

# States ready to respond

*State and local coordination and readiness is the key to disaster recovery. States can support 10 principles as a national strategy.*

**BY KAREN MARSHALL**

*“This nation is not going to let terrorism get the best of us. We will come back and be stronger. We are ready to respond.”*

*— Edward F. Jacoby Jr., director of the New York State Emergency Management Office*

**S**tate emergency operations centers throughout the country activated on Sept. 11 after terrorists attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, standing ready to respond locally as well as to assist areas directly affected. While no one could have been fully prepared for what happened that day, prior planning, training and coordination for multiple types of disasters paid off at ground zero and beyond.

Emergency management officials regularly share lessons learned during disasters, from earthquakes and fires to the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995. Often, the challenges learned from one scene can apply to the next incident. For example, the structural collapse, search-and-rescue efforts, and injuries that resulted from the impact of commercial jetliners on the World Trade Center towers were similar in some ways to what was anticipated in the event of a major earthquake.



*President Bush took time to meet the members of the search-and-rescue teams when he visited the World Trade Center site in New York on Sept. 14. Photo courtesy of FEMA*

In New York and in Arlington, Va., at the Pentagon, local emergency personnel responded immediately, and state and federal personnel and aid were quickly available. "As soon as this occurred, we had a very rapid response," said Edward F. Jacoby Jr., director of the New York State Emergency Management Office. "Early on, during Gov. Pataki's first year, he asked state agencies to devise plans for the federal, state and local levels. We dealt with local agencies such as county emergency management agencies, brought everyone together to develop plans to combat and respond to terrorism. We have had comprehensive plans in place for quite some time."

Terrorist incidents, including threats, create a unique challenge to public-safety officials at every level of government. Distinct legal authorities decide how either the threat or occurrence of acts of terrorism is managed. Crime-scene investigation and emergency response activities occur together. Specialized equipment and resources may be required.

Special risks to the public, first responders and public-health officials also must be considered.

These realities make state and local readiness the cornerstone of America's domestic-preparedness strategy. While the federal government can provide many specialized resources, the fundamental effectiveness of response to a terrorist incident or the threat of an incident depends on what occurs in communities and at the state level. Among other preparedness activities, every state is engaged in and some have completed a threat and risk assessment for the U.S. Department of Justice that identifies capabilities and shortfalls.

States have used grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to create terrorism annexes to their emergency operations plans and have used other federal funds for training and purchase of emergency response equipment. However, state assessments have identified a number of capability gaps, particularly in the areas of bio- and cyberterror-

### Terrorism Legislation

On Sept. 17, New York Gov. George Pataki signed into law legislation passed during a special session of the New York Legislature the toughest package of anti-terrorism laws in the nation. The legislation establishes new and increased criminal penalties for persons who commit, support or hinder the prosecution of terrorist acts, threats or terrorists. The legislation also enables New York to immediately enter the Emergency Management Assistance Compact.

Three states submitted bills this year to CSG's *Suggested State Legislation* docket: Indiana Senate Enrolled Act No. 180 - Anti-Terrorism; Colorado Chapter 31 - Bioterrorism; and Washington Chapter 98 - Public Disclosure - Terrorism. See [www.csg.org](http://www.csg.org), "The States United," for the text of these bills.

### Mutual aid: Emergency Management Assistance Compact

Since being approved by Congress in 1996 as Public Law 104-321, the Emergency Management Assistance Compact has been ratified by 41 states and two territories. EMAC is an interstate mutual-aid agreement that establishes procedures whereby a disaster-impacted state can request and receive assistance from other member states quickly and efficiently. It resolves two key issues of liability and reimbursement for requesting and assisting states. EMAC and its signatory jurisdictions welcomed the state of New York to the compact as of 4 p.m. Monday, Sept. 17.

ism, that need to be addressed on an accelerated timeline.

### National strategies

State emergency management officials have collaborated with federal agencies for several years to prepare for terrorist events. In addition to state planning and training, officials have conducted national and regional summits (see timeline) beginning in February 1999. These forums — sponsored by the National Emergency Management Association, the National Governors' Association's Center for Best Practices, and the Office of Justice Programs and Office of State and Local Domestic Support at the U.S. Department of Justice — were designed to provide information to state officials and gather state and regional concerns and recommendations for improving domestic preparedness.

