The readings for this week discuss the complexities encountered during emergency response and during the post disaster recovery period. Much of this complexity is a result of the tremendous amount of intergovernmental coordination that is needed to effectively respond to these events. Chapter five in Introduction to emergency Management, by Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola provides an outline of the federal government’s role in recovery operations. In the article “A New Use of an Old Model: Continuity of Government as a Framework for Local Emergency Managers” by Stephens and Grant, the authors examine disaster response and recovery through a continuity of government (COG) framework. This framework is an adaptation of COG principle that was first developed to outline how the essential functions of government could continue after a nuclear war.

Haddow, Bullock and Coppola define the recovery function as “decisions and actions relative to rebuilding homes, replacing property, resuming employment, restoring businesses, and permanently repairing and rebuilding infrastructure.” (p. 155) The authors explain that this process of recovery is a balance of a “wanting” to rebuild the community and return to a pre-disaster state as quickly as possible, and maximizing the opportunity to mitigate future disasters. In order for communities to effectively respond during the recovery period a tremendous amount of intergovernmental coordination is required at all levels. In addition to intergovernmental interactions, numerous local community groups and political agendas are at play during the recovery period. The authors describe recovery as both a regulatory process – through the use of building codes, and financial support from both the private insurance industry and the federal government. (p. 156)

The federal government’s role in recovery operations is part of the National Response Plan. The National Response Plan is a companion document to the National Incident Management System and addresses both response and recovery1. Under this plan “the Response and Recovery Operations Branch coordinates the request and delivery of federal assistance and support from various special teams.” (Haddow, Bullock, Coppola p. 157) This branch has four core functions; emergency services, human services, infrastructure support, and community recovery and mitigation. In the context of the NIMS/ICS structure three of these functions, human services - which coordinates aid to families and businesses, infrastructure support - which coordinates federal aid for infrastructure repair of facilities, and the community recovery and mitigation branch - which helps to assess damage, and prepare an appropriate and efficient course of corrective action, are all operated under the operations section of the Joint Field Office. Like all items in the Joint Field Office, coordination between federal, state and local officials is an important component of the recovery effort.

Financial aid from the federal government comes in three forms; individual assistance, public assistance, and hazard mitigation assistance. Individual assistance can range from temporary

---

housing, grants, unemployment assistance, and crisis counseling. (Haddow, Bullock, Coppola p. 160) Public assistance is delivered through FEMA’s public assistance grant programs. These grants are given to state, local and nonprofit organizations and will help pay for both emergency work like debris removal and permanent work on damaged public facilities and infrastructure. Most importantly assistance is given to mitigate the future risk of disasters occurring again. Much of this occurs through local land use regulations so the federal role is limited, however the period after a disaster is a great opportunity for mitigation.

In contrast to the basic outline of the National Response Plan given by Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola, Stephens and Grant discuss in their article “A New Use of an Old Model: Continuity of Government as a Framework for Local Emergency Managers”, some of the difficulties that emergency managers have in using the NIMS based response plan. Their premise is that emergency managers are “uncertain as to the precise nature of their responsibilities and how to fulfill them.” (Stephens, Grant p.284) State level emergency managers area confronted with balancing both federal and local demands, while trying to navigate difficult and sometimes “ambiguous procedures within the National Response Plan.” (Stephens, Grant p.284) The authors suggest that if emergency managers could operate under the concept of Continuity of Government (COG) as opposed to the Incident Command System, a core framework, improved clarity, and more understandable guidelines would be available to deal with local disaster policy.

The COG framework the authors describe is a goal based process. Local, state, and federal governments would all work towards similar goals in planning, response, and recovery. The framework has seven goals as follows: designate line of succession for key government positions, ensure that legal provisions exist for full exercise of emergency powers, specify essential emergency powers for key officials, set emergency operations center requirements, set plans for an alternate emergency operations center, protect vital records, and sustain essential governmental resources, facilities, and personnel. This goal based response would eliminate some of the complexity in the NIMS plan that may have lead to confusion rather then ease of coordination. The authors believe that the COG framework is a more straight-forward approach and will help to blend local governments’ goals with those at the state and federal level.

Recovery efforts require broad based coordination between various governmental, business, and non-profit groups. This complex coordination often only happens during emergencies, and thus is unfamiliar to the groups participating. The NIMS framework attempts to have different levels of government use the same terminology so that coordination can be less cumbersome; unfortunately this has lead to only varying degrees of success. Regardless of the type of underlying structure that emergency response and recovery operations are based on, practice and familiarity is necessary by all parties. In Miami-Dade a virtual operation center is being developed to help organizations practice communicating with each other in non-emergency events. The goal of this project is to help permit organizational learning, and to be used as a research facility. More information on this project can be found in the following article.