



State of California

LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION

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Commission Declares State Unprepared for Catastrophe

The Little Hoover Commission on Thursday urged California's elected officials to develop a comprehensive strategy for responding to an emergency of catastrophic proportions. The Commission's review of emergency preparedness found that the State's emergency preparedness system would be overwhelmed during a catastrophic event. Yet the State has not put in place the plans and strategies or designed and deployed the tools needed to respond to a large-scale catastrophe.

Much like the Gulf Coast prior to Hurricane Katrina, the risks of catastrophic events in California are well-known but largely ignored. Damages from a major seismic event in either the Bay Area or Los Angeles could exceed the entire \$100 billion budget of the State of California. Seismic safety officials report that hundreds of schools, hospitals, apartments and office buildings are at risk of collapse or failure in a large earthquake. A terrorist attack on one of California's major ports could halt trade on the Pacific Rim and undermine California's economic engine. Massive levee failures could inundate the Central Valley and choke off the water supply that sustains the residents and economy of Southern California. And every Californian is at risk of an infectious outbreak that could quickly outpace the state's capacity for treatment and response.

But prevention and mitigation efforts are lacking, California's response plans are inadequate, and the State has no recovery plan to guide rebuilding.

"Without immediate action by the State of California, millions of Californians are at risk in a catastrophic disaster," said Michael E. Alpert, chairman of the Little Hoover Commission.

The Commission affirmed that California may have the most advanced emergency response system in the nation, but the State's preparedness needs have changed dramatically since that system was developed.

“California need not live through its own Katrina to get ready. With the centennial of the 1906 earthquake, experts have reminded us of our vulnerabilities and the consequences of failed leadership and inadequate preparedness,” Alpert said.

The Commission’s report outlines essential steps relating to leadership and planning for catastrophes, including the involvement of the private sector and the public. Specifically, the Commission recommended that the governor and the Legislature pursue the following reforms:

- Identify a clear chain of command for catastrophic response, under the direction of the governor.
- Fortify and restructure the California Emergency Council to advise the governor and Legislature on preparedness needs and oversee preparedness efforts.
- Commission an independent gap analysis to identify deficiencies and develop a strategic plan to guide reforms.
- Consolidate the Office of Emergency Services and the Office of Homeland Security into a cabinet-level Governor’s Office of Emergency Services and Homeland Security, led by an experienced leader appointed by the governor.
- Conduct executive-level training and exercises to ensure the governor, legislative leaders, constitutional officers and cabinet officials are well-versed and trained in their responsibilities during a catastrophic event.
- Develop performance measures and benchmarks for preparedness to ensure continuous improvement and accountability.

The Little Hoover Commission is a bipartisan and independent state agency charged with recommending ways to increase the performance of state programs. The Commission’s recommendations are sent to the governor and the Legislature for their consideration.

The report, *Safeguarding the Golden State: Preparing for Catastrophic Events*, is available on the Commission’s Web site: www.lhc.ca.gov/lhc.html.