



Friday, October 7, 2005

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Governor Doyle Accepts Report on Wisconsin's Emergency Preparedness Plans

Doyle, Wilkening Announce Steps to Improve Evacuation Plans and Communications Systems

Governor Jim Doyle today accepted a report from Major General Al Wilkening, Adjutant General of Wisconsin, and Wisconsin's Homeland Security Advisor, evaluating Wisconsin's Emergency Preparedness plans and recommending specific action steps the state will take to avoid the mistakes made in the response to Hurricane Katrina.

"Like many Wisconsin residents, I was deeply troubled by what I saw in Louisiana," Governor Doyle said. "We saw people waiting for help, officials arguing about who was in charge, resources being misdirected, confusion on the ground, and a lack of communication. This report is the first step toward ensuring that if a disaster of that magnitude were to happen here, these things wouldn't happen – Wisconsin would be ready."

The report addresses each of the "Lessons Learned" from Hurricane Katrina, Wisconsin's readiness in that area, an assessment of the lesson, recommendations to better prepare the state on how to avoid it in Wisconsin, and a timetable to implement action.

"On the whole, Wisconsin is far more prepared than the Gulf Region was," Governor Doyle said. "But this report identifies some important areas on the state and local level where we need to improve significantly. I am committed to leading this statewide effort to make those changes."

Governor Doyle also thanked Wisconsin Emergency Management and the Department of Military Affairs for their thorough review in such a short period of time.

MASS EVACUATION PLANS MUST BE DEVELOPED

All 72 county emergency management offices and the state of Wisconsin have current evacuation and shelter plans which are updated annually. At the state level, six key state agencies, in cooperation with the Red Cross, are responsible for specific tasks in support of county and local evacuation and shelter planning.

A key finding of this report is that while all plans can accommodate small to medium evacuation and shelter efforts, they have not planned for a large scale catastrophe.

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Governor Doyle is directing Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM) to conduct a revision process of the 11 counties with Wisconsin's largest cities to ensure their evacuation plans can accommodate a mass evacuation.

Other key issues associated with mass evacuations for which assessments, recommendations and timeframes have been provided in the report include:

- Transportation requirements,
- The role first responders play in supporting evacuations,
- The integration and coordination of plans at all levels of government,
- Notification requirements,
- Security requirements, and
- Pet evacuation plans.

SPECIAL NEEDS POPULATIONS MUST BE IDENTIFIED EARLY

Hurricane Katrina showed the need for government and private health care providers to keep track of elderly and disabled residents and have detailed evacuation plans for them in place. This review found that while most Wisconsin counties and municipalities do maintain lists of nursing homes and other specialized care facilities in their plans, there may be individuals, groups, and facilities that have not been identified.

Governor Doyle is directing the Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) and the Community Coalition Committee to coordinate with county and tribal human services, public health agencies, and county emergency management departments to identify and maintain county and tribal lists of special needs populations.

EVACUATION AND EMERGENCY PLANS ARE REQUIRED FOR NURSING HOMES, HOSPITALS AND RELATED FACILITIES

Wisconsin law requires nursing homes, hospitals and related facilities to have all-hazards emergency response plans that are exercised on a local and regional basis annually.

This review finds that more extensive planning and exercising is needed in order to effectively respond to a mass evacuation. Governor Doyle will convene a Health Care Facilities Stakeholders meeting by the end of January 2006 to address these concerns.

LOCAL, STATE AND FEDERAL RESPONSES MUST BE EFFECTIVELY COORDINATED AND COMPETENTLY LED

In December, 2004, Governor Doyle issued Executive Order #81, designating the National Incident Management System (NIMS) as the basis for incident management in the state of Wisconsin, which provides a single standardized system of emergency response. The state will encourage local and tribal governments to adopt NIMS, providing consistency across levels of government in an emergency situation.

Effective training is essential to coordinated responses and competent leadership. WEM has already been engaged in intensive training and will continue to do so – putting particular emphasis on leadership development. This training will also work to improve coordination among state and federal agencies, local law enforcement and first responders, and local elected officials.

