

Evans

Good Afternoon Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee, My name is Ed Flick. I am the emergency manager for Marion County Oregon. I also am the vice president of the Oregon Emergency Management Association. I was hired by Marion County in 2014, following my retirement from Active Duty in the US Army as a Special Forces Lieutenant Colonel.

In Special Operations, a number of truths, hard-learned lessons, guide how we shape our organizations. One that is particularly relevant to our topic today is "not to confuse enthusiasm with capability".

I have grave concerns that no matter how enthusiastic emergency management practitioners may be at the state and local level, emergency management organizations do not have the capability to accomplish what should be done to safeguard life, property and the environment in Oregon. Too often, I have seen important work that would best be accomplished at the state level left undone. Local emergency management programs have little capability to fill the gap, particularly with Federal support declining by nearly 18 percent this year.

An example is the way the state approaches the development of the State Hazard Mitigation Plan. Although the state hazard mitigation officer resides in OEM, the actual author of the plan works for DLCD. A third agency, DOJ is responsible for critical infrastructure protection. A fourth agency, the Office of the State Fire Marshal is responsible for hazardous materials planning. As a consequence, hazard mitigation plans often do not address all of the hazards we face. Similar gaps exist between OEM and OHA regarding the evaluation of health hazards, mitigation and response. A more robust OEM staff could integrate the efforts of the various state and local stakeholders and produce better plans, making it easier for counties to conduct similar planning and improve the linkage between local and state plans.

The Cascadia Rising exercise this past June presented numerous examples as well.

In preparation for the exercise, the State of Washington fielded a state-wide resource ordering plan that streamlined and standardized the process. We have no such process in Oregon. Not because OEM staff do not have the expertise, but rather because they do not have the time. It is important to note that the Washington Emergency Management Agency ~~has nearly twice the number of employees as OEM.~~

is much larger than
During the exercise itself, the OEM staff were overwhelmed, struggling to assemble a state-wide damage assessment, coordinate requirements with state agencies, or interface well with the federal incident management team. All too often local requests to the state were neither acknowledged nor acted upon.

My concerns are not with the capabilities of OEM staff members individually. They are dedicated and talented public servants, there are simply not enough of them.

According to OEM, there are approximately 40 staff members assigned. Only a few are funded by the general fund. All others are funded by grants or special funds (e.g. 911). The fact that so many staff members are funded in this manner significantly limits how the agency can deploy their staff. For example, staff funded for hazard mitigation planning are limited in how that may perform general emergency management functions such as response. The fluctuation of grant funding year to year creates an environment of uncertainty for staff and management.

A consequence of this situation is that all too often, OEM struggles to do more than their statutory -

regulatory functions and has little bandwidth to provide subject matter assistance to local emergency management programs.

A better funded OEM would provide more services to the counties commensurate with the threats and hazards we face. Unfortunately, I see no indication that the Oregon Military Department intends to grow OEM.

In closing, how long can we afford to say that we are unprepared before businesses begin to relocate where there are fewer hazards? I encourage the committee to find ways to appropriately resource emergency management in Oregon.

Thanks You.

for the opportunity to testify
and am happy to answer
any questions.