

History of Emergency Management

Emergency Management as a discipline has been shaped by historical events, both nationally and internationally, and has evolved from a single focused, Cold War threat, to one that has expanded its parameters to an “all-hazards” approach.

a. Advent of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

- During the 1960s and 1970s tried to find a balance between natural and technological disasters
- Alaska Earthquake (1964)
- Hurricanes Betsy (1965), Camille (1969), and Agnes (1972)
- Three Mile Island (1979)
- President Carter in 1979 consolidated multiple agencies and programs under newly created FEMA

b. 1980s and 1990s

- Poor handling of hurricanes in Puerto Rico and South Carolina, earthquakes in California and Hurricane Andrew
- President Clinton appointed James Lee Witt as FEMA director (cabinet level)
- Greater focus on preparedness and mitigation

c. After 2000

- Terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 changed both the concept and conduct of emergency management
- Department of Homeland Security (DHS) created in 2003
- FEMA absorbed into DHS with all or part of 21 other federal agencies
- Major shift in federal philosophy, policy, and priorities compared to the emergency management program of the 1990s
- Federal funding for emergency management has become essential to state and local governments
- States establish the conditions governing the pass-through of these funds to local governments
- State emergency management agencies significantly influence the planning, staffing, and training of local emergency management departments