

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Regional Disaster Plan for Private & Public Organizations

1. Why do we need a Regional Disaster Plan?

King County is 2,134 square miles of diverse terrain with over 1.7 million people, 39 cities, over 120 special districts (fire, school, water/sewer, etc.) and over 700 elected officials. The county faces many natural (flooding, earthquakes, severe weather) and technological disasters (hazardous materials releases, transportation accidents, civil unrest). RCW 38.52.070 requires cities and counties to have emergency management programs, but minimal or no guidance is provided to special purpose districts, businesses and non-profits. Back in 1998, when the Regional Disaster Planning process began, the Federal government had focused on government response with the Federal Response Plan. With the recent release of the National Response Plan in December 2004, the focus shifted to include public, private, tribal and nonprofit organizations. With the dense population and complex system of governance and significant risks, disasters present the need to plan for a coordinated response among governments, tribes, non-profits and businesses. Potentially hundreds of entities would coordinate during a severe regional disruption. This plan focuses exclusively on disaster **response** and may be applied to any event that concurrently challenges multiple jurisdictions or multiple disciplines.

2. What makes this plan different?

In 1998, this agreement pioneered new territory as a cooperative endeavor, in that any private business, nonprofit organization, government agency or special purpose district can choose to be a signatory and participate with this plan. Any regional response in geographic King County will not be “perfect.” This plan is an attempt to create a shared concept for how individual, autonomous private and nonprofit organizations, and government agencies, tribes and jurisdictions will work together in times of extreme emergency or disaster. It supplements – NOT replaces – the local emergency plans required by state statute.

3. Why is the private sector involved in this plan?

Disasters don't respect jurisdictional boundaries, let alone economic environments. The citizens expect that public, private and non-profit entities know how to work together to effectively respond to and recover from a disaster. Whether we represent a public, private or non-profit, we are all stakeholders and interconnected to the continued viability of our communities. The private and non-profit sectors provide services and have resources that are critical during regional response efforts, and their availability and use can be coordinated through this regional plan.

4. Don't we already have mutual aid agreements that exist for this purpose?

Very few official mutual aid agreements exist within King County. A number of sewer and water districts participate in the “Washington's Water & Sewer

Agencies Mutual Aid Agreement.” For the fire service, the “King County Fire Resource Plan” and the South Puget Sound Fire Mobilization Plan exists. A number of public works departments have also signed on the “Public Works Mutual Aid Agreement.” Hazardous material response teams have an existing mutual aid agreement between Federal Way and Port of Seattle. Mutual aid is a pre-agreed sharing of resources between entities to support response activities. This plan will go beyond just a mutual aid that provides assistance within a discipline. This plan will facilitate **cross-zone** and **cross-discipline sharing** of resources. The typical sort of emergency for which this framework plan is designed will overwhelm the mutual aid systems available on a daily basis.

5. Does this plan put King County government in charge?

This is a voluntary and cooperative agreement. In no way is King County government in charge. The key is coordination rather than control, and the Appendix One to this plan reflects that... “Direction and Coordination.” No participating organization has “control” or authority over another except where stated in federal, state or local laws. The “Regional Disaster Plan for Public and Private Organizations in King County” may only be initiated by a chief elected official (or their designated representative) of a public jurisdiction or agency. An example of an appropriate use of the Regional Plan may be by: (1) A jurisdiction’s formal proclamation of a disaster; (2) A jurisdiction in anticipation of exhausting all normal capabilities, resources and zone mutual aid available to the jurisdiction(s).

6. How can we be sure our personal interests will be protected?

All participating organizations, tribes, agencies and districts will commit all their available resources to address their internal challenges BEFORE supporting a wider regional response. Participation in this plan does in no way impose any partnership obligation or liability upon any participating organization. Signatory entities that offer available resources and services do so voluntarily, but in the context of working within a coordinated response system. All regional coordination activities will NOT supersede the authority of, or take over the resources, assets, or personnel of those public, private and non-profit organizations.

7. If we don’t like the plan, what do we do?

Help draft and revise it. We are still in the development process of several sections and all participation is influential and welcomed.

8. What will this cost my jurisdiction, tribe, district, agency or organization?

An “Omnibus Legal and Financial Agreement” has been developed to provide the legal platform for resource sharing among participating organizations. The ground rules encourage a sense of security to those with available resources so they feel safe in offering assistance without risking excessive losses or liabilities, as well as establishing an accounting /billing process that is congruent with FEMA polices to encourage appropriate financial recovery. Resources and services that are loaned to other participating organizations will remain under the

operational control of the borrowing entity until recalled or replaced by the lending entity.

9. When and how is the plan implemented?

Participation in the Regional Disaster Plan is voluntary. Activation of the plan may be for an intense, localized event, or a widespread regional or catastrophic event. It is intended to be activated in conjunction with other state and local emergency plans and mutual aid agreements. Any signatory partner at risk of being overwhelmed, will first use appropriate internal resources, and then use any available mutual aid or commercially available resources. If further support is needed, the chief elected official or their successor/designee of the affected signatory organization will proclaim an emergency, and then contact their designated Zone Coordination Point of Contact and/or the King County ECC to request further assistance.

Comment: Are we really saying to use commercial resources and incur additional costs before an agency reaches out to another jurisdiction? That seems counter intuitive to me.

For more information, go to:

<http://www.metrokc.gov/prepare/programs/regionalplan.aspx>

or contact the King County Office of Emergency Management at 206-296-3830.