The discipline of emergency management (EM) is at a critical crossroads. Emergency managers around the world are faced with new threats, new responsibilities, and new opportunities. This paper examines the organizational changes made by the US federal government in shaping the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and presents three key lessons learned during the past decade that could guide emergency planners as they design and manage EM organizations of the future.

INTRODUCTION
Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said, “The great thing about this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving.” The discipline of emergency management (EM) is at a critical crossroads. Emergency managers are faced with new threats, new responsibilities, and new opportunities.

The potential for biochemical terrorist strikes, mass casualty events, and cyberspace attacks loom large. Providing protection to first responders and to the general public from a myriad of unknown and unpredictable technological hazards is a daunting responsibility. Accepting this responsibility and wisely applying the lessons learned from EM practices and policies of the past represents both the challenge and the opportunity for emergency managers.

This paper explores issues concerning the current political and organizational environment for EM and presents the authors’ opinions on what EM must do to survive and grow in this new environment.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES
After the events of 9/11, the US government focused on reorganization and increased appropriations to respond to the threat of terrorism. A new Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created, which consolidates various federal government agencies and programs with some responsibility for terrorism, including the US Border Patrol, the INS, FEMA, the Coast Guard, and a few other discrete programs.

The reorganization does not include any of the intelligence, diplomatic, or law enforcement programs that are at the center of government efforts at preventing terrorism. By including FEMA, the state and local emergency management structure of the US will be integrated into the new department.

The second organizational move the Bush administration has taken is to propose establishing a new Northern Command as the backbone for homeland defense. The mission of the Northern Command is still being developed, and the staffing of this Command (i.e., active military, active military reserves, and/or the National Guard) is still under discussion. What the mission becomes, and the potential conflicts among the roles of these organizations, have a major implication for EM.

Finally, the potential for significant new appropriations for terrorism and for state and local EM dominates the EM response to these reorganization initiatives. The US EM system, at all levels, has been underfunded for decades.

In the early debate over the Nunn-Lugar antiterrorism legislation, emergency managers and other first responders—particularly the fire community—were lobbying for additional resources to prepare for possible terrorist attacks. It is unfortunate that during these discussions the fire and EM communities
did not form a partnership to present a collective argument for their needs because it might have worked. Instead, the traditional rivalry between these two groups, both of which believe they are the most critical first responders, prevailed.

The law enforcement community, on the other hand, presented a unified front. As a result, most of the Nunn-Lugar appropriated funds went to support the Department of Justice, FBI, and local law enforcement.

Later, the fire community was successful in establishing a new grant program to upgrade the deteriorating US fire response infrastructure. The fire unions were responsible for getting these funds, and the terrorism threat was only one small part of their rationale. In the post-9/11 environment, it was obvious that funding for terrorism-related activities was going to be a high-priority competition.

The National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) and the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) endorsed the inclusion of FEMA in the new DHS. NEMA represents the state directors of EM; the IAEM represents local emergency managers. This endorsement comes although in most states, the governors have designated individuals other than the state directors for EM as their agent or “czar” for Homeland Security.

Other than the lure of money, it is hard to understand why the states would take this position. FEMA will lose stature and influence when it is no longer an independent agency, and the Director of FEMA is no longer part of the President’s Cabinet and so will the state EM organizations. There is no assurance that, when sent to the state governments, the proposed federal funding will be controlled by state emergency managers. In most of the states, governors have appointed homeland security czars who are part of their cabinets, and are not the existing state EM director.

There is another aspect of these changes that emergency managers need to consider. In many states, EM reports to the governor through the Adjunct General, who is the leader of the Army and Air National Guard. For years now, the National Guard has been looking for a new mission and new funding. As DOD budgets were reduced and state funding decreased, the Guard sought to expand its role in events not related to law enforcement, particularly disasters where funding for their disaster support would be reimbursed by FEMA.

The involvement of the Guard in disaster response was not universally supported. Preparedness for, and response to terrorist events, provides the Guard with the new mission they sought, and they are unlikely to relinquish it to the emergency managers.

For example, in 2002, California’s Office of Homeland Security which is separate from the state EM office, started working with the Adjunct General to implement a five-step state strategy on terrorism. One of the steps in this strategy is to re-examine state and federal legislation to see what needs to be changed to provide them with appropriate authority to operate in any emergency—technological or natural. This office believes it will have two missions: one in homeland security and one in homeland defense. International actions related to the war on terrorism could add to the Guard’s importance.

What does this mean for EM?

It will probably take months, or—more realistically, years—to sort things out, but let’s look at some of the potential changes. The implications for federal EM efforts are numerous. In the new DHS, FEMA becomes a directorate headed by an under secretary that reports up through a deputy secretary to the department secretary.

