

“Complete” Emergency Management.

Emergency management planning has traditionally been confined to natural disasters, medical emergencies and law enforcement responses. These are, of course, essential services that every community values. With COVID-19, the Great Recession and the present-day impacts of climate change, the idea about emergency response programs needs to expand to include a wider range of possibilities.

The idea of “complete”. “Complete streets” was the first application of this more general idea. Complete streets planners anticipated and designed streets for all modes of travel from cars to buses to bikes to walking, and more. “Complete” means a comprehensive, all inclusive, holistic facility, including its operational aspects. The idea of “complete” can now be applied to schools, park systems, housing markets and neighborhoods, among other places and systems. “Complete” is a great idea that pulls the planner into long-range comprehensive thinking.

Essential workers. Another tangential idea relates to affordable housing and the situation of first responders, Communities are beginning to appreciate, in a new way, the importance of “essential” workers; workers who provide safety services across the board...health, law enforcement, education, transportation and food services.

“Black Elephants” is another useful concept that informs the idea of “complete” emergency services. “Black elephants”, as Thomas Friedman uses the term, was coined by the environmentalist Adam Sweidan. The term combines the idea of black swans with unacknowledged elephants in the room. The “black elephant” is an emergency that has been foreseen for a while but suddenly threatens the community and requires an emergency response. Being prepared is a mantra many adopt but people and cities often postpone actually putting resources and procedures in place.

Six areas of potential emergencies. Some can be specifically anticipated, some are known to be out there with an unknown arrival date, some are out of the blue, a total surprise. Areas that we are vulnerable include:

- **Meteorological** – hurricanes, tornados, floods, severe snowstorms, etc.
- **Biologic** – the COVID-19 is the most recent epidemic, but there have been others.
- **Atmospheric** – Air pollution and acid rain have created emergencies in the recent past as have ozone concerns and volcano eruptions that re-directed air flights.
- **Financial** – The Great Recession of 2008 comes to mind, but the current situation may be worse.

- **Geopolitical** – The extreme geopolitical crisis is War, but trade sanctions, travel restrictions and terrorism are among the dangers.
- **Public Safety** – Law enforcement, fire protection and response and emergency medical assistance top the list of locally provided emergency services.

Given these six areas of vulnerability, and possibly more, what plans and preparations can a small city or town make to reduce the risk and, if necessary, respond to any of the abovementioned emergencies? State and federal aid is a factor, a strong resource. But state and federal assistance is usually not available immediately; so, the local community has to respond with resources at hand.

Few communities have a “complete” emergency response plan. Until recently they have not been seen as necessary. So, to begin the process of creating a “complete” plan for emergency responses, consider the following elements:

First, local law enforcement, fire and medical personnel must be trained and equipped.

Second, local partnerships must be established prior their need, including the hospital, the school system, utility companies, grocery stores and construction companies.

Third, police, fire, medical techs, teachers, grocery staff and construction workers must be provided with livable wages and affordable housing that enables them to live in town.

Fourth, a “smart” system of internet connected sensors can provide city-wide information to a central “dashboard” about physical facilities, traffic movements, emergency responses and health care capacities; thus, enabling responding agents to be efficiently directed.

Fifth, a command center, even an informal one, can be located in city hall or elsewhere with the communication systems, emergency electricity and transportation vehicles necessary to respond to many emergencies.

Preparedness is the watchword. This level of effort may seem beyond the capabilities of a small city or town, but when the need emerges, the responses are demanded. Partnerships with larger cities and counties may fill some of the gaps, but the responsibility is still local. The trick is to imagine the imaginable.