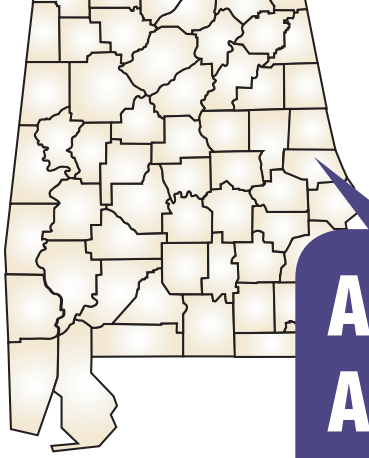


Q How does the local road and bridge infrastructure affect the work of an emergency manager?



A Anyone involved in emergency planning and coordination will agree that the top two elements of emergency response are communication and transportation. These two elements provide the framework upon which all other emergency planning and response is dependent. It is essential that we maintain the ability to provide emergency services to our people, and our residents must be able to rely on a solid transportation infrastructure for evacuation when necessary.

Q How would you describe the duties of a county emergency management agency (EMA)? And how does the county EMA relate to the work of emergency responders such as police, fire and ambulances?

A Emergency managers look at the big picture. Whether the jurisdiction is the entire nation (FEMA), the state (AEMA) or a county (local EMA), the focus is not on one particular discipline or perspective, but rather on how the vast network of resources available can be quickly brought to bear in meeting the needs of our citizens. What training do we need? What are our resource shortfalls and what resources might be available from outside our jurisdiction? EMA's job is to be the coordination point or hub. Your EMA manages the resources and information that are essential to

A voice from Alabama's 67 counties...

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a multi-level response, connecting people in need with people who have resources and knowledge to assist in a range of situations, from natural disasters to hazardous materials spills and other man-caused emergencies involving mass casualty or mass fatality. Any time a community experiences an emergency that requires resources beyond normal day-to-day elements, EMA may be called upon for consequence management and resource support.

Your local EMA is communications hub for the entire county. They are responsible for monitoring threatening situations and passing information on to those who need it, including the public. Notification and warning is a major part of what they do for elected officials, first responders and the community.

Q From the viewpoint of emergency management, why do Alabamians need a good road and bridge network?

A Whenever possible, prevention of an emergency is the key. A small fender bender due to an improperly maintained

road can lead to a much larger accident, perhaps escalating up to a large hazardous materials incident requiring evacuations. Accidents aren't only dangerous to those who are involved; they often lead to additional, related accidents and dangers that can be even more devastating.

Alabama has a multitude of highly trained, professional individuals representing emergency services (fire, law enforcement, EMS, and public works) who are prepared to assist our citizens in times of need. Reliable transportation routes are essential to emergency evacuation measures, the provision of emergency resources and medical care when our population is threatened. These services must be able to reach those threatened citizens safely and reliably via our roads and bridges.

Q If emergency responders are delayed, what are the possible consequences?

A Paramedics, ambulance services and hospitals, from the largest metro hospital to the smallest community hospital, understand that getting a patient

to the hospital within the “golden hour” is essential. Survival rates for severely injured or ill people decrease significantly after an hour has passed. In addition, life and property are at great risk when essential fire and law enforcement services are delayed. Time is always of the essence. If a fire truck must take a detour, the cost we pay in lives and property affects the whole community, not just the family whose home is lost. The same is true for law enforcement response.

Q There are about a thousand bridges in Alabama with posted weight restrictions low enough to interfere with school buses. Does that also affect the ability of emergency responders to reach people quickly?

A If these bridges are restricted for a school bus, by the same token, they are also restricted for fire trucks and some ambulances.

Q Some bridges are posted with weight limits as low as 3 tons – which is about the weight of a Chevrolet Suburban without driver, passengers or cargo. Even a smaller emergency vehicle such as an ambulance is well-stocked with equipment and supplies. What sort of impact does this have?

A Well, of course the first question that comes to mind is how do responders cross that bridge with a 55,000 pound fire engine? The answer is, they don't. The same is true for ambulances and law enforcement vehicles. Responders' only option would be on foot, leaving their valuable equipment behind. Is this what we are willing to accept in these modern times? The answer is a resounding “No!”

Q In an emergency, do dispatchers have responsibility for advising responders about traffic jams or bridges with posted weight limits?

A If the 911 dispatcher is aware of an immediate issue that impacts the response, of course they will relay this to the responder. Almost every fire department in Alabama has a bridge or multiple bridges with design or weight limits that may impede response. As professionals, firefighters and paramedics learn about the hazards in their jurisdiction and the best travel route to use to reach the area and what vehicles they can use to facilitate the response.

Q It sounds like reducing traffic accidents – and the related injuries and fatalities

– is only the beginning of the public safety benefits when a community is served by good infrastructure, is that right?

A It is essential that we maintain and build upon our transportation infrastructure in so many ways. There is no way to detail, in this short article, all of the impacts possible. They range from everyday medical emergencies, fires, and law enforcement emergencies all the way to the large-scale disaster.

There is one common thread that impacts our ability to respond in each case, we must be able to reach our citizens to intervene. The alternative is not acceptable. The safety of our citizens, our friends, our families as well as the safety of our public servants in performance of their duties depends upon it. All Alabamians deserve a reliable and safe transportation network. Our lives – your life and your family's – depend on it. ■

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**BACK TO THE
STONE AGE**

