



## Regional Emergency Preparedness Compacts: Safeguarding the Nation's Communities

MARCH 2002

*"We hope to change the old relationship—cities, states, federal model—into one based on mutual cooperation, collaboration and partnership."*

—Tom Ridge, Director, Office of Homeland Security

Homeland security is a critical national issue that also provides an important opportunity to redefine relationships within the federal system based on a new model of collaborative governance. This survey of regional approaches to emergency preparedness makes the case that regional emergency preparedness compacts offer a common-sense way to achieve results in a more effective manner.

The Alliance for Regional Stewardship, a national network of regional leaders, commissioned William R. Dodge to prepare this survey of regions to share best practices with federal, state, local and private sector leaders so that they can develop effective homeland security that will safeguard our nation's communities.

### **Regional Cooperation: A Common-Sense Approach to Preparedness**

At one level, regional cooperation simply makes sense as a way to shepherd federal, state and local resources. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Director, Joseph M. Allbaugh, summed up the situation succinctly, "We (FEMA) do not have the wherewithal to deal with 100,000 communities." The U.S. Conference of Mayors calls for Metropolitan Emergency Management to "accelerate the development of regional approaches to emergency and disaster management." State health officials recommend that state health departments "plan in advance for multi-jurisdictional issues with regional input."

The major recommendation from this survey is that federal and state governments should work with local government and private sector leaders to encourage new "networked" compact approaches to cooperation and mutual assistance within regions to replace the traditional "stovepipe" program approaches. This will require leadership at all levels of government, in partnership with the private and civic sectors. Innovative examples of where this is working should be further encouraged through incentives from the federal and state agencies that fund preparedness efforts.

### The major findings from the survey are as follows:

- *Regional cooperation became a life-saving necessity on September 11, but few regions are optimally coordinated to respond to terrorist attacks.* According to a National Association of Counties survey in early 2002, less than 1 in 10 counties responded that they were fully prepared to deal with terrorist attacks. “Thirty percent (of the counties) report that insufficient intergovernmental agreements hinder preparedness, while 35 percent report that insufficient communications networks hinder preparedness.”
- *Regional organizations play an important role in developing and implementing emergency preparedness plans.* Public regional councils of governments and regional planning commissions have a long history of recruiting and training fire, police, and other first response personnel. Regional chambers of commerce are assisting businesses to prepare and implement emergency preparedness plans, including mock disaster drills. Regional civic organizations can engage and inform the public, as well as act as a broker to bring the public and private sectors together around preparedness.
- *It is equally important to have full partnership and engagement from both the business and non-profit sectors in regional planning efforts.* Key critical infrastructure is in private hands. Technological and 24/7 operations know-how is in private hands. The media (needed to communicate to the public) and hospitals and doctors (needed to care for the public) are largely in the private sector. In addition, the non-profit sector—organizations such as the American Red Cross, Salvation Army, and community foundations—provides critical disaster recovery support. A complete regional teamwork approach is required.
- *With federal government leaders indicating support for regional compacts, regions have a unique opportunity to demonstrate an effective model of emergency preparedness through regional collaboration.*

### The Office of Homeland Security Encourages More Collaboration

The Office of Homeland Security is encouraging a more collaborative response through its “Securing the Homeland and Strengthening the Nation” strategic plan:

- The proposed “**Supporting First Providers**” program will provide \$105 million to support state and local governments in developing comprehensive plans to prepare for and respond to terrorist attacks. FEMA currently encourages partnerships and intergovernmental cooperation through its Project Impact and Hazard Mitigation Grants program. Regional public and private leaders can work with state governments and FEMA to develop collaborative regional plans. The innovative examples in this survey indicate that it can be done.
- The proposed “**Defending Against Bioterrorism**” program makes funding available “to support the development of mutual aid compacts.” The Department of Health and Human Services already provides grants for Metropolitan Medical Response Systems (MMRS) to develop plans to coordinate public safety, public health and health services sector responses to terrorist incidents. The deadline for state plans to HHS is April 15.
- The proposed “**Using 21<sup>st</sup> Century Technology to Defend the Homeland**” recommends that “federal, state, local officials as well as the private sector, must work seamlessly together. Having the right system of communications—content, process

and infrastructure—is critical to bridging the existing gaps between federal, state and local governments as well as the private sector.” The plan provides \$722 million in grant increases to will help tear down the unwarranted “stovepipes” among federal, state, local government communications systems.