The direct authorities currently vested in the Director of FEMA will probably be given to the new DHS Secretary, who will probably retain the responsibilities for recommending disaster declarations to the President and for coordination of the federal response to natural and technological disasters or emergencies. This could dramatically impact the timeliness, effectiveness, and operational abilities of the current FEMA operations and staff. There may be changes in response or preparedness responsibilities to take better advantage of other parts of the new department, such as the Coast Guard. In any case, the stature and authorities of the leader of federal EM activities will be diminished.
Another likely impact will be the competition for resources among the various organizations within the new department. It is unlikely that the EM contingent will be effective in arguing for resources when up against organizations three and four times their size, such as the INS. The increases in terrorism monies that are potentially flowing to EM can evaporate quickly in the absence of terrorist events or rescission of federal spending across the board. These impacts, if they are realized, will certainly extend to the states. They most assuredly will be felt at the local EM level, where we already see states using federal support designated for local efforts as offsets to state budget shortfalls.

Throughout the summer and fall of 2002, Congress debated various versions of the legislation that would create the DHS. It looked like the legislation might ultimately fail because of pressure from the Democrats in Congress to preserve the rights of federal employees being transferred into the new department. But the mid-term elections of 2002 changed the control of Congress with a Republican majority in both houses. Without further deliberation on the legislation, the House passed the bill (H.R. 299-121) on November 13, 2002, and the Senate passed the bill (S.90-9) on November 19, 2002.

On November 25, 2002, President Bush signed into law the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-296) and announced that former Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge would be nominated to be Secretary of the new DHS established by the legislation. Ridge was quickly confirmed and promised that the new department would be in place by March 1, 2003. The legislation allowed the Administration extraordinary freedom to reorganize personnel and programs from the existing 22 agencies combined to create the new department. For months, a small group of individuals in the Office of Homeland Security were working on reorganization plans. In January, a small transition team headed by Secretary Ridge began to finalize the structure. The new structure moves significant numbers of FEMA personnel and most of the program funding for state and local EM infrastructure and first responders to a newly created Office of Domestic Preparedness. What remains of FEMA is reduced personnel for disaster response and recovery, the US Fire Administration, National Flood Insurance Program, other mitigation programs, nonterrorism training programs, and Citizens Corps. Added into FEMA is the National Disaster Medical System, the National Strategic Stockpile, and Nuclear Incident Response team. FEMA was renamed the Emergency Preparedness and Response Directorate.

On January 10, 2003, President Bush announced his intention to nominate Michael D. Brown to be the Under Secretary for Emergency Preparedness and Response. Mr. Brown had served as General Counsel and then Deputy Director to Joe Allbaugh, the former FEMA Director who had announced his resignation as Director of FEMA to be effective March 1, 2003. Mr. Brown has stated that he would like to retain the name or the identification of “FEMA” even though it is not part of the official title of the new organization, since it has such universal public recognition and respect. This will be very difficult since a part of the name denotes an independent agency.

Three events provide a level of insight into how the new DHS will operate and how it impacts EM and FEMA.

The organizations coming into the department were taxed with providing initial operating funds for the new department. FEMA was asked to provide approximately $35 million dollars, while the Coast Guard (with a much larger budget) was only required to contribute $3 million. FEMA came up with the funding by reallocating over half of the funding for the Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) program, funds from the predisaster mitigation grant program, and from other accounts including the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF).

The second event was the tragic explosion of the Space Shuttle Columbia, which, using FEMA’s authorities under the Stafford Act, as amended, was immediately declared a federal emergency. This type of declaration is a prerogative of the President when federal facilities or assets are impacted. The bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995 was initially declared a federal emergency. The Columbia declaration took some by surprise as it was precedent and had not been applied in the earlier Challenger disaster.
Two speculations exist concerning this emergency. One is that the Bush Administration wanted to show the broad scope of the new DHS and that it could perform its responsibilities. Another more practical reason may be that by declaring it an emergency, the DRF could pay for the activities of the agencies involved in the clean-up and investigation. Emergency declarations are capped at $5 million unless Congress is notified. As of February 24, FEMA has expended over $90 million responding to the Columbia shuttle explosion.

The DRF has historically been considered only applicable for victims, be they people or communities. The leadership of the new DHS may be taking a much broader approach to use of this fund, and it may provide further rationale for why FEMA was included in the new department. While the DRF receives an annual appropriation, most of its funding comes from supplemental appropriations that are outside the normal federal budget caps, thereby providing almost “free money.” Congress has never failed to approve supplemental funds in the aftermath of a single or multiple disasters.

Passage of the 2003 Omnibus Appropriations bill indicates that spending on federal-level homeland security and terrorism programs is a high priority. However, heavy cuts were made in state and local homeland security programs, such as grants for EM, first responders, and public safety. Overall, resources to these state and local programs were cut more than 35 percent.

Do each of these examples represent a special situation, or are they representative of a significant change in philosophy? If the latter, then this has broad implications for the future of EM at all levels of government. By rushing to adopt the new hazard of terrorism as the primary objective, EM may find itself losing the funding battle to other forces in law enforcement and defense.

**The Future of EM**

We are optimistic that EM can survive and thrive in the future if it embraces the lessons learned from the past and moves forward with a progressive agenda that will be valued by the American people.

