



The Florida Senate

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Committee on Military Affairs and Domestic Security

CERTIFICATION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OFFICIALS

Issue Description

The State of Florida currently does not require individuals serving in an emergency management agency leadership position to possess any sort of professional certification. Emergency managers traditionally enter the field by initially serving as firefighters, law enforcement officers, emergency medical technicians, military personnel, or public administrators. They achieve qualification for their emergency management positions through a combination of additional formal education, in-service courses, self-study courses, exercise participation, and on-the-job experiences. An emerging consensus within the emergency management community favors development of some type of professional certification for emergency management officials. According to the community's reasoning, certification of emergency managers ensures standardization of emergency manager training and demonstrates qualification for service in an agency leadership position.

While Florida takes pride in the professionalism of its emergency managers, there is recognition that a trained and proficient work-force is not static. Turnover due to career opportunities and retirements requires continual training of new emergency managers capable of meeting the next disaster. Professional certification would further ensure that the next generation of emergency managers is properly trained and competent to perform their duties.

Emergency management is becoming more widely recognized nationally as a professional career field. A substantial number of community colleges, colleges, and universities offer programs leading to undergraduate and graduate degrees in emergency management, or public administration with a specialization in emergency management. More than 50 of these institutions also offer certificate programs in emergency management.¹ College degrees and certificate programs lend credibility to an emergency manager's list of professional qualifications.

Interest in establishing a state-managed, formal emergency manager certification program emerged during the 2009 Legislative Session. Proposed legislation would have required each county emergency management director to become certified under a state program. This Interim Report explores professional education and certification of emergency managers, the benefits of certification, existing certification programs, the impact on local and state governments, the implications of certification on current emergency managers, certification standards, and alternatives to implementing a state-managed certification program.

Background

Florida Statutes Provide an Emergency Management Framework but Do Not Address Emergency Manager Certification

Chapter 252, F.S. (Florida Statutes), recognizes the need to adequately deal with, reduce vulnerability to, and recover from emergencies and disasters resulting from natural, technological, or manmade causes.² To this end, ch. 252, F.S., creates a state emergency management agency known as the Division of Emergency Management (DEM); confers emergency powers to the Governor, the division, and each political subdivision of the state; sets

¹ Federal Emergency Management Agency website at <http://training.fema.gov/emiweb/edu/collegelist/emstandalone>, last viewed on 09/29/2009.

² Section 252.32, F.S.

forth an emergency management framework; and establishes a trust fund to provide financial resources for emergency management.

Current law places each county within the state under the jurisdiction of DEM with respect to coordination of emergency operations. Each county is required to establish a local emergency management agency with jurisdiction over the entire county and headed by an emergency management director. The director's training and education requirements are established in a job description approved by the county.³

Current law does not prescribe training and education qualifications for the DEM director. The law states, "The division director shall be appointed by the Governor, shall serve at the pleasure of the Governor, and shall be the agency head of the division for all purposes."⁴

Hurricane Katrina Brought the Issue of Emergency Manager Qualifications to the Forefront

President George W. Bush's infamous quote, "Brownie, you're doing a heck of a job,"⁵ to then Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) administrator Michael D. Brown will long be remembered. The subsequent controversy regarding Hurricane Katrina response and recovery operations and Undersecretary Brown's qualifications for his position led to passage of The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (Post-Katrina Act).⁶ Among other things, the act requires that the FEMA administrator shall have demonstrated ability in and knowledge of emergency management and homeland security and have attained not less than five years of executive leadership and management experience in the public or private sector.

Federal Efforts to Provide Improved Emergency Management Education

Educational opportunities for emergency managers are available at the national level through FEMA. The agency offers a broad range of courses at its on-campus Emergency Management Institute, off-campus classroom courses nationwide, and on-line independent study courses on subjects relating to homeland security and emergency preparedness. The on-line courses accommodate emergency managers' schedules and offer standardized education for emergency management professionals. Moreover, these on-line courses are available, at no cost, to any U. S. resident who is interested in homeland security or emergency preparedness and is willing to take the time to complete each course. FEMA has established a series of seven on-line advanced level courses which, when completed, leads to the award of a Professional Development Series Certificate.

