



Office of the Washington State Auditor

Pat McCarthy

Opportunities to Improve Washington's Preparedness Efforts in Emergency Management

Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee

May 15, 2019

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Why we did this audit

To follow up on two recommendations issued in the Oso Landslide Commission's report, related to:

- Clarifying roles and responsibilities
- Standardizing the resource request process



The emergency response process is complex



Local government responds to an incident



Local government requests help from neighboring communities



Local government requests help from the county



Local government or county requests help from the state



State requests help from the federal government

Key players in emergency response

- ✓ Local governments

- ✓ Incident Management Teams (IMTs)
 - Local experts
 - Volunteer to serve on teams
 - Deployed to incidents to help affected local government

- ✓ Emergency Management Division (EMD)

Objectives

1. Do state and local emergency management personnel have clearly defined roles and responsibilities when responding to disasters?
2. What improvements can EMD make to request, track and mobilize resources more effectively during disasters?
3. What improvements to communication can EMD make to strengthen collaboration with local partners?

Commission recommendation: Roles and responsibilities

- During the Oso landslide, roles and responsibilities between the initial incident management team (IMT) and county emergency management were unclear.
- The Oso Landslide Commission recommended:
State, county and incident management teams work together to establish guidelines to create clear expectations before an incident.

That recommendation remains unfulfilled

In our review of roles and responsibilities, we found:

- No further guidance has been developed
- IMTs have offered to provide regional training sessions to help educate local partners
- IMTs see a role for EMD in the training sessions:
 - To help coordinate sessions
 - To send a representative to answer questions about the state's operations

Local partners uncertain about the EMD liaison's role

Liaisons are EMD's representatives at an incident scene.

However:

- EMD has not published guidance on their role local governments can access
- Liaisons have sometimes taken on different roles during incidents

Published guidance and training will help further clarify the role of the EMD liaison for local partners.

Commission recommendation: Improve resource requests

- During the Oso Landslide, local authorities experienced challenges with the resource ordering process
- The Oso Landslide Commission recommended:
The state develop a standardized process for requesting, tracking and mobilizing resources.

Why a standardized process is important

In our review of the resource request process, we found:

- Few municipalities own or maintain all the resources necessary to address all threats
- A standardized process helps multiple jurisdictions work together during an incident

Four options to request state assistance



Radio

Request resources verbally



Telephone

Request resources verbally



Email

Submit state resource request form



WebEOC

Submit state resource request form online
EMD's preferred option

Challenges with the current resource request system



Local authorities described challenges in using WebEOC

1. Software compatibility issues:

Difficulty viewing and sharing information with the state's Emergency Operations Center

2. Infrequent or limited use:

Difficulty remembering how to use the system

Work with local authorities to resolve software issues and identify opportunities for them to use WebEOC more often

Challenges identifying personnel and requesting help

- No mechanism in place to identify incident management team (IMT) and emergency operations center (EOC) personnel and their qualifications
 - EMD must send a statewide email to all local emergency managers describing the need, then wait for a response
- No statewide process for local authorities to verify the qualifications of personnel deployed to an incident scene

Statewide credentialing system could offer many benefits

Few counties have the resources to implement their own credentialing program.

A statewide credentialing program for IMT and EOC personnel would:

- Allow everyone to be trained to the same standards across the state
- Give authorities asking for help greater confidence in personnel deployed from other local governments

Challenges to communication exist

In our review of communication, we found:

- Local partners experience challenges trying to communicate with EMD
- EMD provides some opportunities for engagement with local partners:
 - Quarterly meetings
 - Semiannual statewide conference
 - Program-specific outreach
- However, local partners did not think these methods are as effective as they could be

Communication is critical to successful response

National standards recommend emergency management organizations:

- Work with potential partners to create and sustain effective communication
- Establish a process for continuous two-way engagement with potential partners



Suggestions from local emergency managers

Improvements to provide greater two-way engagement:

- Consider holding online meetings
- Add time to regular meetings to engage with local partners
- Develop a regional coordinators program

EMD can strengthen its relationship with local partners by improving communication

Recommendations to EMD

To provide clarity on roles and responsibilities

- Assist IMTs by coordinating regional trainings with local partners
- Provide guidance and training to local partners on the role of the EMD liaison

To improve the resource request process

- Continue to improve WebEOC and seek opportunities to help local partners increase familiarity
- Develop a statewide credentialing program

To strengthen its collaboration with local partners

- Work with local partners to develop and implement ways to improve communication

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