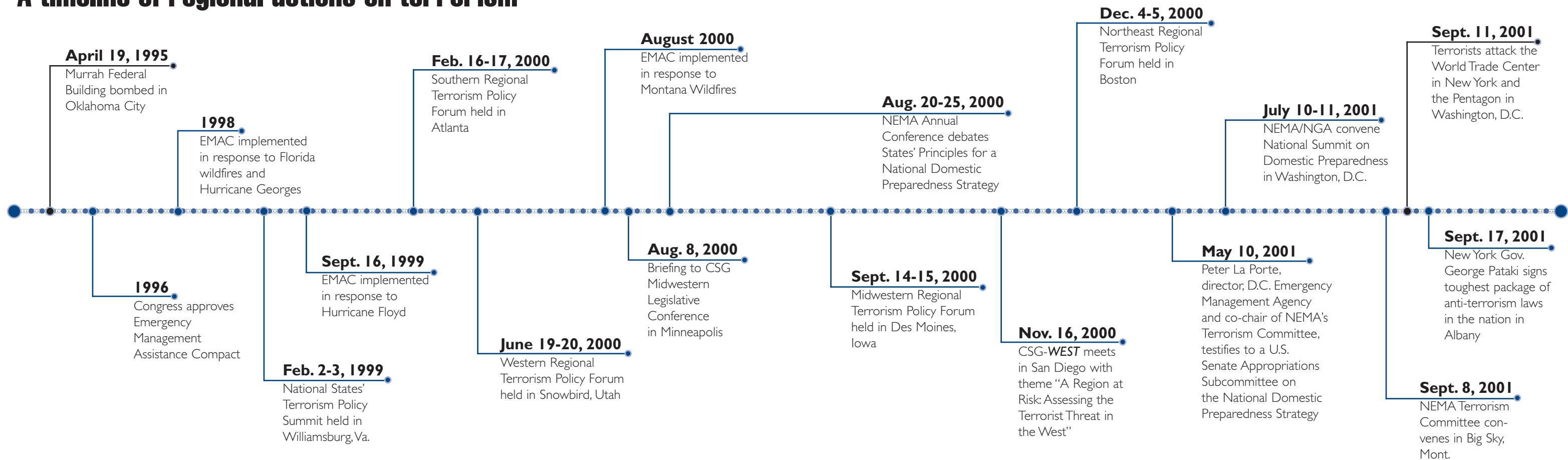
The forums presented discussions and training opportunities for participants

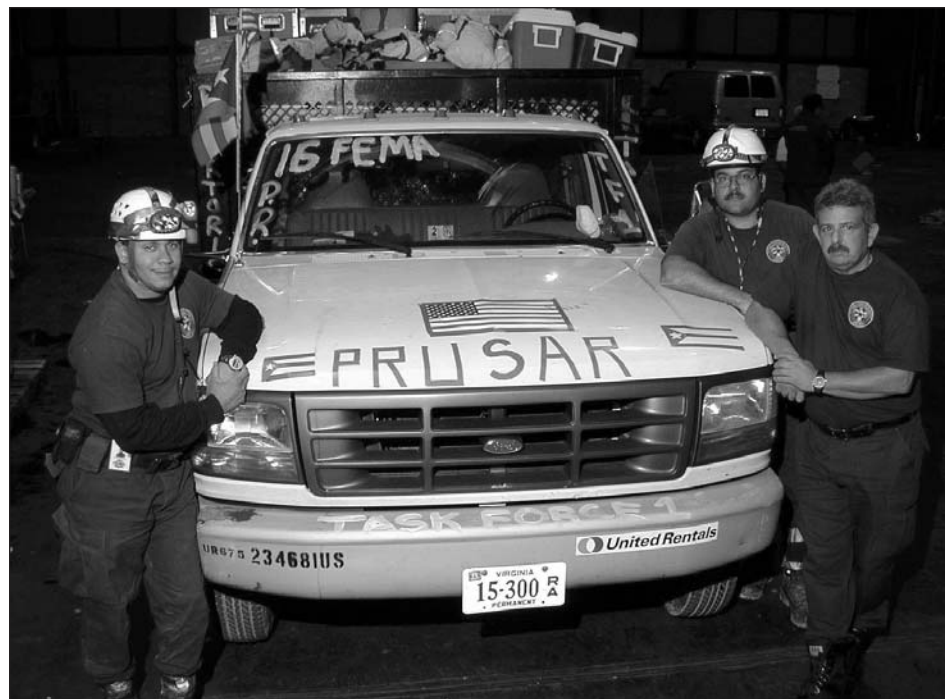
in areas including federal interagency coordination, threat briefings, national strategy and security concerns, protecting states' critical infrastructures, interoperability among federal, state and local agencies, communicating the potential terrorism threat to the public and the media, evacuation, quarantine, and search-and-seizure issues, use of the military and states' best practices.

From input generated at the forums, NEMA created and formally adopted a set of states' principles that it believes provides the necessary framework for a national domestic-preparedness strategy. The principles recommend a comprehensive and integrated national strategy that uses the existing "all-hazards" emergency management and response system and supports state and local responders.

The principles support civil liberties; the creation of one committee at the federal level (there were at least 15) with jurisdiction over components of domestic preparedness; credible and timely threat information; increased information-

## A timeline of regional actions on terrorism





Top: Workers with Puerto Rico Task Force 1 stood beside their truck loaded with supplies as they prepared to be dispatched to the World Trade Center disaster site in New York.

Left: New York City Police Department officers entered their temporary headquarters near the World Trade Center.

Bottom: Plastered with mementos, including a button with a photograph of a fellow firefighter, a New York City firefighter's helmet lay on the ground near the World Trade Center disaster site in New York.

Photos courtesy of FEMA



sharing, public-health and medical-system capabilities; and adoption of national standards for first-responders in planning, training, equipment and communications.

