

External Factors

The first factor or challenge that could affect achievement of FEMA's long-term goals is the effectiveness of emergency management partnerships. Although FEMA provides leadership and coordination, State and local governments are ultimately responsible for protecting their citizens from harm. Only when its capability and resources are not adequate to respond to a disaster does the State turn to the Federal Government for assistance, and only then does FEMA step in to coordinate the federal response and provide recovery services. For example, the Federal Government can provide leadership to increase awareness of the need to adopt and enforce sound measures, provide incentives and limited funding, and lead by example with regard to mitigating federal facilities. Individuals, businesses, and community officials, however, are ultimately responsible for the zoning and building practices that will reduce or increase the potential for a community to be damaged by a disaster.

The second challenge is the availability of resources. Like the Federal Government, State and local government resources are being stretched and are in growing demand. The ability of State and local governments to effectively carry out preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery responsibilities may be diminished and require them to increasingly turn to the Federal Government for assistance. The continued support of the Administration and Congress will be necessary to ensure that significant downsizing in the Federal Government does not impact its ability to carry out its emergency management responsibilities.

Resource levels to plan and execute FEMA's mission may shrink or, at best, may remain constant. This opens the possibility of severe effects on FEMA operations and ultimately on its customers. If FEMA's full-time personnel resources were reduced further, the agency's ability to respond quickly and effectively to major unforeseen events would become impaired.

Similarly, FEMA is one of many Federal Response Plan partners—all of which have mandates and strategic plans to fulfill. While FEMA coordinates efforts in both emergency and consequence management, it

cannot control the timeliness of response or the response priorities set by its partners. These external factors may have an impact on the timeliness of some of FEMA's objectives although their final achievement is a goal of the partnership.

The third challenge in achieving the goals and objectives of this strategic plan is the frequency and magnitude of disasters. FEMA's response and recovery objectives are based on "typical" disasters—not on extraordinary or historically unprecedented ones. At every level of government, many of the individuals preparing for disasters or trying to mitigate their effects are the same individuals that must stop their normal work and respond to an emergency. Many who are working to re-engineer plans and processes must give first priority to the operational requirements of the crisis of the day. By its very nature, emergency management requires shifting resources to insure that the current disaster operation is well served. It is very difficult to predict the level of effort available to build and improve the performance and efficiency of the national emergency management partnership when resources remain constant or decrease when the disaster operations workload seems ever increasing and compounding.

The fourth challenge relates to new systems development. A major FEMA success in reducing administrative costs results from applying new technology to reduce labor costs and speed up business processes. This often requires an increased short-term investment in hardware and software to realize longer-term efficiencies. Major investments in new electronic systems often require many years to amortize and return savings.

Anticipated improvements in efficiency projected in this plan are based on many assumptions regarding the time required and costs associated with development and installation of new systems. Although these assumptions and objectives are reasonable, a great deal of uncertainty and risk are associated with them. Efforts to overcome these uncertainties include expanding management controls in the development process, expanding the use of outside experts, involving users extensively in identifying system requirements, making maximum use of off-the-shelf software, using state-of-the-art development tools and processes, and using third-party evaluation and cost estimates.