



RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES: The Role of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Support of the Nation

INFORMATION PAPER

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is a major Army command with a broad set of missions and capabilities. One of the principal missions is to provide assistance, within its authorities, when natural disasters or other emergencies occur.

As the nation's primary Federal engineering agency, the Corps has established an impressive response record during national emergencies. From the Midwest Floods of 1993, to Hurricane Georges of 1998, the Loma Prieta earthquake, the eruption of Mount Saint Helens, the Los Angeles riots, the Oklahoma City bombing, and numerous spills of hazardous materials, the Corps responded quickly to help get life back to normal.

Although emergency preparedness and response is primarily a state and local responsibility, in instances when the nature of the disaster exceeds the capabilities of state and local interests, the Corps of Engineers stands ready to help save human life, prevent immediate human suffering, and mitigate property damage.

Organization for Emergency Response

The geographically diverse location of Corps of Engineers offices nationwide assures an immediate response to disasters in any area. The Corps is aligned by drainage basins into **8 regional divisions**. The divisions are further aligned by smaller drainage basins into **38 districts**.¹ During emergencies the division responsible for the

affected region coordinates and commands the Corps of Engineers' response.

Under its Readiness 2000 (R2K) concept, the Corps of Engineers restructured its approach to the emergency response mission. Whereas the Corps previously took a regional approach to disaster response, it now organizes and manages resources through a **national strategy**, aligning the readiness community into a corporate Corps team that shares planning responsibilities and response capabilities.

Central to this national strategy is the use of Corps **Planning and Response Teams (PRT)**. Each Corps district has established a PRT dedicated to one of the eight emergency response tasks for which the Corps is responsible: ice, water, emergency power, debris removal, temporary housing, emergency access, temporary roofing, and structural safety assessment. With several teams available for each task area, the Corps can tailor its response to the specific emergency. Providing added depth to the Corps' ability to respond quickly and effectively are the Advanced Contracting Initiative, in which the Corps contracts in advance for major USACE missions, and the Deployable Tactical Operating System (DTOS)—which includes twenty strategically-located, state-of-the-art, mobile command, control, and communications (C3) units. DTOS mobile units are self-sustaining, generator-powered vehicles and trailers positioned to deploy within 18 hours to most areas of the country.

¹ The Corps has a total of 41 districts, three of which are located overseas in Germany, Japan, and Korea.

Major Authorities for Corps Emergency Management Program

Flood Control and Coastal Emergencies:

The Corps may provide disaster response and support under **Public Law 84-99**, Flood and Coastal Storm Emergencies. A Corps-unique authority, PL 84-99 missions and activities are funded by annual Energy and Water Development Appropriations Acts and, when necessary, emergency supplemental appropriations acts. Under this law, the Chief of Engineers, acting for the Secretary of the Army, is authorized to undertake a number of activities including:

- disaster preparedness through all hazards planning
- advance measures
- emergency operations (Flood Response and Post Flood Response)
- rehabilitation of flood control works threatened or destroyed by flood
- protection or repair of federally authorized shore protective works threatened or damaged by coastal storm
- provisions of emergency water due to drought or contaminated source.

Supporting FEMA and the FRP

"The Stafford Act " and the Federal Response Plan (FRP): In addition to our emergency authorities, the Corps also has a primary role in support of the *Federal Response Plan*. When a major disaster strikes, sufficient resources may not be available to state and local agencies to meet emergency requirements. The principal Federal authority for providing disaster relief to the state and locals resides in the "Stafford Act." When a State Governor requests assistance, and the President determines that an emergency exists, the Federal government may respond to state and local needs through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) under the Federal Response Plan (FRP). The Stafford Act also allows the Federal agencies to pre-position teams and

resources prior to the declaration of a disaster by the President.

Under the FRP, the Department of Defense (DoD) has designated the Army Corps of Engineers as the primary agency for planning, preparedness, and response under the **Emergency Support Function 3 (ESF #3), Public Works, and Engineering**.

Each Corps division and district develops plans based on hazards unique to its area, coordinates with appropriate agencies, and identifies response teams to support the assigned missions in the *Federal Response Plan*. Training and exercises are conducted frequently to ensure the readiness of emergency team members when the *Federal Response Plan* is activated.

Types of Assistance Provided under ESF #3

- Technical advice and evaluations
- Engineering services
- Construction management and inspection
- Emergency contracting
- Emergency repair of wastewater and solid waste facilities
- Real estate support

Some of the activities within the scope of ESF #3 include emergency clearance of debris; restoration of critical public services and facilities, including supply of adequate amounts of potable water and temporary restoration of water supply systems; technical assistance; temporary emergency power; temporary roofing/housing; structural evaluation of buildings; and damage assessment.

For more information about the US Army Corps of Engineers and its emergency response authorities, roles, and capabilities, contact Ed Hecker, Chief, Civil Emergency Management Branch (202) 761-4601; for general information about Corps programs and missions contact Dr. Dale W. Jones, 202-761-1048.