FEMA developed the Emergency Management Higher Education Program in 1994 with the aim of promoting college-based emergency management education for future emergency managers and other interested personnel.⁷ The primary goal of the program is to help create an emergency management system of sustained, replicable capability and disaster loss reduction through formal education, experiential learning, practice, and experience.⁸ FEMA states that, in the future, more and more emergency managers in government as well as in business and industry will come to the job with college degrees in emergency management. College students entering the emergency management field need introduction to hazards, risks, vulnerabilities, disasters, and what to do about them.⁹ Currently, more than 60 colleges and universities nationwide offer programs with majors in emergency management, emergency management concentrations, or minors. Degrees offered range from Associate to PhD.¹⁰ The table below shows Florida institutions offering formal emergency management education.¹¹

³ Section 252.38, F.S.

⁴ Section 20.18 (2)(a), F.S.

⁵ CNN, 'Can I quit now?' FEMA chief wrote as Katrina raged, November 4, 2005, at <http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/11/03/brown.fema.emails/>, last viewed on 09/29/2009.

⁶ The Post Katrina Act was enacted as Title VI of the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2007, PL 109-295, 120 Stat. 1355 (2006)

⁷ FEMA EMI Emergency Management Higher Education Program website at <http://training.fema.gov/emiweb/edu/>, last viewed on 09/29/2009.

⁸ Id.

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ FEMA The College List at <http://training.fema.gov/EMIweb/edu/collegelist/>, last viewed on 09/29/2009.

¹¹ Not included in the table is the State College of Florida Manatee-Sarasota which has submitted a letter of intent to the State Board of Education to explore offering a four-year degree in Public Safety Administration/Homeland Security

Florida Colleges and Universities Offering Emergency Management Degrees or Certificates

Schools	Masters	BA with Emergency Management Concentration and Minors	Associate	Certificate
Broward Community College			X	X
Florida A&M University		X		
Florida Atlantic University	X			X
Florida State University	X	X		X
Indian River State College		X	X	X
Lynn University	X			
Miami-Dade College		X		
Northwest Florida State College			X	
Palm Beach Community College				X
St. Petersburg College		X	X	X
University of Central Florida		X		X
University of Florida	X	X		X
University of South Florida	X			

Source: FEMA and Florida Division of Community Colleges

Professional Certification May Be a Solution to Training and Standardization Concerns

While performing research for this report, Senate professional staff conducted group discussions and individual interviews with more than 60 emergency managers, DEM personnel, association representatives, and academicians. Staff believes that this group is a representative sample of Florida’s emergency management community. During the course of these discussions and interviews, staff learned that emergency managers usually begin their careers either as law enforcement officers, fire fighters, emergency medical technicians, public administrators, or members of the military. A small number of relatively younger individuals indicated they began their emergency management careers directly from college with a degree in emergency management.

The emergency management community is calling for improved emergency manager training and standardization. Each of the traditional entry occupation fields requires some knowledge of emergency management principles, but each field’s core functions and related training are designed to support a primary mission that is separate and distinct from that of emergency management. People who subsequently become emergency managers acquire the additional skills they need through further education and training, exercise participation, and actual disaster experience.

Agency placement varies among the counties according to each county’s determination of its own optimum organizational structure. Diversity within the emergency management community is further illustrated by the table below.

Florida County Emergency Management Reporting Structure

EM Director/Coordinator Reports To:	Percentage
Board of County Commissioners	22 %
County Manager/Administrator	23 %
Public Safety Director	21 %
Sheriff	11 %
Fire Chief	8 %
Mayor of Orange County ¹²	2 %
Other	13 %

Source: Florida Division of Emergency Management

The emergency management community has indicated that one way to achieve training standardization and demonstrate competency is through a professional certification program. Based on discussions with Senate

¹² The Mayor of Orange County is a single category with only one EM director reporting to the mayor. The 2% figure reflects a rounded mathematical computation

professional staff, a majority view supports certification as a means of recognizing emergency management as a separate and distinct professional career field.

