



# Disaster Basics for Faith Communities

**Definition of a Disaster:** Event that results in significant harm to lives and/or property, as well as disruption to normal patterns of living.

**The Roles of Religious Leaders in Disasters:** Polls show that during times of crisis, a majority of Americans – nearly 60% – say they turn to a religious leader for comfort, guidance, and wisdom.

**Emergency Management** refers to the organization, management, and coordination of resources dealing with all aspects of disasters. Each level of government has designated Emergency Management entities.

## Disaster Lifecycle



### Tip: Know All Your Hazards!

The preparations you make in general can be applied to any disaster. There are certain hazards, however, that will require special actions. Learn more about the hazards that face NYC by going to [www.nyc.gov/oem/hazards](http://www.nyc.gov/oem/hazards).

**After a disaster, the needs of your congregants will grow dramatically. Some who have neglected their spiritual lives will return to their faith, while others will seek meaning for the first time. Boundaries of separate faith traditions will be blurred as the whole community seeks not only solace, but also concrete services. As a religious leader, responding to these complex issues in a truly meaningful and helpful way requires knowledge. This tip sheet presents the basic concepts and terms, as well as the structure of the disaster lifecycle.**

## Disaster Lifecycle

Emergency Management is best viewed as a cycle of phases. Although activities in each phase often occur simultaneously, each phase informs the next. The phases are:

- **Mitigation** – Reducing or eliminating the future effects of disaster.
- **Preparedness** – Establishing authorities and responsibilities for emergency actions, and ensuring necessary resources are available and coordinated to respond effectively.
- **Response** – Saving lives, protecting property, and providing for public welfare during the period immediately before, during, and following a disaster.
- **Recovery** – Helping communities heal and return to a state that is similar to, or even improved from, pre-disaster conditions. Typically divided into short-term and long-term recovery. Recovery generally implies a return to economic, emotional, and spiritual self-reliance of individuals or families.

## A Community Effort

Emergency Managers team up with people in all parts of the community, including:

- Community and religious leaders
- Government agencies
- Nonprofits with disaster-specific missions
- Businesses
- Social service, community-based, and faith-based organizations
- Individuals

Many religious leaders could have roles in all or most of the partner sectors listed above. In addition, interfaith networks take on a vast majority of the long-term, individual recovery coordination.

## Disaster Declarations

There are 3 main levels of disaster declaration, evacuation orders, or states of emergency, coinciding with city, state, and federal jurisdictions. They are Mayoral, Gubernatorial, and Presidential.

- **Mayoral** – The Mayor can declare a disaster evacuation or state-of-emergency for the city, and order the New York Police Department (NYPD), the Fire Department of New York (FDNY), and the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) into action.
- **Gubernatorial** – The Governor can declare a disaster evacuation or state-of-emergency at the state level, and can activate the State Emergency Management Office (SEMO) as well as the State National Guard into action.
- **Presidential** – The President can determine and declare a federal disaster evacuation or state-of-emergency and can activate the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as well as mobilize any National Guard unit in any state or the US Military.

The majority of incidents (fires, localized flooding, isolated power outages) are handled with local resources. The larger the incident, the more resources required from state, regional, and national levels. In order to access state and national resources during a disaster, local governments and non-profits must ask for assistance. Similarly, **each religious organization has its own protocols for requesting assistance.**

Continued on reverse

**Emergency Alerts:** Here are a few NYC agencies and organizations that allow the public to sign up for free emergency information alerts via internet.

NYDIS' NYDISNET Alert

([www.nydis.org](http://www.nydis.org))

NYC OEM's Email Alert

([www.nyc.gov/oem](http://www.nyc.gov/oem))

DOHMH's Health Alert Network

([www.nyc.gov/doh](http://www.nyc.gov/doh))

A great way to learn about disaster responders and roles is by taking FEMA Independent study course. Check out:

[www.training.fema.gov](http://www.training.fema.gov).



**Emergency Operations Center (EOC):** Established by Emergency Management officials during large-scale disaster operations, an EOC is a central clearinghouse for information and resource-sharing, and coordination. All government and private agencies with a major role are present.



