



Oregon State Assessors and Tax Collectors Association

Summary: Critical Role of Assessors and Assessment Data in Disaster and Emergency Response

Accurate property assessment data is a cornerstone of effective disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. For first responders, precise and up-to-date information on building characteristics, occupancy, and location enables rapid deployment of resources, enhances situational awareness, and ultimately saves lives during emergencies.

Government agencies rely on this data to coordinate relief efforts, assess damages, allocate funding, and ensure that recovery operations are equitable and efficient. For property owners, accurate assessments help secure timely insurance claims, access recovery assistance, and make informed decisions about rebuilding and mitigation. In both the immediate aftermath of a disaster and the long-term process of recovery, the availability of reliable property data is vital to restoring communities, protecting lives, and building resilience against future events.

Oregon 2020 and 2024 Wildfires

Assessors and assessment data played a pivotal role in Oregon's wildfire emergency response, recovery, and long-term rebuilding. Their importance was demonstrated during major wildfire events in 2020 and 2024. In the 2020 wildfires, over 4,000 homes were destroyed, prompting A&T offices to step in immediately. Assessors provided property records for improvements, ownership, and values. These records became the cornerstone for critical services requests such as FEMA disaster assistance, property insurance claims, and property tax adjustments. Accurate and timely data enabled rapid support to impacted property owners and government agencies.

Marion County, for example, had high-quality aerial imagery from Eagleview just prior to the 2020 fires and coordinated additional captures during and after the disaster. This allowed first responders, local government, and state agencies to plan cleanups and initiate rebuilding with precise, current information. Their data also supported the implementation of a wildfire-specific property tax relief program adopted by the county, underscoring the long-term value of historical, current, and future assessment and tax data.

In 2024, Umatilla County's GIS team was tasked with real-time fire perimeter mapping due to the State's inability to manage fire progression data. The team's cadastral mapping and data sets were critical to emergency responders, evacuation planning, and media communication. Post-containment, they verified structural impacts and further aided emergency management.

Without proper funding to maintain data, qualified personnel, and technology, emergency response efforts would be severely delayed or compromised. Investing in assessors and their infrastructure ensures accurate data for all stakeholders—first responders, government agencies, and property owners—during both crisis and recovery.
