

# The Criticality of Standards for Disaster Search and Rescue Capabilities

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Nationally, the availability and operational capability of Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) rests upon 28 federally sponsored resources and numerous state US&R resources provided through governmental, private, and non-governmental organizations. These resources are “systems and capabilities,” so critical to the United States that the incapacitation or inability of such a resource to deploy, has a debilitating effort on national and state response and recovery operations, public health and safety, or any combination of life, health, and safety related priorities throughout disasters.

## Need for a Catalog of National US&R Resources

The need for a catalog of national US&R resources was realized as an after action item from the National Level Exercise of the New Madrid Earthquake Scenario. State and local government officials have a need to understand what resources, including US&R, are available to potentially assist during a disaster. It is critical for state and local officials to understand the various kinds and types of resources available to them when requesting mutual aid resources. That helps ensure that proper resources are ordered. With the developing catalog, governors and mayors can ensure that their requests are being met with the correct assets. The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (PKEMRA)

requires that states receiving federal preparedness assistance administered by FEMA will report on their levels of preparedness and that an assessment of current capabilities is established.

Organizationally, US&R represents capabilities that are not fully maximized during disasters nor adequately recognized as “available” assets prior to impact from natural, technological, or human-caused events. Individual US&R capabilities of non-federal resources are not fully understood or accepted, and suffer from policy, logistical and socio-perceptive isolation. To truly determine the nation’s US&R capability, a common assessment framework and methodology based on national standards must be established for the US&R infrastructure that considers and accepts individuality found within the whole community.

## Critical to Establish National Standards for US&R Teams

The establishment of national standards for US&R teams and the assessment of tiered-response assets are critical to the reporting of national preparedness, along with the criticality of ensuring that the right US&R resource is getting to the scene of a disaster in a timely manner. US&R resources and tiered response assets against a set of American National Standards Institute (ANSI) certified national standards for emergency preparedness and response would ensure that happens.

## Developed of the Urban Search and Rescue Standard

To that end, the goal of achieving a truly national certified US&R system, recognized by all participants and communities in need, was spearheaded by many partners including the federal government, the State Urban Search and Rescue Alliance, and the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP). Over a series of working group meetings, including representation from the National Preparedness Assessment Division (NPAD), FEMA US&R Branch, National Integration Center (NIC), federally sponsored US&R team members, State Urban Search & Rescue Alliance (SUSAR), the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), and EMAP, the *Urban Search and Rescue Standard* was drafted and submitted for public comment.

EMAP, as a recognized third-party standard development organization, led the effort to write the *Urban Search and Rescue Standard*, along with providing peer-review assessments to validate US&R teams. The standard is scalable, modular, and consistent as written and reviewed by the whole community.

The *Urban Search and Rescue Standard* delivers a consistent set of criteria enabling US&R resources with the opportunity for enhancement and improvement. Nationally, the standard has and does provide a

[continued on page 21](#)

### History of Higher Education Accreditation in EM

[continued from page 19](#)

*Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Emergency Management Magazine*, and the many hundreds of textbooks, articles, white papers, and monographs that have been published in recent years. All of these build the profession and provide for the publication of research. When the Higher Education Project was launched, there was only one basic emergency management textbook, published by the International City Management Association and dubbed the “green book.”

IAEM has offered the Certified Emergency Manager (CEM®) designation, for more than 20 years, based on having a bachelor’s degree, 100 hours of emergency management training, and 100 hours of general management training, professional references, six areas of professional contributions, an exam, and an essay. There are

about 300 CEM®s who have had this qualification for at least 10 years, and about 200 CEM®s for over 15 years, including several members of the foundation board.

Accreditation of emergency management programs in institutions of higher education is the next natural step in the evolution of the building of the profession of emergency management.

During the successful deliberations of the FEMA Focus Group, the foundation changed its name to the Council for the Accreditation of Emergency Management Education. Then the EPP split from the council and began seeking its own accreditation as a national honor society.

During the FEMA Higher Education Conference in 2015, the participants adopted the FEMA Focus Group’s recommendations as a way forward, emphasizing outcomes rather than only inputs. All of the focus group survey results, documents and recommendations are on the FEMA Higher Education web page.

Daryl Spiewak, the council’s Director of Standards, is updating the guidelines to include those recommended by the focus group and approved by the conference participants, aiming for a rapid resumption of assessments, when requested by institutions of higher education, starting with those on the waiting list.

### Conclusion

Therefore, the FEMA Focus Group, the institutions of higher education offering these degrees, the Foundation Board, and the Council Board, in partnership with the FEMA Higher Education Program, have accomplished the initial goal of enhancing the basic foundation needed to build this exciting profession. The students, faculty members, and administration officials are striving mightily for enhanced educational opportunities and excellence in professional development. This collaboration has set a new benchmark for professional thought leadership. ▲

### Criticality of Standards for Disaster Search and Rescue Capabilities

[continued from page 20](#)

defined set of processes for US&R resources to seek recognition through the EMAP Certification Program. The program provides recognition for hard work and dedication to the profession; having met established and accepted national criteria; and completing a self-assessment and independent peer assessment resulting in certification.

Administrative criteria established through the *Urban Search and Rescue Standard* and assessment processes established for task force

teams provides the consistency necessary for independent certification. Certification and integration into mutual aid systems such as EMAC establish a common goal—deployment of the correct resource in the shortest time possible, to bring capabilities to the disaster scene.

This certification now can be cataloged in an organization like EMAC, providing a clearinghouse of validated and certified resources capable of providing resources to state and local governments in times of crisis. With a catalog of nationally EMAP-certified US&R resources, communities will be able to ensure that resources coming to bear during a disaster will be capable of

assisting in the response operations and helping to locating and caring for survivors.

### Conclusion

Certification of US&R resources not only provides recognition as a final outcome, but also has established a national system for recognition and capability that is required not only during disaster, but also on a daily basis in our communities. ▲