Florida Has Experienced Turnover in its Emergency Management Leadership since the 2004 and 2005 Hurricane Seasons

According to a survey conducted by DEM in 2008, approximately 44 percent of Florida county emergency management directors/coordinators have held their current positions for three years or less. Overall, approximately 31 percent of directors/coordinators have 10 years or less experience in the emergency management field. Conversely, almost 70 percent Florida's county emergency management directors/coordinators have 10 to 30 years or more of emergency management experience. However, approximately 18 percent have 25 or more years of experience and most will likely retire within five years.¹³

DEM reports that 85 of its 136 authorized positions are new hires since the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons. This turnover of key emergency management personnel does not appear to be out of the ordinary; it illustrates the point that the training of replacement personnel to become the next generation of emergency managers is a necessary and on-going process.

Public and Private Sector Certification Programs

The National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) recently conducted a survey of state certification programs for emergency management personnel. NEMA found that 25 states have some sort of certification program.

State Emergency Management Certification Programs

State Emergency Management Staff – Target Audience of State's Certification Program	Local Emergency Management Staff – Target Audience of State's Certification Program	State Has Its Own Certification Program for Local Emergency Management Programs
Alabama	Alabama	Alabama
Arkansas	Arkansas	Arkansas
Arizona	California	Illinois
California	Colorado	Indiana
Colorado	Illinois	Iowa
Georgia	Indiana	Kansas
Hawaii	Iowa	Maine
Illinois	Kansas	Nebraska
Indiana	Louisiana	North Carolina
Kansas	Maine	Pennsylvania
Louisiana	Michigan	Vermont
Maine	Minnesota	Wisconsin
Michigan	Nebraska	West Virginia
Minnesota	North Carolina	
Nebraska	North Dakota	
North Carolina	Oklahoma	
North Dakota	Oregon	
Oklahoma	Pennsylvania	
Oregon	South Carolina	
South Carolina	Wisconsin	
Wisconsin		

Source: National Emergency Management Association

Twenty of these programs are targeted toward state emergency management staff. Nineteen states have their own certification programs for local emergency management staff. Eighteen states target both state and local staff.

¹³ Florida Division of Emergency Management 2008 County Emergency Management Survey Overview

Certification is not mandatory for the vast majority of both state staff and local programs. Only four states – Georgia, Kansas, Maine, and Minnesota – require their state emergency director to be certified.¹⁴ North Carolina has subsequently adopted an emergency manager certification program aimed at state and local emergency managers, making it the 26th state to do so.

FEMA's extensive program of emergency management education and training provides for recognition of individual course completion. The Professional Development Series and FEMA's Advanced Professional Series programs each recognize achievement in completing a series of prescribed courses with the award of a completion certificate.

The Advanced Professional Series program requires enrollment through the state's Emergency Management Training Officer and completion of 10 classroom courses. Five of the courses are required core courses covering management and operations, incident command, rapid assessment, disaster recovery, and mitigation planning. The remaining five courses are electives relating to a wide range of emergency management topics. Enrollment through the state emergency management training officer tends to limit the program to emergency management professionals. There is no cost for participation and the certificate is awarded upon verification by the state training officer of required course completions.

Within the private sector at the national level, the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) offers a voluntary program leading to accreditation as a Certified Emergency Manager (CEM). Accreditation as a CEM is a rigorous process. An applicant must document his or her emergency management experience, education, training, and contributions to the emergency management field; submit a 1,000 word essay, official job description/s, and three professional references; and must pass a 100 question multiple choice exam. IAEM's CEM Commission conducts a peer review of the application and determines approval or rejection of the applicant. IAEM membership is not required. IAEM members are charged a discounted application fee of \$325 while non-members pay a \$450 application fee.¹⁵ As of March 27, 2009, 1,307 persons had received IAEM certification nationwide. According to IAEM officials, 89 Floridians currently hold the CEM certification.

Several state professional emergency management associations also provide certification programs. In Florida, the Florida Emergency Preparedness Association (FEPA) awards certifications as a Florida Professional Emergency Manager, a Florida Associate Emergency Manager, and a Florida Emergency Management Volunteer. Qualifications for these certifications require varying levels of work history, experience, education, training, contributions to emergency management through personal accomplishments, and personal references. The Florida Professional Emergency Manager (FPEM) is FEPA's highest level of certification and carries the greatest requirements for experience, training, and contributions to the field. FPEM applicants must have four-years of full-time emergency management experience of which at least two-years must have been in Florida. Certification applications go before a peer review Certification Commission where the applicant is reviewed according to FEPA standards. FEPA does not require a certification examination. The association charges a \$50 application fee for certification.¹⁶ As of July 31, 2009, FEPA had awarded 183 FPEM certifications.

