

ALL ABOUT CHATHAM EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY



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WHAT YOU MUST DO FOR YOURSELF

There is only so much that government in general and CEMA in particular can do to protect the public from the threat of emergencies and disasters. Ultimately your safety and that of your family and loved ones depends to a large degree on what you are willing to do for yourself. In other words you also have a personal role in Emergency Management to be responsible, aware and prepared.

Responsible

- Don't be a helpless victim. Take personal responsibility to do everything in your power to protect yourself and your property.
- Be willing to take care of others who might need help or depend on you.

Aware

- Make it a priority to find out what the potential threats, risks and hazards are where you live and work. How serious could they be? What consequences could they have?
- Learn all you can about the County's Emergency Management Program, and the disaster plans already in place, as well as what you may need to do if disaster strikes.

Prepared

- Develop a personal disaster preparedness plan for your family and those you are responsible for. Review it periodically. Practice it. Get others involved.
- Take necessary precautions to protect your property and assets before a threat occurs.
- Have an adequate amount of appropriate insurance to cover disaster-related losses.
- Listen carefully for public information from officials during a crisis and follow instructions immediately.

WHAT IS CEMA?

THREATS

In one sense CEMA can be viewed as an insurance policy that local government maintains against the threat of major emergencies and disasters. While national security and civil unrest are still preparedness concerns, more likely threats and hazards exist due to our local demographics, technology, economy, geography and climate. The following list represents a few of the threats CEMA plans for:

NATURAL THREATS

- Floods
- Fires
- Hurricanes
- Tornadoes
- Thunderstorms

MAN-MADE THREATS

- Hazards Materials
- Bomb Threats
- Explosions
- Chemical Agents
- Biological Agents

PRINCIPLES

In order to best serve the citizens of Chatham County, CEMA has adopted a proactive approach for emergency management, based on a framework of guiding principles, values and work statements. More specifically CEMA adheres to a formal Vision, Philosophy, and Mission, which together define the agency's role and provide focus for its daily operations.

VISION

CEMA's vision for the future is a community where:

- All people are made as safe as possible from the threat of both natural and manmade emergencies and disasters;
- Government, business and the public work proactively and collaboratively together to maintain an optimal state of readiness against all types of hazards and threats; and
- Public education, training, resources, plans, and coordination of effort are provided and maintained at all times.

CEMA can assist you in learning:

- What you may need to do
- How to do it
- When to do it
- Why you should do it
- What you will need to help you do it

However CEMA generally cannot:

- Do it all for you
- Make you do it
- Provide you with direct financial assistance
- Guarantee evacuation assistance

CEMA is an acronym for the Chatham Emergency Management Agency, the unit of County government with the lead role in preparing for and responding to both natural and manmade major emergencies and disasters, During the Cold War the agency was called Civil Defense because of its emphasis on preparedness for nuclear war. The current name now reflects a shift in priorities towards all hazards.

Mission

To protect lives and property from the threat of all types of major emergencies and disasters, both natural and manmade. This is accomplished by providing community-wide leadership, guidance, support and coordination in the areas of mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

Scope

CEMA is the local, community-based equivalent of the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) at the State level and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) at the Federal level. It works closely with these as well as dozens of others public and private agencies before, during and after emergencies and disasters to provide coordinated and comprehensive protection of lives and property.

Staff

CEMA has a full-time professional staff of nine County employees who receive the equivalent in specialized training as police officers, paramedics or career fire fighters. Like these other public safety officials the CEMA staff serves the community 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. As necessary, they are also supported by dozens of dedicated volunteers in specialized roles.

Funds

The CEMA operating budget is tax supported. Approximately 23% comes from Federal funds and the other 77% from local taxes. This expense is periodically offset by the availability of State Public Assistance disaster funds received by the County, City of Savannah, municipalities and nonprofit organizations as the result of declared disasters affecting the County. In the event of a disaster, without the existence of CEMA local governments might not be eligible under State and Federal Law for the financial assistance needed to pay for unbudgeted overtime costs, infrastructure repair, community-wide cleanup, and the recovery and restoration of many essential services.

Philosophy

One of the fundamental responsibilities of government is to provide for the safety and welfare of its citizens before, during and after emergencies and disasters. An effective County-wide emergency management program should always remain as one of the highest priorities of elected and appointed officials. However individual citizens must also accept personal responsibility within their own means and abilities to be constantly aware of risk and always prepared to take protective actions when necessary for their own safety as well as that of their families, friends and property.

GOALS

Mitigation

Activities designed to prevent the occurrence of an emergency or reduce or eliminate risks to persons or property or to lessen the actual or potential effects or consequences of an incident.

Preparedness

Actions taken to avoid an incident or to intervene to stop an incident from occurring. Preparedness involves actions taken prior to an emergency to protect lives and property and to support and enhance disaster response.

Response

Activities that address the short-term, direct effects of an incident. These activities include immediate actions to preserve life, property, and the environment; meet basic human needs; and maintain the social, economic, and political structure of the affected community.

Recovery

The development, coordination, and execution of service- and site-restoration plans and the reconstitution of government operations and services through individual, private-sector, nongovernmental, and public assistance programs. Short-term recovery includes damage assessment and the return of vital functions, such as utilities and emergency services, to minimum operating standards. When rebuilding and re-locating is due to damaged property, long-term recovery activities may continue for years.

SCOPE OF SERVICES

CEMA's role and functions can be best defined in terms of the variety of services it provides. These may be summarized to include:

- Identify and assess potential emergency and disaster-related risks, hazards, threats, and needs throughout the community.
- Identify and recommend the necessary resources to protect the community in terms of facilities, equipment, supplies, technology, personnel, training, education, planning and program.

- Develop, update, revise, evaluate and disseminate County-wide Emergency Operations Plans.
- Assist public and private sector agencies, organizations, groups and authorities in developing, maintaining and revising their own specific Emergency Operations Plans and Standard Operating Procedures.
- Maintain the County's Emergency Operations Center in a constant state of readiness; whenever necessary and once activated, direct the overall conduct of operations.
- Provide community-wide alerts and warnings of impending emergencies and disasters, as well as instructions on proper protective actions.
- Respond to potential and actual emergencies or disasters and coordinate inter-organizational response and recovery efforts.
- Provide specific analyses, technical support and recommendations to decision makers and emergency response officials.
- Develop, conduct, and participate in training programs and exercises focusing on mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of both exercises and actual responses, making specific recommendations as appropriate.
- Serve as a central point-of-contact and liaison between local, State and Federal authorities and the private and public sectors.
- Maintain a current database and repository of emergency management-related information, technology and decision making tools, and serve as a clearinghouse for technology transfer and information requests.
- Engage in community outreach activities with businesses, groups, organizations, neighborhood associations, clubs, churches, schools, individuals and the media to increase community-wide education, awareness and preparedness.

WHAT CEMA CAN DO FOR YOU

Within the overall Scope of Services described above CEMA can provide the citizens of Chatham County with a number of services to increase their awareness and preparedness. Examples include:

- Library of pamphlets, brochures, booklets and videotapes on disaster preparedness.
- Periodic "Are You Prepared" television programs on the Chatham County's cable TV station.
- Frequent public service announcements, stories and interviews on local TV and radio stations, as well as related articles in the newspapers.
- Periodic Disaster Preparedness booklets and inserts in local newspapers.
- Storm Spotter Training for interested groups and organizations, as well as an annual County-Wide Tornado Drill.
- Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training to prepare individuals to respond to emergencies in their community.