

PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF EMERGENCY MANAGERS

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BACKGROUND

During an emergency, first response and support agencies work together in a fashion that allows for the strategic delivery of services while accommodating the responsibility and authority of each agency to their respective jurisdictional and legal roles. This integration of services does not come about by accident. Rather, many of the processes used to coordinate these agencies are designed and fostered by emergency management practitioners, commonly known as emergency managers.

The job title of emergency manager is increasingly found in government, industry and the private sector. However, the function, authority and responsibility of emergency managers can vary greatly across each sector. An emergency manager working for a local government authority may have a far role from one working for a federal agency. Additionally, seemingly minor variations in job titles can have major implications. Emergency management functions may be performed by emergency coordinators, emergency program managers, business continuity planners, resiliency officers, and disaster response coordinator to name a few. While each of these titles imply a different role, there is a level of overlap in the function of each role that ties them together into the core emergency management discipline.

Individuals may enter the emergency management discipline a number of different ways. Some may pursue a formal education, obtaining certificates, degrees, and professional designations. Others may find themselves tasked with performing emergency management functions on the periphery of a different role. However, the variations in how individuals become emergency managers belie the somewhat complicated process of “becoming” an emergency manager. To be considered a legitimate emergency manager, an individual must come to identify themselves as an emergency manager. While education is likely an important factor in forming this identity, there are a number of characteristics that appear necessary. These may include participation in legitimate emergency experiences, actively maintaining professional networks that includes relationships with key individuals, holding specific opinions on practices and theories, and actively supporting the uniqueness of the emergency management discipline from other emergency-related disciplines.



Image: <https://www.mymcmurray.com/wp-content/blogs.dir/sites/11/2014/06/Fire-3.jpeg>

The variation in titles, functions, roles, and indoctrination possibilities demonstrate a broad depth of understanding of the discipline. However, it understanding what the critical elements and experiences are that guide an individual in forming their identity as an emergency manager. This lack of understanding creates a challenge in indoctrinating and training new emergency managers, potentially resulting in inconsistent training, inconsistent practices in the field, and inconsistent expectations of the competencies and abilities of emergency managers.

The goal of this research study is to explore the roles and functions of emergency managers based on the perceptions of public safety professionals. This study will focus on identifying what activities are seen as being central to emergency management, identifying the individuals and groups seen as being important for emergency managers engage with, and identifying common experiences emergency managers are perceived relevant to emergency managers.

METHODS

This research is currently being conducted. A selection of public safety professionals are being engaged in one-on-one interviews to gather their perceptions on the roles and functions of emergency managers. Interviews are being conducted in a semi-structured, conversational format. A set of initial questions and probes is used to guide participants in exploring the topic. Additional open-ended and structured questions have been generated and are used as additional prompts or redirects for participants. Questions guide participants to consider historical recollections, as well as current views and opinions on the roles and characteristics of emergency managers. Interviews range from 30 to 45 minutes.

Interviews are being recorded and transcribed. Initial themes are being generated on the basis of emerging information from participants. Future research will focus on examining and validating these initial themes as well as exploring the process of ‘becoming’ and emergency manager.