## Important Disaster Partners for NYC Religious Communities

Many of the entities below can provide training opportunities, guidance, and resources for your planning and response efforts. It is essential to establish communication links with these entities during disasters.

**New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS)** provides mitigation education and preparedness training to clergy, religious leaders, houses of worship, and faith-based agencies. During major emergencies, NYDIS works with the NYC Office of Emergency Management to serve as a link to its member religious communities. Visit [www.nydis.org](http://www.nydis.org) or call 212.669.6100.

**American Red Cross in Greater NY (ARC-GNY)** – Partnering with your local chapter will allow you to support your community during incidents that affect your neighborhood. Visit [www.nyredcross.org](http://www.nyredcross.org) or call 1.877.REDCROSS.

**Church World Service** is the relief, development, and refugee assistance ministry of 35 Anglican, Orthodox, and Protestant denominations in the United States. Within the United States, Church World Service assists communities in responding to disasters, resettles refugees, promotes fair national and international policies, provides educational resources, and offers networking opportunities. Visit [www.churchworldservice.org](http://www.churchworldservice.org) or call 212.870.2061.

**Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)** – Currently under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), FEMA organizes by region: New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands make up FEMA Region II. When FEMA is activated by the President in a disaster declaration, its operations are based on the National Response Plan (NRP). Visit [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) or call 1.800.621.FEMA (3362).

**FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaison (VAL)** – FEMA assigns a VAL to each of the ten FEMA regional offices. Before, during, and after disasters, FEMA VALs foster cooperation between nonprofit disaster partners and government, and also work closely with VOADS.

**Human Services Council of NYC (HSC)** – Through HSC, staff from NYDIS and our member agencies are trained as Coordinated Assistant Network (CAN) intake specialists. This national web-based program for disaster victim assistance is used at a Disaster Assistance Service Center (DASC) or Family Assistance Centers (FAC). The HSC emergency preparedness committee coordinates intake and case management during disasters. Visit [www.humanservicescouncil.org](http://www.humanservicescouncil.org) or call 212.836.1230.

**NYC Office of Emergency Management (NYC OEM)** – In NYC, emergency management on the local level is coordinated by The New York City Office of Emergency Management (NYC OEM). OEM Headquarters are home to the city's Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Activated during large scale emergencies the EOC is a central location for city, state and federal agencies, and relevant entities to coordinate response efforts. Visit [www.nyc.gov/oem](http://www.nyc.gov/oem) or call 311. You can also interface with NYC OEM through NYDIS ([www.nydis.org](http://www.nydis.org)).

**NYC Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NYCVOAD)** – NYCVOAD is a chapter of a national organization with state and local affiliates. NYCVOAD provides effective responses and less duplication in services through coordination and planning before disasters occur. NYCVOAD engages members in various planning committees. The National website is [www.nvoad.org](http://www.nvoad.org) and has excellent resources. For more information about NYCVOAD, contact its Board President Peter Gudaitis at 212.669.6100.

**State Emergency Management Office (SEMO)** – Every state has an emergency management agency. In New York, it is the New York State Emergency Management Office (NYSEMO). Visit [www.semo.state.ny.us](http://www.semo.state.ny.us) or call 518.292.2200.

**Your local, regional, and national religious organizations** – Find out which actions your religious community expects you to take during disasters. Many have disaster programs in which you can participate, and some may offer resources to your house of worship and others in affected areas. Visit [www.nvoad.org](http://www.nvoad.org). The **NYDIS Disaster Tip Sheet “Faith-Based Disaster Service Organizations”** provides links to major faith-based and secular disaster human services programs.

**Your local community** – Building relationships with other religious leaders, social service organizations, businesses, and public safety personnel in your neighborhood will help you accomplish your everyday mission and provide a solid base for serving your community during disasters. A good start is connecting with your police precinct council, which you can find by going to [www.nyc.gov/nypd](http://www.nyc.gov/nypd) and connecting with your community board by visiting [www.nyc.gov/cau](http://www.nyc.gov/cau).

## NEW YORK DISASTER INTERFAITH SERVICES

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