

RELATED TERMS

- Emergency Assistance Compact
- Memoranda of Understanding



- Emergency Management
- Fire
- Emergency Medical Services
- Law Enforcement

Mutual Aid Agreements: Overview

PURPOSE

This document presents an overview of a series of Best Practices that provide guidelines and suggestions for drafting and supporting mutual aid agreements.

SUMMARY

Mutual aid agreements can augment the resources that a jurisdiction can bring to bear in an emergency. Emergency planners should use mutual aid to complement and enhance local capabilities in order to prepare for a broad range of threats, both natural and man-made. This Best Practice series addresses how comprehensive mutual aid agreements and use of the Incident Command System (ICS) can improve overall terrorism preparedness, response, and recovery. Carefully crafted agreements combined with joint exercises and use of the ICS can greatly enhance multi-jurisdictional response and recovery efforts.

DESCRIPTION

This series of Best Practices provides general guidelines for all major types of agreements and seeks to advise the reader on potential sources of mutual aid. Some elements of mutual aid, such as the importance of the ICS or of addressing liability and reimbursement issues, are universal, while other elements differ based on state and local law, jurisdiction size and capabilities, and additional extenuating factors.

Mutual aid agreements exist across the country at the local, regional, state, and inter-state level. Many of these agreements have been tested by true emergencies, including recent terrorist incidents. These Best Practices incorporate lessons learned from these emergencies and provide guidelines for better protocols and procedures in the future.

There is no universally accepted mutual aid agreement format, nor are there standards for the types or quantities of agreements that a given agency or jurisdiction should have. Emergency response and homeland security professionals can develop mutual aid plans to meet today's response challenges by following the guidelines, suggestions, and recommendations of these Best Practices. This series aims to help the following people and organizations think about mutual aid:

- Municipal and County Governments
- Councils of Governments
- State Governments
- Any organization with responsibilities in an emergency
- Fire Departments
- Law Enforcement Agencies
- Emergency Medical Services/Ambulance Providers
- Homeland Security Officials
- Emergency Management Agencies

BEST PRACTICES OUTLINE

- Overview
 - Agreement Types
- Addressing Terrorism
 - Mutual Aid Committee
 - Mutual Aid Needs Assessment
 - Resource Database
- Developing Agreements
 - Liability and Insurance
 - Reimbursement and FEMA
- Joint Training and Exercises
- Response Protocols
 - Backfill
 - Requesting Aid

BACKGROUND

Mutual aid agreements are deeply rooted in the culture of emergency response. Agreements codify what is already understood in the fire, rescue, and other emergency response communities: provide help whenever and wherever it is needed. Written agreements provide an official framework for assistance by outlining request and response procedures and addressing areas of concern such as insurance and liability.

Most early mutual aid arrangements among communities were handled informally, without paperwork, and without expectation of payment. Each community recognized that if it helped a neighbor in need, that neighbor would reciprocate in the future. However, as the costs associated with assistance rose dramatically, communities began to codify these arrangements into formal agreements.

Mutual aid agreements exist at every level of government and can bring resources to bear throughout emergency response and recovery:

- *Automatic aid agreements* can quickly bring a small number of units from neighboring jurisdictions to the incident scene.
- *Mutual aid agreements* work to bring a larger quantity of resources to the scene at the direct request of the afflicted jurisdiction.
- *Regional mutual aid agreements* can mobilize a significant amount of resources from several jurisdictions throughout the region during larger emergencies.
- *Statewide mutual aid agreements* coordinate the mobilization of statewide resources for use in local and state-declared disasters.
- *Inter-state mutual aid*, coordinated through the [Emergency Management Assistance Compact](#), brings in out-of-state resources to assist when a disaster or incident overtaxes an individual state's capabilities.

While mutual aid is not a new concept, there is renewed interest in the issue following recent terrorist attacks, most notably September 11, 2001. According to the [Department of Homeland Security](#):

As an established mechanism for sharing or pooling limited resources to augment existing capabilities and supplementing jurisdictions that have exhausted existing resources due to disaster, mutual aid processes will help ensure that jurisdictions across the United States can benefit from each other's efforts to enhance their first response capabilities...Many areas have little or no capability to respond to terrorist attack using weapons of mass destruction. Even the best prepared states and

localities do not possess adequate resources to respond to the full range of terrorist threats we face.

The support of neighboring jurisdictions and the private sector as well as state and even out-of-state resources has proven to be crucial in the response to many terrorist incidents and natural disasters. New and enhanced mutual aid arrangements across greater geographical areas will greatly improve overall domestic preparedness.

For more information, see the following resources and references:

- The Department of Homeland Security on Mutual Aid: http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/integrapp/editorial/editorial_0197.xml
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Introduction to State and Local EOP Planning Guidance: <http://www.fema.gov/plan/gaheop.shtm>
- FEMA's National Mutual Aid & Resource Management Initiative: http://www.fema.gov/pdf/nims/508-3_emergency_medica_%20services_%20resources.pdf
- Emergency Management Assistance Compact: <http://www.emacweb.org>
- National Mutual Aid and Resources Management Initiative: http://www.fema.gov/pdf/nims/508-3_emergency_medica_%20services_%20resources.pdf
- Mutual Aid Box Alarm System / Illinois TOPOFF 2 Lessons Learned Report: Request from reardon@northbrook.il.us
- Arizona Statewide Fire Service Mutual Aid System (LLIS.gov ID# [13495](#))
- Texas Regional Councils' Mutual Aid Templates: http://www.nimsonline.com/docs/Mutual_Aid_ao.pdf
- Washington State Fire Services Resource Mobilization Plan: <http://www.wa.gov/wsp/fire/mobepan/1thru5.pdf>

Post-September 11 Mutual Aid Efforts

At the **federal** level, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has launched an effort to create a comprehensive, integrated [National Mutual Aid and Resource Management](#) system.

States across the country have enhanced their mutual aid networks in light of September 11. [Arizona](#) completed the [Statewide Fire Mutual Aid Plan](#), connecting fire departments throughout the state to local, regional, and statewide resources.

Local Councils of Government (COG) in [Texas](#) have developed [regional mutual aid agreements](#) as part of the state's overall effort to improve first responder preparedness. Communities, large and small, are recognizing the importance of taking a regional approach to emergency response.

DISCLAIMER

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