

States move millions in DHS funds

More than 80 percent of federal grants passed through to local governments

BY JACK PENCHOFF

States are moving millions of dollars of homeland security funds to local communities despite the red tape they face in accessing domestic preparedness funds already appropriated by Congress.

That was the conclusion of a recent survey conducted by the National Emergency Management Association, an affiliate of The Council of State Governments, which shows that states have met federal requirements for passing the funds through to local communities.

NEMA conducted the survey in response to concerns raised in Congress that states were moving too slowly in spending Office for Domestic Preparedness and Federal Emergency Management Agency grant funds. Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee raised the issue during a hearing in March.

According to the survey, of the 37 states and two territories responding, an average of 81 percent of the \$347.7 million provided by the federal government for homeland security between 1999 and 2002 has been spent or obligated by the states. Most of that money comes in the form of grants from the ODP and FEMA.

Since FY 2000, states have been required to pass through at least 80 percent of their ODP funding to local communities. Before ODP and FEMA were brought into the new Department of Homeland Security, ODP was part of the U.S. Department of Justice and FEMA was a stand-alone agency.



The ODP grant process requires states to submit an application, work with local governments to conduct a comprehensive statewide needs assessment, and develop a state strategy and then purchase equipment for emergency responders. Only after states pay for equipment are they eligible for federal reimbursement.

According to NEMA, the states have spent 76 percent of all federal funds provided through the ODP grant program between fiscal years 1999 and 2002. The states received the remaining 24 percent of the funds in the past six months and they will soon be obligated.

In FY 2001 states passed through an average of 88 percent of their ODP funds and in FY 2002 they passed through an average 83 percent, the survey shows.

“This process can take months as states are required to apply separately

for each grant appropriated by Congress, and at times apply to multiple federal agencies,” said State Rep. Dan Bosley of Massachusetts, CSG chairman. “Given the requirements placed on states during this time of war and the threat of attack on American soil, the states are doing yeoman’s work in getting these funds out the door to local governments as soon as possible.”

The NEMA report notes that not only is the application process cumbersome, but appropriation cycles have been irregular. According to the survey, FY 00 and FY 01 grant funds were consolidated and made available to states in spring 2002. The FY 02 funds were provided to states in the fall of 2002.

“Three years of ODP funding came to the states within approximately six months,” said Trina Hembree, executive director of NEMA. “It is impossible for

The following states and territories responded to the NEMA survey

Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Guam, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Virgin Islands, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming

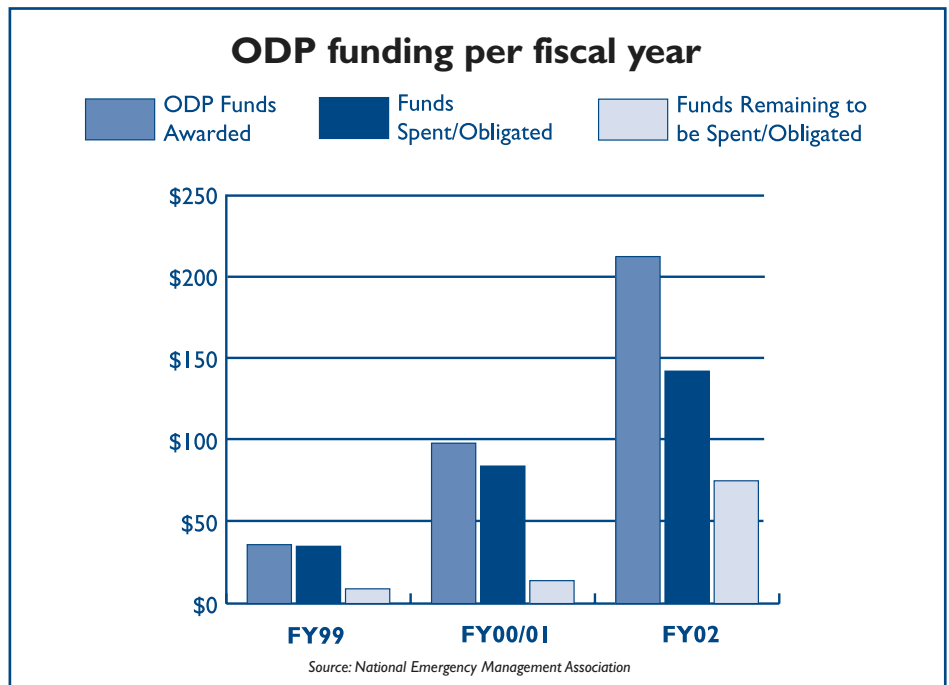
state and local governments to design and implement a long-term strategy for homeland security preparedness and response capabilities with erratic federal funding cycles and extreme spikes and lows in funding.”

States also reported to NEMA that they spend a lot of time assisting local communities with making equipment purchase decisions because there are no national standards for equipment.

“Choosing between thousands of vendors and multitudes of products can be a daunting and time-consuming task for both states and local governments,” said Hembree.

States also spend a lot of time working with local governments, she said, in promoting mutual aid, supporting specialized response teams, encouraging statewide equipment compatibility, and ensuring a basic response capacity exists throughout the states.

The goal is not only to move the funds quickly, but also responsibly, said Glen Woodbury, director of the Washington Emergency Management Agency and president of NEMA. “We need to invest in effective processes as well as protective equipment,” he said. “We have to look at the overall needs of our state and communities and then work collaboratively to design resource strategies that are based upon true risk and need, not hype. Only



then are we truly securing our homeland’s security from not just terrorism, but from any hazard that might threaten the health and safety of our citizens.”

The National Governors Association on April 3 forwarded the NEMA report and a letter to U.S. Senate and House leaders calling for quicker processing of homeland security grant requests.

“In the face of emerging new terrorist threats, we cannot overstate the importance of consistent federal planning guid-

ance and streamlined processing for federal reimbursement requests coupled with a stable, multi-year federal funding stream to support building capacity in local communities consistent with statewide strategy,” wrote Raymond C. Scheppach, NGA executive director.

Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge told those attending a NEMA conference in February that one of his goals was to streamline the federal grant application process.

Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, CSG president, said states need stable, long-term funding that will allow them to plan for and build an appropriate level of preparedness for homeland security.

In addition to a more stable funding mechanism, states need the flexibility in that funding to address their particular needs and priorities, Huckabee said.

“Flexibility in funding is important,” said Huckabee. “The threat of agricultural terrorism might be the priority in some states, while infrastructure protection or port security might be the priorities elsewhere. For every state, the goal is to ensure the safety of our first responders and all citizens.”

The entire NEMA report is available at <http://www.csg.org> or <http://www.nema.org>.

— Jack Penchoff is senior editor of *State Government News*.