NEMA presented these principles at a second national policy summit on domestic terrorism in July in Washington, D.C., which was attended by more than 350 state officials and federal agency representatives, including U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft and Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson. After the summit, several pieces of legislation were introduced in Congress to support a coordinated national strategy. Vice President Dick Cheney formed a task force to review terrorism preparedness, and President George W. Bush directed FEMA to establish the Office of National Preparedness to serve as a coordination point for all federal domestic-preparedness programs.

For several years, national-security experts have said the issue was “when” not “if” an attack would occur, and state and local governments were listening. However, few would have guessed that the worst terrorist attack the United States has seen would occur so soon, bringing into focus the discussions and plans of recent years.

Despite the suddenness of the attacks, the nation’s emergency management system was quickly activated, and emergency personnel began heroic response efforts, illustrating that the local-state-federal response system works. This response system must now be improved to provide preparedness and protection for possible future events, said NEMA President Eric Tolbert, director of the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management.

“A strengthened national program based on today’s all-hazards approach to emergency preparedness is imperative,” Tolbert said. “Congress, federal agencies, governors and their state emergency management directors, and local officials and all disciplines of emergency responders must work together to develop a strategy for standardized, bottom-up national capabilities to effectively respond to catastrophic disaster situations.”

After the Sept. 11 attacks, NEMA made recommendations for specific

enhancements to a nationwide strategy for catastrophic disaster preparedness. The recommendations include:

- federal funding to build a more robust state and local emergency management and response capability
- linking complementary operational systems, such as the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (see box) and the Federal Response Plan, for response and recovery activities
- adopting national standards for state and local emergency management programs.

NEMA also recommends ensuring a certain minimum capacity for hospitals, enhancing bioterrorism detection capabilities, and developing state medical assistance and search-and-rescue teams to deal with mass-casualty events, especially those involving weapons of mass destruction. Finally, the recommendations address information-management protocols and security clearances to facilitate sharing of information and critical intelligence.

As much of the country returns to everyday activities, the long-term recovery effort will continue in New York and

Washington, D.C., with many lessons to be shared. As states stand ready to assist affected areas in the months ahead, they also are reassessing the plans, resources and training needed for enhanced capabilities to respond to new threats. ★

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## NEMA’s 10 principles for preparedness

**1.** The United States needs to have a viable national vision to guide the development of a clear, comprehensive and integrated national domestic-preparedness strategy to prepare for and manage the consequences of terrorism — one that utilizes the nation’s existing all-hazards emergency management and response system. The strategy must clearly define federal, state and local government roles and responsibilities and articulate a clear direction for federal priorities and programs to support state and local responders. The strategy must be developed in coordination with state and local entities, include measurable performance objectives, and address sustainable infrastructure.

**2.** There must be increased and productive coordination of all federal domestic-preparedness programs and resources and improved interface with governors and states. A single, visible point of coordination is essential at the federal level with the appropriate degree of authority to ensure that all federal agency resources, programs, and policies are consistent with and supportive of the national strategy. A mechanism must be provided to this coordination point in order to influence federal agency budgets and program authorizations to ensure consistency with the national strategy. This entity must be codified in authorizing legislation rather than the current practice of appropriations language, and the entity must be appropriately resourced to fulfill its mission.

**3.** All federal resources, programs, and activities must be coordinated through the nation’s governors and their state emergency management agencies to ensure a comprehensive statewide domestic-preparedness strategy that reflects the unique characteristics and needs of each individual state.

**4.** Government at all levels must ensure that the protection of civil liberties and states’ rights remain the highest priority within the context of national security as the United States prepares for and addresses the consequences of terrorism.

**5.** There are at least 15 different congressional committees with jurisdiction over components of the domestic-preparedness issue. There should be a special committee on domestic

preparedness to better ensure the coordination of federal programs, coordination of funding, avoid duplication of programs, and to provide centralized, coordinated oversight.

**6.** Credible, timely threat information is needed by state and local governments that is based upon solid research, analysis, and sound science rather than worst-case scenarios.

**7.** The issue of increased tactical and strategic capabilities for communication and information sharing between and among all levels and disciplines of government is essential to effective domestic preparedness. Information sharing by law enforcement must be addressed to allow emergency responders at the state and local level the ability to deter, interdict or respond to a potential terrorist incident.

**8.** The nation’s public health and medical-system capabilities, including that of private hospitals, must be substantially enhanced and fully integrated into the domestic-preparedness program with increased and improved coordination between emergency management, law enforcement and the fire community.

**9.** National standards should be developed for responders at all levels of government, particularly in the areas of planning, training, equipment and communications, in order to ensure common approaches between communities and states. In addition, a standardized approach to preparing for and respond to terrorist events, including cyberterrorism, is critical to local, state and the federal government’s ability to work effectively as a team, and therefore NEMA recommends that all states and all federal agencies adopt the incident command/management system as a way to ensure an integrated and coordinated local, state and federal response.

**10.** The National Emergency Management Association offers to partner with Congress and the federal government to develop the national domestic-preparedness strategy — one that can be implemented effectively by all levels of government. NEMA has the ability to facilitate the input of all state and local responder groups into the development of such a strategy.