

March 16, 2007

Mr. Johnnie L. Smith  
Administrator

Wisconsin Emergency Management  
2400 Wright Street  
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Mr. Smith:

We received an Information and Guidance memo from your agency recently, which appears to indicate yet another deterioration of the Emergency Management Program in Wisconsin. This memo states "WEM will no longer be providing lodging for students attending classes funded by EMPG". Training for All-Hazards classes has become increasingly rare in recent years, and the focus of training and resources has shifted to Homeland Security priorities.

Unfortunately, natural disasters and other potential crises have not disappeared. This latest edict is symptomatic of the problems evolving since the implementation of Homeland Security programs and grants. The separation and isolation of training programs, grants, exercises, and planning between separate agencies has had the following result on many local programs:

- Confusion as to priorities.
- Lack of understanding between the state and the city, village, county, and township levels. Training levels, communications infrastructure, response capabilities and other elements of emergency response vary tremendously throughout the state. Dissemination of information between the state agencies involved to the local agencies has often been contradictory and redundant. The "all-hazard" approach, which has worked relatively well for decades, seems to be slowly disappearing.
- Lack of understanding of the financial burden on local communities. The requirements placed on local communities are tremendous. As stated, many of our emergency response departments are volunteer, and the rest are locally funded. Local funding, as you may be aware, is now capped by mandate of the Governor and Legislature, and additional revenues for training, equipment, travel, and other program expenses is not available. Many counties are facing layoffs and reduction in services.
- Local emergency management departments now have to understand and implement programs from two state agencies - Wisconsin Emergency Management and OJA. It is often obvious that these agencies do not communicate well with each other. The present system also guarantees a competitive and confusing atmosphere. Neither agency understands the demands placed on local governments by the other agency. Neither agency appears to understand that lack of coordination at the state level

severely impacts the quality of service delivered to our citizens. With the additional work placed on local departments since OJA began managing Homeland Security, there has been little increase in county workforce. Most of us are a one or two person operation. There has been no reduction in requirements from WEM to balance the burden. Additionally, other state agencies, such as Public Health and Department of Agriculture, have Homeland Security grants, training, and requirements that often are not communicated to Emergency Management at the local level and are a repetition of work already completed or in progress. Further, there has been no understanding of the local requirements often placed on Emergency Management Departments because of fiscal and personnel constraints.

- We need training – there is no doubt! But we need training that is useful, delivered locally, or paid for if travel is necessary. We have no additional funding for motels, mileage, and meals. With mandated training looming, it appears that this denial of training and travel funding will doom our communities to a state of non-compliance and under-trained personnel. By necessity, we in the northern part of the state, have learned to coordinate services, training, and response to survive. We know our volunteer community is stressed and diminishing. We are very aware that any training offered must be affordable, pertinent, and accessible. We understand that more of our time is being absorbed in juggling competing directives from state agencies and the accompanying paperwork. We understand that we must be prepared for all types of emergencies and we coordinate almost obsessively in order to avoid duplication, competition, and neglect.

The State of Wisconsin needs to develop that same spirit of coordination that we have learned by necessity! Look deeply at the duplication that has occurred in the last four or five years between WEM, OJA, DHS and Public Health, Dept. of Agriculture, and more. The State cannot continue to build bureaucracies at the expense of a competent and coordinated program.

Yes, we must learn more about Homeland Security issues. But we must also coordinate that knowledge, experience, training and equipment with the response necessary for the imminently explosive wildfire season or the tornado that may be spinning across our state in the spring.

Therefore, because we all want to have an efficient and coordinated Emergency Management Program in the State of Wisconsin, we hope that:

1. A dialogue can be initiated to air problems and concerns between local government agencies and state agencies to jointly work toward solutions.
2. Consideration be given to establishing a unified structure which will foster communication, coordination, and cooperation.

Such method, whether it means combining Departments and Agencies, or housing them under a common umbrella, or other solution, may enable the changes needed.  
 3. Support be given to County Emergency Management Offices. We are deeply concerned and wish to help and participate in working towards a more efficient system.

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CC. Governor Jim Doyle  
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