

County Board Members Guide to Disaster Response in Lee County



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Illinois Freedom of Information Act 5ILCS 140/7 (11) reference

(11) Vulnerability assessments, security measures, and response policies or plans that are designed to identify, prevent, or respond to potential attacks upon a community's population or systems, facilities, or installations, the destruction or contamination of which would constitute a clear and present danger to the health or safety of the community, but only to the extent that disclosure could reasonably be expected to jeopardize the effectiveness of the measures or the safety of the personnel who implement them or the public. Information exempt under this item may include such things as details pertaining to the mobilization or deployment of personnel or equipment, to the operation of communication systems or protocols, or to tactical operations.

**Photographs on cover beginning at
the top left continuing clockwise**

Fall flooding of the Rock River

Approaching storm front in southern Lee County

Ice jamming on the Rock River

Train derailment at the bridge over the Rock River

PREFACE

The County's response during any disaster situation can only be successful if the key players understand their role and coordinate their effort through the County's Crisis Management Team. As a member of the Lee County Board, your leadership during a disaster situation not only influences the communities you represent but also directly impacts the County's ability to protect lives and property.

Your primary role during a disaster situation is one of communicator, liaison, and oversight. You know the needs of your district and you have already established effective channels of communications with your constituents. The role you play during a disaster event will help ensure that the event will be brought to a speedy conclusion while helping to ensure that the needs of the stricken community are fully met by County Government.

This information was compiled specifically for the members of the Lee County Board. It discusses your role during a disaster response, explains the Disaster Declaration process and will give you pointers on media management, should the need arise.

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Introduction

Responding effectively during a disaster requires a coordinated community-wide effort. As a member of the Lee County Board, your leadership during a disaster situation not only influences the communities you represent but also directly impacts the County's ability to protect lives and property.

Your primary role during a disaster situation is one of communicator and liaison. You know the needs of your district and you have already established effective channels of communications with your constituents. The role you play in disseminating and gathering information during a disaster and assisting with rumor control will help ensure that the event will be brought to a speedy conclusion.

The County's Emergency Operation Plan (EOP) clearly spells out how the various County agencies, individually and collectively, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. This integrated emergency management system is based on an "all-hazards approach" to dealing with incidents, which allows the County to manage disasters no matter the size or complexity.

This guide has been developed for the members of the Lee County Board to use before, during and after a disaster occurs. The guide is divided into four main categories:

- Disaster Declaration
- Preparedness
- Response
- Recovery

This guide also includes tips for working with the media. If you have any questions,

or would like to learn more about emergency management, please contact the Lee County Office of Emergency Management at 815-284-3365.

Disaster Declarations

Local government has direct responsibility for the safety of its residents. The State has additional legal responsibilities for emergency response and recovery, and serves as the point of contact between local and federal agencies. The Federal government also has legal authorities for

disaster response and recovery and is a source of fiscal resources, as well as specialized personnel and equipment.

Specific areas of authority and responsibilities for emergency management are clearly

stated in state law and local ordinances. These laws also provide a specific line of succession for elected officials and ensure the continuity of government and leadership during an emergency.

During a disaster, the Lee County Emergency Management Agency serves under the operational authority of the County Board Chairman or his designee, and coordinates emergency operations at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

The Declaration Process

- Step 1: Conditions indicate a local disaster is likely to occur or has already occurred.
- Step 2: Local disaster declared by the County Board Chairman.
- Step 3: Director of EMA forwards disaster declaration to Springfield requesting a State declaration.
- Step 4: Governor requests a Presidential Declaration.

Emergency Operation Center (EOC)

The EOC is located in the Sheriff's Departments Training Room. The Crisis Management Team will operate from the EOC, making decision that will conclude the event. The EOC is a secure facility where NIMS trained individuals from various agencies discuss and make decisions on specific needs of the responders in the field. Only NIMS trained and those personnel required to accomplish the tasks will be allowed into the EOC. By limiting the personnel in the EOC, distractions are avoided. Please do not be offended if you are not allowed into the EOC during its operation.

When conditions warrant, the EOC is activated. Working around the clock, when required, staff from tasked agencies coordinate the County's response and develop plans for continuing actions until the event concludes.

The Illinois Emergency Management Act gives local governments the authority to declare a local emergency or disaster. In general, 20 ILCS 3305/11 says:

- A local disaster may be declared only by the principal executive officer of a political subdivision, or his or her interim emergency successor, as provided in Section 7 of the "Emergency Interim Executive Succession Act".
- The declaration shall not be continued or renewed for a period in excess of 7 days except by or with the consent of the governing board of the political subdivision.
- The effect of a local disaster declaration is to activate the emergency response plan of that political subdivision and to

authorize the furnishing of aid and assistance.