Since September 11, the nation’s psyche and its political leaders have been focused on terrorism and eliminating those who could perpetuate terrorist acts against the US. At the same time, the nation has experienced relatively few major natural disasters. Large Western wildfires, many caused by human error and drought conditions, dominated the disaster landscape. The El Niño effect reduced the likelihood of floods and hurricanes. These conditions will change.

Even when you consider the costs and human devastation of the 9/11 events, the statistics indicate that natural disasters will continue to be costly. The probabilities support the inevitability of a major natural disaster—flood, hurricane, or earthquake—affecting our communities. Continued development pressures will make flooding events in the US more prevalent and severe. As EM systems focus their efforts on preparing for and responding to terrorist events, these efforts should not diminish their capabilities or capacity for dealing with natural hazards.

**Lesson one**

**Maintain an all-hazards approach to EM.**

Applying this approach takes advantage of the common capabilities necessary to treat any type of disaster or emergency but allows for incorporating the special needs of terrorism. To abandon the all-hazards approach would be repeating the mistake the EM community made in the 1980s. During the Cold War era, FEMA concentrated more than 75 percent of its financial and human resources on preparing for the next nuclear war. It mandated that states and localities receiving FEMA funding follow suit.

The result was that federal, state, and local capacities to respond to natural disasters were severely diminished. As Hurricanes Hugo, Iniki, and Andrew vividly demonstrated, state and local capacities were quickly overcome. The federal government response under FEMA was disorganized and late. In the case of Hurricane Andrew, the Director of FEMA was replaced as the in-charge official, and the military provided most of the initial support. This example of the folly of focusing on any one threat at the cost of more frequent and widespread threats provides strong evidence of the wisdom of the all-hazards approach to EM.
Lesson two

The federal response infrastructure, based on the Federal Response Plan, works. Since 9/11, many political leaders have called for building a new terrorism response structure, forgetting that an effective federal structure already exists. There is no need to build a new infrastructure. This approach was tested in hundreds of natural events and the Oklahoma City bombing—a terrorist event—and it worked. This proven structure is flexible; it needs modification and the addition of new partners to accommodate the unique aspects of terrorism, but the EM community should fight any attempts to build a separate structure.

At the state and local levels, state plans and the EM compacts that exist between states support this operational approach. Specific lessons learned from 9/11, particularly in communications and joint operations, can be readily incorporated into these existing structures.

Lesson three

Continue to practice the concepts that facilitated the US EM system becoming the best in the world. These five concepts are:

- focus on your customers, both internal and external;
- build partnerships among disciplines and across sectors, including the business sector and the media;
- support development and application of new technologies to give emergency managers the tools they need;
- emphasize communications to partners, the public, and the media; and
- make mitigation the cornerstone of EM.

These common-sense concepts were the key to the respect and success FEMA achieved under Director James Lee Witt and President Clinton. We believe they provide the framework for EM to continue to grow and expand its influence and importance to the institutions and people it serves. EM can ensure its place in the future if it focuses on policies, programs, and activities that improve the safety and social and economic security of individuals, institutions, and communities. To do this, EM must focus more effort in promoting and implementing prevention and mitigation.

Prevention and Mitigation

Prevention is the positive function that emergency managers can practice every day, in every community, and not be dependent on an event to prove their value. Prevention is practiced by all sectors of a community. To be effective, it requires developing partnerships within a community and often brings together disparate parties to solve common problems.

Mitigation brings the private sector into the EM system because economic sustainability of their businesses depends on risk reduction, so prevention promotes their support and leadership. Mitigation provides the entry point to involve the private sector in other phases of EM and to understand their unique needs in response and recovery.

In the late 1990s, business continuity and mitigation planning was the largest growth area for EM. Economic considerations or interest often drive public decisions. Mitigation allows emergency managers to have access and influence to the decision-making process. Mitigation works best at the local level and provides that grassroots constituency that can exert political pressure for continued EM support.

FEMA’s national mitigation initiative, Project Impact, articulated this concept and made it a reality in more than 250 communities. The Bush Administration recognized this by including the words “building disaster-resistant communities” in the objectives for the new DHS.

There are many competitors for the role of homeland security czar. There are reasons and politics that may affect who or what agency gains prominence. While the struggle goes on, the EM community can demonstrate their value by focusing on mitigation. Their investment in this approach will ultimately pay off.

Should another terrorism event happen, the same questions raised after 9/11 will surface again because
no preparedness or response will be adequate; however, when the next natural hazard occurs, EM leadership in prevention and mitigation will be recognized and rewarded with public support. If there is any doubt, the events and comments made by public officials and citizens in the aftermath of the 2001 Seattle earthquake prove the point.

CONCLUSION

Whether the EM establishment will embrace this path in the future is debatable. Historic trends indicate otherwise; however, throughout the 1990s, a new breed of EM professionals began to emerge. These individuals were anxious to bring a fresh face to the profession and embraced new strategies for promoting sound EM practices, particularly mitigation. The future of EM may rest on their ability to balance the new demands of the terrorism threat with the real need to make a difference in the quality of people’s lives and their community’s sustainability through mitigation.

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