MUTUAL AID COMPACTS MUST BE IN PLACE

Most communities have mutual aid agreements with nearby departments in surrounding cities and counties. However, these mutual aid compacts must be expanded. In a major disaster, local resources could be immediately overwhelmed and processes need to be in place to be able to bring help from surrounding communities and the region, as well as from other states.

Governor Doyle is calling for legislation establishing comprehensive statewide mutual aid compacts by April 2006.

REGIONAL PLANNING AND EXERCISING

Hurricane Katrina demonstrated clearly that some communities did not communicate with each other — and they may not have ever planned or exercised together. Better coordination by local governments could have assisted with more effective evacuations and a more efficient response.

While some Wisconsin counties have formed regional planning groups, this review found there is more to do. WEM will adopt the concept of regional planning as a requirement for its planning process by November 1, 2005. Wisconsin will also work with neighboring states in developing more multi-state exercises.

DONATIONS & VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

As the nation and the world watched the horrors of Hurricane Katrina unfold, many people donated plane and truck loads of water, clothing, and other supplies. It has become a major challenge to store, inventory, and process those items for distribution.

Wisconsin needs to develop a comprehensive plan about how to manage donations to ensure that the right items are donated and that the donations are quickly distributed to those in need. A comprehensive plan will be completed by October 1, 2006.

Following any major emergency, bus loads of volunteers arrive to help lend a hand to those in need. Wisconsin must develop better plans to coordinate large number of volunteers to ensure that their skills are matched with the jobs available, as well as to ensure their safety.

In addition, the state needs to continue to promote and expand our partnerships with our volunteer organizations such as the Red Cross and Salvation Army. In conjunction with the Red Cross and WEM, the state has a goal to recruit and train 1,000 more citizen volunteers statewide by the end of the year. These will be Red Cross certified volunteers – ready and able to deploy anywhere in Wisconsin or the rest of the nation on short notice. This is part of a nationwide effort to recruit and train up to 40,000 additional people.

NATIONAL GUARD FORCES MUST BE DEPLOYED IN A TIMELY, EFFECTIVE, AND EFFICIENT MANNER

Hurricane Katrina flooded the Jackson Barracks of the Louisiana National Guard devastating equipment and assets needed for local emergency response. National Guard forces from neighboring states were cued up to assist hurricane-affected areas but there was no effective or consistent deployment of critical personnel and specialized assets to the areas of greatest need.

The Governor will dispatch the National Guard in the event of a declared local or state emergency and after local mutual aid efforts have proven to be insufficient to handle the emergency incident. As prepared as the National Guard is, the Guard will work to improve response time, and increase joint training exercises on the local, state, and federal level.

COMMUNICATIONS INTEROPERABILITY

Hurricane Katrina silenced communications systems in the impacted Gulf States. It wasn't just downed cellular phone towers and land lines, but also various jurisdictions and departments couldn't talk with each other due to differing communications systems. Currently Wisconsin Emergency Management has two systems that provide the capability to bridge across otherwise incompatible radio communication systems. Milwaukee County and Dane County possess similar capabilities.

In February 2005, Governor Doyle signed Executive Order #87, which establishes the State Interoperability Executive Council to examine Wisconsin's interoperability and provide goals, objectives, technical standards, and recommendations to achieve statewide public safety radio interoperability.

Wisconsin will continue to study its current communications systems and evaluate the work that needs to be done and equipment that needs to be purchased to ensure statewide communications interoperability.

OTHER AREAS ADDRESSED IN REVIEW

The review also includes substantive recommendations in other areas, including helping citizens become better prepared with their own emergency plans, addressing the need for potential evacuations to or from other states, and the role of private emergency organizations and other private groups in major disasters.

The entire Review of Wisconsin's Emergency Preparedness Plans can be viewed at:
<http://emergencymanagement.wi.gov>