Preparedness

Preparedness involves activities that are done before a disaster, such as training, planning, community education, and exercises. As an elected official, you should encourage your constituents to have plans and supplies for both their home and workplace. Some of the essential points you need to highlight are:

- Make sure they have developed an adequate emergency preparedness plan for their family and business. Disaster preparedness information can be found on the Illinois Emergency Management Agency web site (www.state.il.us/iema) to help people plan should they need it.
- Discuss emergency preparedness with municipal officials. Suggest they create a local EOP that dovetails with the County, State and Federal plans.
- Have water, nonperishable food and other supplies on hand to be able to be self-sufficient for at least 72 hours.
- Have all important phone numbers they may need readily available. Include critical community leaders they may want to contact during a disaster event.
- Decide ahead of time where they want to go during the disaster.

Response

The scenes of disasters and emergencies involve significant risks to your safety and welfare. Natural disasters, such as floods, involve contaminated floodwater and debris that can produce a myriad of slipping and

falling hazards along with possible infectious diseases. Major fires produce smoke, toxic atmospheres and the possibility of structural collapse. Hazardous materials events usually involve toxic materials that can cause numerous types of health hazards. Terrorism threats can involve chemical, biological, radiological, or explosive devices.

It is highly recommended that you do not respond to disaster scenes because of safety concerns for both yourself as well as emergency responders working at the scene. Remember, your assistance may be needed at the EOC in mitigating the event. However, if you do choose to respond to the scene, we ask that at a minimum you follow these guidelines:

- The Fire and/or Police officials will establish a "Hot Zone" where only persons with the proper protective equipment and training are allowed to enter due to hazards to health and safety. Be prepared to follow their guidance and understand that if you are denied access it is for your safety.
- Park your car in a safe place away from the incident and in an area where your vehicle does not obstruct the roadway. Blocked roads may slow emergency vehicles from reaching their destination.
- Always respond from upwind and uphill.
- Report to the Incident Commander as soon as you arrive at the scene. This person is responsible for directing all activities at the incident scene. The Incident Commander should be located at the Command Post, which is designated with a green flashing light.
- Pay attention to your surroundings. Many responders are struck by cars every year because they are operating in the roadways where drivers are easily distracted by the disaster or incident.
- Watch where you step. The scene may contain hazardous materials that can wind up on your shoes, which in turn can wind up in your car, home, or business. Do not walk into or touch spilled material. Avoid inhaling fumes, smoke, and vapors. Avoid floodwater; it may be contaminated.
- Wear the right type of clothing and protective equipment. Sturdy steel-toed boots, a hardhat, and even safety glasses might be needed. Showing up at a disaster in the wrong type of clothing can place you at risk.
- Remember, the scene of a terrorism act is an area where someone intended to harm people; it is also a Federal crime scene.

During a disaster, you are likely to receive calls from your constituents. Through these conversations, you may be able to collect information from residents and businesses that you can funnel to the right agency or department for prompt action.

It is up to every member of the Lee County Board to help manage public expectations about what government can or cannot provide during or after a disaster. It is helpful when you reassure constituents that County government is still functioning and that we will work very hard to get things back to normal as quickly as possible.

Recovery

Recovery involves all of the cleanup activities that are necessary to return the community back to normal. This involves getting the damage repaired, utilities restored, and the debris cleaned up. Recovery is often the hardest part of the response to disasters and may continue for an extended time. As soon as it is safe to do so, the Office of Lee County Emergency Management and other agencies will conduct preliminary damage assessments to determine the level of property damage and the parts of the critical infrastructure that may be damaged.

During the recovery phase, you may find it helpful to get briefings from County staff on the extent of damage and status of the recovery process. Estimates on the extent of damage in your district will be available through this briefing process.

The County's priority for service is the same as the state and the federal governments':

1. Life Safety
2. Critical Facilities (Systems)
3. Property Damage

It is important to understand that local residents have their own priorities, which may be different from those of the County. For example, a resident may have a tree that has been blown down in their backyard as a result of a storm and *they* want it cleared up right away. The tree is not causing any hazards to life safety or critical systems, and therefore is not considered a high priority for the County. Residents are often unaware of the scope of a disaster and may have unrealistic expectations about what local government can do for them as everyone works to recover. Your task, as an elected official, is to help your constituents better

understand local response capabilities and the magnitude of the incident.

Some of the biggest issues that occur after the disaster involve the following:

Debris Removal: Debris removal on private property is typically not covered by FEMA or the County and is the property owner's responsibility. If you have a constituent who has a significant problem with debris removal, call the EOC. We may be able to find ways to help.

Sandbags: Constituents may not understand why we can only supply a limited amount of sandbags. The number of bags and amount of sand required to adequately protect a home is really more than most people understand and far exceeds our available resources. For example, to build a one-foot-high wall that is 100 feet long out of sandbags requires 800 sandbags and 20,000 pounds of sand.

Rebuilding: Residents may want to rebuild their house or business in the flood plain. This brings up zoning issues and County ordinance issues. These people should be referred to the County's Zoning Department for assistance.

Response Time: Residents may think that government is slow to respond. Part of your role as a County Board member is to help your constituents understand that the demands of a disaster place an extreme strain on local resources. It may take up to 48 to 72 hours for help to reach them.

