

An Opportunity Beckons: Converging Disaster Recovery and Infrastructure Resilience

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Recovery from a catastrophic disaster relies on three key factors – the restoration of housing, infrastructure resilience, and business continuity. In an August 2009 Domestic Preparedness Journal article, National Disaster Recovery Doctrine was identified as a major gap in the nation's large-scale disaster-recovery plans.

In 2010, there will be an opportunity to ratify the convergence of disaster recovery and infrastructure resilience as the key step needed to build an effective national disaster-recovery framework.

The White House, the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have organized an ambitious and very encouraging public process that next year may well produce a consensus doctrine that addresses defined roles and responsibilities as well as credible measures of success. The White House and DHS/FEMA expect that a draft of the National Disaster Recovery Framework will be available early in 2010 – in time, therefore, for a publication date of 1 June 2010.

Initiatives & Updates, Reports & Reserves □

Several public and private-sector initiatives addressing infrastructure resilience that have emerged over the past 12 months can contribute significantly to the framework doctrine. The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) published its updated "Infrastructure Report Card" in March 2009, for example; the Report Card, and the ASCE's new "Guiding Principles for the Nation's Critical Infrastructure," released in July 2009, address such major topics as risk, integrated systems, decision-making processes, and life-cycle adaptability.

The National Infrastructure Advisory Committee (NIAC) also has issued reports – one in July 2009, and another in September – on Critical Infrastructure Resilience and Disasters; and TISP (The Infrastructure Security Partnership) previously – i.e., in 2006 – published a Regional Disaster Resilience Guide.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce also released a major report, in June 2009, that identifies 10 policies that states should adopt, the Chamber said, to help them recover from a disaster, more quickly as well as more effectively. Those policies include: (a) ensuring the availability of adequate capital for rebuilding and recovery; and (b) emphasizing the repair and rebuilding of infrastructure in affected areas.

How capital reserves are created is the heart of the recovery planning and resilience challenge. ProtectingAmerica.org, an influential private-sector organization, started a hotly debated initiative to create a national non-profit fund to help support state disaster-recovery funding efforts. Other organizations such as the Heritage Foundation see the initiative as opening the door to another National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), and advocate instead that a private-sector insurance solution be sought. Complicating the situation even more is that the Terrorism Risk Insurance Program Reauthorization Act, which extends the Terrorism Risk Insurance Act (TRIA) through the end of December 2014, was originally – i.e., in 2002 – intended to be a short-term measure that would provide the insurance industry an opportunity to develop its own private-sector solutions for terrorism coverage.

Final Success: The Essential Prerequisites

Whatever else happens, the individual states must reassert their own responsibility for recovery and then develop policies that empower the private sector to help them. And state governors must personally take charge of recovery and pre-incident recovery planning, taking special care to ensure that their own states have in place an effective and affordable State Disaster Housing Plan.

The FEMA Joint Field Office (JFO)-Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) also must be rewritten. In its present form it does not support major disaster recovery effectively. Pre-incident planning for parallel response and recovery activities is particularly needed. In addition, the infrastructure recovery has to be

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resilience-based, and engineers have to be integrated into the state plans. The integration of private-sector resilience also should be written into the JFO-SOP as a pre-planned activity. Finally, the groundwork for the update should be spelled out in the National Disaster Recovery Framework.

DHS and FEMA have under them several offices that should collaborate to integrate the infrastructure resilience effort into the framework. Those offices include, but are not limited to, the Office of Infrastructure Protection (OIP), the National Preparedness Directorate (NPD), the Mitigation Directorate, and the Science and Technology (S&T) Directorate.

Of course, the Obama administration itself also must recognize that gaining consensus on such a complex plan, particularly while working under a very tight timeline, might well require expending some of its own political capital – but the very large gains that result would undoubtedly outweigh the rather reasonable costs required.

Recovery stakeholders, specifically including private-sector corporations, that want to get involved still have time to respond to 16 probing questions on the group's website (www.DisasterRecoveryWorkingGroup.gov) through the end of December 2009.

The opportunity to converge recovery and infrastructure resilience will make the Disaster Recovery Framework a much stronger doctrine. But completion of an effective, as well as *cost-effective*, doctrine will be possible in 2010 only if leaders fully embrace the need for infrastructure resilience and make the private sector an indispensable element of recovery planning.