

Written testimony of

Emily Bentley

**Presented to the Little Hoover Commission
February 23, 2006**

Sacramento, California

Members of the commission and guests, thank you for the invitation to offer my insights on building strength and accountability in emergency management and preparedness. I applaud your work in examining how to improve California's emergency management, homeland security, and preparedness activities.

My work with the national assessment and accreditation program for state and local government emergency management offers constant reminders that the key function and responsibility of state government is protecting the safety of its residents. This responsibility includes providing a system to prepare for, mitigate against, respond to, and facilitate recovery from disasters caused by the hazards that may impact the state's residents. As noted by this body and by many of your panelists, California faces numerous potential hazards, both natural and human-caused. California's large and diverse population, then, has significant need for a sophisticated and robust system to help them prepare for and survive disasters.

For state and local governments, there is a body of standards that set out the components of a viable emergency management program. These standards are provided by the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP), an independent non-profit organization created by local, state and federal emergency management practitioners. It is important to note that EMAP views the "emergency management program" as the jurisdiction's entire system for disaster preparedness, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery rather than one agency or department. The standards and assessment process provide consistent criteria and a methodology for measuring improvement in state emergency management and preparedness. California is one of 47 U.S. states and territories that have completed an assessment using the EMAP standards.

EMAP assessment and accreditation are designed to be a continuous improvement process for a state or local government's emergency management system. Because the standards used in the process are scalable, they do not prescribe how a government structures its emergency management system -- how departments or agencies are organized or which is responsible for what functions -- or how a government is to address areas of non-compliance found in the assessment process. The appropriate strategies and steps for improvement remain the purview of the government that holds the responsibility for safety of its residents.

In that vein, EMAP standards offer a framework and measurement tool for a state's expectations of its emergency management activities. There are several key areas that many states, including California, can look at to strengthen their emergency management systems:

- Effective disaster preparedness and emergency management, resulting in better outcomes during a disaster, require multi-agency, multi-disciplinary, and often, multi-jurisdictional planning and coordination. Institutionalization of this holistic approach is key to successful disaster outcomes and to attaining compliance with EMAP standards. A key to this is an active advisory body with a broad range of department, private sector, and other stakeholders to provide input to the program's activities.
- Conduct of a comprehensive and integrated hazard identification, risk assessment, and impact analysis forms the basis of other emergency management activities. This includes identification of hazards and the populations, property, and infrastructure that are vulnerable to each hazard. This also includes, in preparation for planning and public education activities and resource needs assessment, examination of the potential impacts of each hazard on resident and responder safety, continuity of operations capabilities, and public trust, for example.
- EMAP standards require examination of resource needs expected for each hazard before a disaster occurs. In other words, a state should ask itself, "what tasks or activities will we need to undertake to respond to this hazard/disaster?" and then, "what resources (including personnel and expertise) will we need to access to be able to accomplish those activities?". Analysis and prioritization of resource shortfalls and identification of sources to address can then follow.

- Planning is a dynamic, ongoing process involving many stakeholders rather than creation of a static document that sits on a shelf. Several planning areas have been identified as needing attention throughout the nation, including strategic planning, continuity of operations planning, and recovery planning, in particular. Related to planning is the need for procedures to implement operational plans and to provide for continuity of response operations, including alternate operating capabilities.

- Emergency management programs are called to coordinate resources, including equipment, supplies, and personnel from a wide range of sources -- and to account for them -- during a disaster. This requires a logistics framework that can be used in a routine emergency as well as scaled up to deal with catastrophic disaster response.

- Even with plans, procedures, personnel, resources, and communications in place, they must be tested. Training provides the tools personnel need to fulfill their responsibilities, including elected officials. Exercises and a follow-up process to ensure that deficiencies identified are addressed check the workability of the system's moving parts and must feed back into plans, procedures, and training. Again, EMAP calls for these activities to be coordinated across departments and disciplines and to include all those who have a role in a disaster.

- An area that requires additional focus is that of engaging the public in disaster planning and preparedness. As Hurricane Katrina highlighted, outreach to residents of a vulnerable area can present challenges but cannot be ignored both before and during a disaster. The first time residents hear about steps they should take cannot be at the time they are faced with high-stakes decisions impacting family and property. Additionally, government must take steps to determine if its plans and procedures work for the public they purport to serve.

Keeping all of these activities coordinated and moving in complementary directions does not happen without vision, high expectations and assessment of progress, and investment.

Involvement in and support of state disaster preparedness and emergency management efforts is crucial -- from executive-level support through policy and operational-level personnel, to

the private sector and individual residents. If core emergency management activities, such as workable plans and procedures, communications and warning systems, training and exercising, and delivery of effective disaster public education, are ignored on a day-to-day basis, they cannot be expected to be functional when a disaster occurs.

If that is understood, it might be surprising to note that dedicated funding to promote tourism is more common in the U.S. than is a similar arrangement to prepare for and protect residents in disaster. Only one state, Florida -- another hazard- and population-dense state -- has such a trust fund. It is based on a per insurance policy surcharge¹ approved by the Florida Legislature after Hurricane Andrew taught decision makers, the public, and the insurance industry tough lessons about the impact of disasters and the need for robust local and state preparedness and response capabilities. While state and local support for tourism, as well as a multitude of important state services and infrastructure, are important, it seems that the state's system that protects those investments during disaster is not given requisite attention.

Many state legislatures provide disaster response and recovery funds as needed once a disaster occurs. However, based on assessments done in the majority of states and territories, the uncertainty of state and federal funding streams can make it difficult to approach emergency management comprehensively and strategically. A strategic plan should be about more than how to spend federal program dollars. Whatever the source of the funds, if a state is dedicated to providing a system that serves its residents in times of disaster -- and in preparing them for their role ahead of time -- it must recognize the importance of consistent and responsive funding for emergency management activities.

Strong state emergency management and homeland security first require an acknowledgement of the responsibility entrusted to the government for the public's safety. To fulfill that trust requires appropriate investment, accountability, and coordinated multi-disciplinary input coupled with assessment of progress against credible benchmarks.

¹ Florida Statutes Title XVII, ch. 252.372.