Public Information: Residents may report difficulty getting critical information about the disaster from the news media. Despite all of our efforts to communicate through the media by issuing regular news releases, local media often choose to edit the

information significantly, which can make it inaccurate, or not use it at all in their reports. As an elected County Official, your responsibility is to help in getting accurate information out to your communities. The lines of communication you have established within your district may assist in the dissemination of accurate information out to the public or collecting information for the Crisis Management Team. Rumor control plays an important role during the early stages of any disaster situation. County Board members need to work diligently to ensure that accurate information is getting out to your residents.

During the recovery phase, the County may be able to arrange:

- Drinking water
- Shelter
- Food
- Emergency medical transportation

But we normally do not provide:

- Batteries
- Generators
- Flashlights
- Sandbags
- Ice

These items can typically be purchased through retail establishments. If you receive questions from your constituents about ice, you may want to refer them to the phone book where vendors are listed under the heading of "Ice." Generators and sand bags may be available from hardware stores, equipment supply companies, and

<p>Crisis Management Team</p> <p>Responsible for coordinating the County's response to a disaster. The team is comprised of key elected officials and department heads from the following agencies or offices:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">County Board Chair Highway Department Assessor Coroner Finance Sheriff Zoning GIS/IT EMA Public Health Regional Schools</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>(Participants may vary as required by the incident)</i></p>
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equipment rental businesses. During disasters, stores that sell generators and other emergency supplies will likely run out. In some cases, when there is a severe shortage, the Emergency Management office may be able to make temporary arrangements to supplement local resources. However, it is best for residents to have enough basic supplies on hand so that they can be on their own for 72 hours.

FEMA's Role

FEMA's role in providing individual assistance involves assisting citizens in filling out paperwork to get a low-cost loan from the Small Business Administration, providing temporary housing in the form of trailers, and providing some grants to replace items not covered by insurance.

One of the most important contributions that a County Board member can make is to point your constituents in the right direction to obtain the information they need - that might be to a FEMA tele-registration number or a disaster field office. If you have a constituent who has a special need for items or services, contact the EOC at 815-284-3365.

Working with the Media

The job of the County's Public Information Officer (PIO) is to coordinate all media relations. During a disaster, all media requests should be routed through the PIO.

If you cultivate good relationships with the media prior to an emergency, you will get better support from the media during the hectic hours of responding to an emergency. You want to create a situation where the media feels it has a vital role during the response efforts. The media, when supportive, can convey important information to the public about issues such

as evacuations and disaster-assistance information.

Here are a few tips for working with the media during a disaster:

Responding to questions:

- Answer all questions directly and as completely as possible.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, say so. Do not risk a guess. Erroneous information can cause the public to take incorrect actions and can damage your credibility. Ask the reporter to leave his or her name and telephone number so that you can provide the accurate answer if necessary.
- Do not exaggerate the facts. Give facts as you know them and cite your own sources. In an emergency or disaster, the information you provide could threaten lives if it is incorrect.
- Tell the truth and avoid using "no comment." No comment gives the impression that you have something to hide.
- Never give "off the record" information-it could come back to haunt you.
- Never argue with reporters or lose your cool. Do not be rude even if the interviewer or reporter appears to doubt your credibility.
- If you are interrupted, wait for the interrupter to finish and then proceed with your answer. You may wish to repeat the original question to bring the reporter back on track.
- Challenge any efforts to put words in your mouth. If you do not, you may end

up appearing to agree with something you actually disagree with.

- Do not act evasive. Your evasiveness may be interpreted as an attempt to hide something.
- Be alert. Avoid answering speculative "what if" questions. Be prepared to lead the interview away from problems and negatives and toward positive points, you want to make.

Delivering your message:

- Speak naturally and avoid using "jargon" or terminology that is not familiar to those working outside of emergency management.
- Say the most important thing first and then elaborate if necessary. Avoid long, rambling responses-be succinct and clear in your responses.
- Make one point at a time. Speak in simple sentences rather than compound sentences. During times of high stress, people are generally only able to remember short, concise bits of information.
- If you must read a prepared statement, review the information before going "live." Read in a relaxed manner-avoid stilted, halting speeches.
- Be believable, personable, and conversational. Credibility is vital to getting your message across.

Speaking With One Voice

During any emergency or disaster, situation County government must speak with one united voice.

- As seen with recent events, a single face before the public helps in getting information across to the public. In Lee County, that person will be the County Board Chairman or someone he/she may assign. In special circumstances, the PIO may enlist support from agency heads or specialists to assist in answering specific questions.
- Coordinate any requests to tour the disaster scene with the PIO and Incident Commander before making any promises to the media.
- **Please let the PIO know if you talk to the media.**

Conclusion

In short, the collective role of the County Board during any disaster event is one of information management and oversight. Working with the County Board Chairman and the PIO to disseminate information to the public and help control the rumor mill will aid in a speedy recovery while Board oversight will help to insure that the needs of the stricken communities are fully met by County Government.

For further information you may contact the
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