The National Response Plan

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by Leonard Bosma

Because of the tragic events associated with 9/11, Homeland Security Presidential Directive – 5 (HSPD-5) – was signed February 28, 2003. HSPD-5 mandates that the National Response Plan replace the existing Federal Response Plan.

The National Response Plan is an all encompassing strategy designed to integrate the actions of federal, state, local and other activities responding to incidents of national significance, including wildland and urban fires, floods, oil spills, hazardous materials releases, transportation accidents, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, pandemics, disruptions to the nation's energy and information technology infrastructure, and terrorist attacks.

- It establishes a comprehensive, all-hazards approach to incident management across a variety of activities that include prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery actions.
- It incorporates best practices and procedures from various incident management disciplines—homeland security, emergency management, law enforcement, firefighting, public works, public health, responder and recovery worker health and safety, and emergency medical services—and integrates them into a unified coordinating structure.
- It provides the framework for federal interaction with state, local, and tribal governments; the private sector; and nongovernmental organizations in the context of domestic incident prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery activities.
- It describes responsibilities and operational processes and protocols to help protect the nation from terrorist attacks and other natural and manmade hazards; save lives; protect public health, safety, property, and the environment; and reduce adverse psychological consequences and disruptions to the American economy and way of life.
- Finally, it serves as the foundation for the development of detailed supplemental plans and procedures to effectively and efficiently implement federal incident management activities and assistance.

The National Response Plan is predicated on the National Incident Management System (NIMS), which aligns the patchwork of federal special-purpose incident management and emergency response plans into an effective and efficient coordinating structure. The National Incident Management System provides a nationwide template enabling federal, state, local, and tribal governments, and private sector and nongovernmental organizations to work together effectively and efficiently to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents regardless of cause, size, or complexity. It is both flexible and scalable, allowing it to evolve in both size and shape as incidents play out.

The National Response Plan consists of the base document, fifteen Emergency Support Function Annexes, ten Support Annexes, and seven Incident Annexes. The base document describes the unified approach to be taken, and the various annexes identify agency roles and responsibilities by function and incident.

The NRP and the NIMS together integrate the capabilities and resources of governmental jurisdictions, incident management and emergency response disciplines, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector into a cohesive, coordinated, and seamless national framework for managing both declared and undeclared incidents of national significance.

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