

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION  
OF STATE HIGHWAY AND  
TRANSPORTATION OFFICIALS

**AASHTO**



# Managing Catastrophic Transportation Emergencies: A Guide for Transportation Executives

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# Foreword

Congratulations on being appointed as the CEO of your organization. This can be one of the most powerful and exciting opportunities in your career. Your time in public service will be critical to those you serve, even though it may often go unseen.

At some point during your tenure, you will be called upon to deal with a major emergency or disaster. One need only watch the evening news to become aware of the potential for loss of life and devastation that can occur as the result of manmade or environmental incidents and disasters such as floods, storms, fires, earthquakes, terror events, and others. When it does happen, the day-to-day methods that you use in your operation will be insufficient to handle the emergency.

To help you navigate and prepare for the day you will be faced with these events, we prepared this guide to assist you in getting a quick understanding of what tools and people you will have at your disposal. The guide acquaints you with not only the kinds of events you will face but also the process of preparing your agency to be ready to respond to them.

Most importantly, it brings you advice from your peers, current and former, who have faced similar situations. More than ten were interviewed and willingly shared thoughts they felt would help you deal with the event successfully.

We think spending a few minutes reviewing this short guide will help you shape your thinking and recognize very quickly where you will want to place effort given the many demands on your time.

Sincerely,



John Cox  
Director  
Wyoming Department of Transportation



Brian Ness  
Director  
Idaho Transportation Department  
Chair, AASHTO Special Committee on  
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Management



## To the Executive

During your tenure as the Chief Executive of a state DOT, transit agency, or other transportation organization, you will likely be called upon repeatedly to manage your agency's response to and recovery from a major emergency, event, or disaster. The emergency may consist of a short-duration, simple, static, and singular incident; or it may be prolonged, complex, and dynamic, impacting multiple fronts and requiring deployment of extensive assets and resources.

The need for emergency-incident response or recovery may be due to inclement weather, in the aftermath of a serious highway accident or train derailment, or caused by a significant security threat or breach. Additionally, the same planning required for incident response is needed to manage a planned special event effectively, such as an annual holiday celebration and parade, a PGA golf tournament, or a political convention.

Establishing the capability to manage and direct "All-Hazards" transportation emergency response and recovery effectively, irrespective of the incident type, demands preplanning, resourcing, and staging of assets and coordination internally and with other affected external agencies, companies, groups, and personnel. When an emergency occurs, routine day-to-day operations give way to a focused, practiced, and resilient crisis management approach that requires professional skills throughout the breadth and depth of the organization.

As a new CEO, you may initially be unfamiliar with your agency's critical role and capabilities in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from an emergency situation. This Guide was developed to assist you in the transition and is based on the thoughts and advice of transportation leaders who have been in similar positions. Former and current transportation executives were interviewed to gain practical understanding of CEO roles and actions during emergency events. Insights were also obtained from a review of relevant literature and information about actual emergency events that impacted transportation. Quotes from the interviews are incorporated into the Guide with a summary of the interviews found in Appendix A.

The Guide is organized first to provide basic information about the types of emergency incidents and events that impact transportation agencies. Next, managing these events is discussed, along with an overview of the types of questions and issues that should be considered to assist the agency in preparing for "All-Hazards" emergency incidents. The Guide also provides additional information about where to locate more detailed reference materials pertaining to transportation agency emergency management.

*Managing Catastrophic Transportation Emergencies: A Guide for Transportation Executives* is a reference guide specifically designed for use by newly appointed executive-level leaders of transportation organizations. It has been written to provide executive decisionmakers with important leadership-level information about emergency management major-event response and recovery.

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