their post as police chief or fire chief, they will be so involved in an emergency situation that they may not be able to function additionally as the coordinator. Thus, it is not advisable to select such persons as coordinators. However, especially in smaller communities, there may be no one else available. In such circumstances, it may be prudent to select a fire or police chief to perform the responsibility. Before so doing, elected officials are well advised to carefully consider such a move before actually making the selection.

As a final note, Pennsylvania state law provides for the possibility for municipalities to share the same coordinator. For example, an elected governing body of one jurisdiction may pass a resolution which designates the coordinator of a neighboring jurisdiction to serve as its emergency management coordinator too. This action is sometimes undertaken in sparsely populated jurisdictions with few of their own emergency resources. There are obvious advantages and disadvantages to taking this kind of action.