

Fighting terrorism at home

Funding those first on the scene in response to an emergency is key to the president's proposed homeland security budget.

BY KRISTIN E. CORMIER ROBINSON

Homeland security at the federal, state and local levels has helped elevate emergency management priorities in President Bush's proposed budget for fiscal year 2003. If Congress agrees with the president, states stand to gain expanded resources for homeland security needs and to share funds with local governments. The lessons learned from the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks emphatically showed that the United States needed to be better prepared and that like all politics, all emergencies are local. The president's budget proposes \$37.7 billion for homeland security, which is an \$18.2 billion increase over this year's funding.

The Office of Management and Budget deemed four priorities in the budget to be so important and so urgent that they required immediate attention. These issues include: supporting first responders (such as police, firefighters and other emergency personnel), defending against bioterrorism, securing America's borders and using 21st Century technology to secure the homeland. Of key interest to states is the support to first responders and the bioterrorism proposals, since both would provide grants through the states to local governments to address immediate needs for homeland security.

First responders grants

Significant increases were included in the president's budget for the Federal



The federal government is expected to provide grants through the states to local governments to support first responders.

Emergency Management Agency this year with \$3.5 billion for new state and local terrorism preparedness priorities. The plan would consolidate the Office of Justice Programs' Office of Domestic Preparedness and the Fire Grant Program into FEMA's Office of National Preparedness. The Office of Homeland Security intends for the grants to be directed through the states to an agency designated by the state's governor. At least 75 percent of the total grants would be passed on to local government.

The administration anticipates that: one third of the funds will be used for improving communications; one third of funding for equipping state and local first responders; and one third for training, planning, technical assistance and administration. States completed domestic preparedness assessments with FEMA in the aftermath of Sept. 11 and the Department of Justice required all states to complete a state-wide strategy plan to receive funds from the current equipment grant program. FEMA is likely to use these

assessments for deciding priorities for use of the first responder grants in the fiscal 2002 supplemental appropriations bill.

In addition, the \$3.5 billion includes \$50 million for the Office of National Preparedness to work with states and localities on terrorism preparedness, as well as to administer the first-responder grant program. It also will provide funding to allow states to train 400,000 citizen volunteers for Community Emergency Response Teams through the proposed Citizen Corp program.

For states, coordination will be key to making the first-responder program effective. "Just as FEMA must create an Office of National Preparedness to accomplish the new tasks dealing with potential terrorist acts, state and local governments must also be funded to accomplish similar new tasks. These

increased capabilities should be accomplished through increased FEMA Emergency Management Performance Grant funding. We must create and maintain a national system as recognized by President Bush and Director Ridge. Coordinated efforts among different levels of government and many professions involved in public service must be coordinated



New federal dollars may be spent on improved communications, equipment, training and technical assistance.

to maximize efficiency and through this synergy increase capabilities in our communities," said Dale Shipley, executive director of the Ohio Emergency Management Agency and legislative chair for the National Emergency Management Association.

NEMA, a CSG affiliate, is working closely with the Office of Homeland Security and supports federal efforts to increase emergency management capacity building at the state and local level for specific needs such as personnel, planning, training, equipment, coordination and emergency exercises. With tight state budgets, a significant federal commitment must be made to give state and local governments the tools to ensure preparedness. Eric Tolbert, NEMA's president and director of the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management said, "Emergency management needs

to have the flexibility and federal resource commitment to hire additional personnel to administer the growing programs adequately."

Despite the dramatic increase in funding, concerns remain about traditional emergency management roles and responsibilities. Stephen McGrail, executive director of the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency and vice chair of the NEMA Legislative Committee said, "I am very concerned that emergency management planning not be forgotten in the rush to provide our first responders with the training and equipment they certainly need. We must also find a method to start funding state and local emergency operations centers. In Massachusetts, we are using a state facility that was built in the early 1960's and our mission today requires new thinking and new technology."

Bioterrorism

Among the budget proposals for bioterrorism, \$1.2 billion is proposed for bioterrorism preparedness grants administered by the Department of Health and Human Services to state public health agencies. Of the \$1.2 billion, \$591 million would be provided to hospitals for infrastructure improvement, \$210 would be provided to states through state public health departments to assess their existing ability to respond to such attacks, and an additional \$200 million to increase state laboratory capacity and related systems to permit rapid collection and identification of potential biological agents.

Congress now will have to consider the president's budget and arrive at a proposal. Congress began appropriations hearings in March and will consider appropriations bills for six months. ★

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