FEPA periodically conducts an Emergency Management Academy. Academy cadets receive more than 80 hours of classroom instruction and simulated emergency response play over a period of nine days.¹⁷ Graduates receive a certificate which signifies completion of emergency management education and exercise training.

Findings and/or Conclusions

In order to complete this report, Senate professional staff conducted discussion groups and individual interviews with more than 60 emergency managers, DEM staff personnel, association representatives, and academicians. Staff conducted literature and Internet searches and corresponded with the National Emergency Management

¹⁴ National Emergency Management Association, NEMA 2008 Biennial Report, Lexington, KY, www.nemaweb.org

¹⁵ International Association of Emergency Managers website at <http://www.iaem.com/certification/generalinfo/intro.htm>

¹⁶ FEPA website http://fepa.org/certification_comm.aspx, last viewed on 09/29/2009.

¹⁷ FEPA Alert, Summer 2009, Volume 14, Number 1, pg. 7. at FEPA website <http://www.fepa.org/>, last viewed on 09/29/2009.

Association. Senate staff also collaborated with the Florida Legislative Committee on Intergovernmental Relations (LCIR) staff. LCIR staff conducted substantial research on a project closely parallel to this project and readily shared the results of that research.

Senate staff found evidence of national trends towards both students increasingly pursuing higher education degrees specializing in emergency management as a means of entering the field, and the establishment of state and national certification programs for emergency management professionals.

During the course of this review, several key issues were identified relating to the certification of emergency managers:

- What is the benefit of adopting a certification program and is it really required?
- What is the impact of certification on state and local governments?
- What is the impact of certification relating to large counties versus small counties?
- Should there be a single level of certification or tiered levels of certification?
- What are the implications of required certification on currently serving emergency managers?
- How will adoption of standards with which to certify emergency managers be implemented?
- Is there duplication of certification programs currently in existence in the private sector?
- Should there be a required certification exam as part of the process?

Benefit of Requiring a Certification Program

Florida has extensive emergency response experience resulting from the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons. Those hurricanes left Florida's emergency managers with a depth of knowledge and a public citizenry confident in their abilities. With a proven system of experienced emergency managers, what is the need for a certification program?

Senate staff found a consensus among the emergency management community calling for some form of professional certification. The community believes that, due to the diversity of entry disciplines and normal rates of turnover, there is a need to ensure that the next generation of emergency managers meets appropriate training standards and demonstrates professional competence. A certification program would accomplish those goals. Approximately 18 percent of county emergency management directors/administrators representing the most experienced portion of the cadre will likely retire within the next five years. Leaders among this group were strongly committed to professional certification as a way of ensuring that the progress made in Florida would not be lost.

Impact of Certification on State and Local Governments, and Large Counties versus Small Counties

Certification will have a cost impact on state and local governments. Legislation proposed during the 2009 session only called for the mandatory certification of each county's emergency management director. DEM leadership stated a belief that funding for such a program could be obtained either through federal grants or through the Emergency Management, Preparedness, and Assistance Trust Fund established in ch. 252, F.S.

Such a program would cost the counties in terms of staff time devoted to training and preparation for certification. In particular, the Florida Small County Coalition questioned the small counties' ability to make sufficient staff time available for such a requirement. Large counties with more staff personnel may be in a better position to make staff time available for pre-certification training.

There will likely be a need for periodic recertification. Recertification will require a certain amount of continuing education in order to maintain certification. This process will require staff time allocation along with its associated cost.

The emergency management community consensus advocated that certification should not be limited to the county directors/coordinators. There is a need to train multiple levels of subordinate staff to ensure a continuity of operations. If a director/coordinator is required to be certified, then the deputy emergency manager who would be

expected to take over in the director/coordinator's absence should also be certified. Certification opportunities for subordinate emergency managers below the director/coordinator level should also be made available on a voluntary basis as part of career development. Costs for such additional certifications will further increase the impact on both the state and counties in terms of staff time.

One additional potential impact to state and local government is in the area of emergency management agency salary structure. A requirement for certified emergency managers will likely be accompanied by a demand for higher salaries in order to recruit qualified personnel.