### **Innovative Regional Preparedness Models Can Provide Guidance**

The Alliance survey highlights regional and state examples of innovative regional emergency preparedness compacts with strong state, local and private leadership. Seven case studies are described in depth:

- The National Capitol Region
- Columbus (Ohio) Region
- Kansas City Region
- Hampton Roads (Virginia) Region
- Coastal Georgia Region
- Regions in the State of Florida
- Regions in the State of Vermont

These first two models focus on developing regional compacts that support the activities of first providers, give terrorist threats priority attention, engage public and private and civic sectors and assure effective communications and decision making in disasters. They started with summits and are being guided by task forces of public, private and civic leaders.

The Mid-America Regional Council in Kansas City interstate region has been building a base of regional approaches to emergency preparedness for over a half a century. Regional councils of government in Hampton Roads (Virginia) and Brunswick (Georgia) successfully used federal programs to initiate regional approaches to emergency preparedness. Florida and Vermont are states that foster regional approaches through regional models for land-use and transportation planning.

More details and accompanying case studies on these models can be found in the full report at [www.regionalstewardship.org/publications.html](http://www.regionalstewardship.org/publications.html).

### **Next Steps: Federal, State, Local and Private Sector Collaboration**

What needs to be done to foster regional approaches to emergency preparedness? While the Office of Homeland Security has taken important steps to promote more collaboration, the Federal government can do more to encourage states and local governments to move in this common sense direction. Successful regional examples already exist and can be shared widely. Local elected officials and private sector leaders can work together to develop regional compacts based on mutual assistance and cooperation around their specific preparedness issues following the best practice examples.

Governors play a critical role in the federal system. Florida and Vermont’s regionally-based model can serve as examples for other states. In a February meeting with the National

Governors' Association, Governor Tom Ridge noted that while Governors should act as overall coordinators for their states, "the relationship you have with your mayors is going to be crucial to this effort." He said that most of the federal money would go to "first responders" in fire, police and medical units run by city and county governments and thus urged the Governors to work closely with local officials to achieve the most effective results. Clearly, one important answer to the challenge of homeland security is moving to a more networked model based on "mutual cooperation, collaboration and partnership," as Governor Ridge has indicated.

We hope this survey can help state and local officials understand the need to develop regional preparedness compacts. The report makes a number of specific recommendations including holding regional security summits, conducting regional exercises and demonstrations, creating a learning network among regions to share best practices on compacts, giving priority in federal and states funding for regional compacts, and designating federal and state liaisons to help develop regional compacts.

Federal and state government support for developing regional emergency preparedness compacts can provide the catalyst needed to reward existing efforts and foster new ones in the nation's regions. State and local leaders and private sector leaders acting as "regional stewards" also need to take responsibility for promoting more collaborative approaches to this critical national, state and local issue.

We have the opportunity to redefine the federal-state-local relationship to make sure that all of our citizens are safe and our homeland is secure by developing more collaborative ways to address our challenges. As we implement the national homeland security strategy together, let us not miss this opportunity.

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*Both Mayor Glenda Hood and George Vradenburg are members of the national advisory board of the Alliance for Regional Stewardship, a national network of regional leaders ([www.regionalstewardship.org](http://www.regionalstewardship.org)) that commissioned this survey prepared by William R. Dodge ([WilliamRDodge@aol.com](mailto:WilliamRDodge@aol.com)).*