Implications of Required Certification on Currently Serving Emergency Managers

Consensus exists for "grandfathering" currently serving emergency management directors/coordinators. The most senior managers have a long track record of experience including actual emergency response performance. In addition, some already possess an IAEM or FEPA certification. Required certification could be directed at less experienced emergency managers and those in training to become the next generation as a cost saving mechanism. Credit for equivalent training and certifications could replace some or all new certification requirements.

An alternative to "grandfathering" could be to provide for a transition period in order to allow emergency managers sufficient time to gain certification. An example of provisional certification exists within the building inspector community as authorized in s. 468.609, F.S., and Rule 61G19-6.012, F.A.C. The law allows newly promoted building code inspectors a provisional certificate with a requirement to become fully certified within three years.

Adoption of Standards with which to Certify Emergency Managers

If a decision is made to require state certification of emergency managers, there will be a need to formally adopt certification standards. This task could be accomplished by requiring the adoption of standards and granting the administering agency rule-making authority to do so. An alternate solution would be to create an emergency management advisory council, made up of appointed members of the emergency management community, tasked with recommending state standards to the certifying agency or to the Legislature for adoption.

Duplication of Certification Programs Currently in Existence in the Private Sector

Currently, at least two private sector programs are available to Florida emergency managers to apply for peer reviewed professional certification. One requires an examination and the other does not. Both require extensive documentation of education, training, contributions to the field, work history and duties, and actual emergency management experience as well as personal references. Both programs judge an individual's application according to adopted standards and determine that the standards have been met prior to granting certification.

Interviewees stated that the IAEM certification included coverage of certain disasters not usually encountered in Florida such as earthquakes and ice storms. The FEPA certification does not include a professional exam.

Adoption of a Required Certification Exam as Part of the Process

DEM officials strongly supported a requirement for a written exam as part of the professional certification process. They felt that such an exam would enhance certification credibility. Other emergency managers expressed concern over the adoption of an exam. Such an exam was seen as a potential bar to employment and an infringement on an individual county's right to choose emergency management candidates based on a best fit of each county's needs. The actual design and administration of an exam and procedures related to such a program were of concern as well.

Adoption of a Single Level of Certification or Tiered Levels of Certification

Legislation proposed during the 2009 Session called for certification solely at the county director level. Senate staff found a broad community consensus in favor of a tiered approach that covers multiple levels of emergency management professionals.

As an example, North Carolina recently adopted a tiered approach that includes four levels of certification.

- IV – Entry This level has the least requirement for education and experience.
- III – Basic Has higher level education course requirements including one specified community college course and additional experience.
- II - Intermediate Includes additional high level education course requirements. An Associate Degree is required but may be substituted with an additional year of experience.
- I – Advanced Requires a Bachelors Degree or two additional years of experience, top level emergency management educational courses, and certification as a Department of Homeland Security Training Instructor.

North Carolina’s approach recognizes that there are different skills requirements at the various job levels within an emergency management agency. Completion of certification at each level is designed to demonstrate competency at that level. Participation in North Carolina’s certification program is voluntary.¹⁸

Comments offered by Florida emergency managers also recognized that skill requirements varied by job level and that tiering provides an orderly approach to training and career progression.

Options and/or Recommendations

One option would be for the Legislature to decide not to require professional certification for Florida’s emergency managers. However, the consensus of the emergency management community favored adoption of some form of professional certification, preferably a tiered approach.

Should a decision be made to require state certification, possible alternatives include:

- Accept the certifications already in existence through FEMA, IAEM, or FEPA.
- Establish a partnership with one of the existing certifying bodies to design and administer a certification program to meet Florida’s unique needs.
- Separately establish a state administered certification program designed specifically for Florida’s needs.

Senate staff could not determine a clear consensus within the emergency management community on which of these alternatives was most desirable. The three most difficult issues associated with these alternatives were:

- Who should be required to obtain certification?
- Whether to “grandfather” current emergency managers, or provide for a provisional certification during a transition to a regular certification requirement?
- Whether to require a certification exam?

Senate professional staff recommends the establishment of a tiered certification program with stakeholder participation to resolve the associated issues during the legislative process.

¹⁸ North Carolina Emergency Management Association and North Carolina Division of Emergency Management, North Carolina Emergency Management Certification Program, Revision #4, April 8, 2009