

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) Explained

Key Terms and Acronyms:

NEMA – The National Emergency Management Agency

Emergency Support Function (ESF) - Emergency Support Functions are groupings of governmental and some non-governmental agencies that provide support, resources, and services that are needed to save lives, protect property and the environment, restore essential services and critical infrastructure, and help victims and communities return to normal immediately following national disasters. Each ESF has a lead agency and support agencies so that the ESF can make a collaborative effort in disaster response.

Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) - An EOC is a facility that brings together highly trained experts to coordinate resources, information and communication to respond to disasters and emergencies. In a disaster, an EOC will activate on the impacted island if possible.

National Emergency Operating Centre (NEOC) – an NEOC is essentially the same as an EOC with the added responsibility of focusing on the entire country as opposed to a single island. The EOCs on other islands report into the NEOC because the NEOC is the central hub for all coordination of all disaster preparedness, management and response efforts for the entire country.

The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) - CDEMA is a regional inter-governmental agency for disaster management in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Pacific Disaster Centre (PDC) - PDC is an applied research centre managed by the University of Hawaii that provides reliable information, ground-breaking research, applied scientific practices, and its powerful disaster risk intelligence platform, to empower disaster management decision makers and the public.

Agency – Any Governmental or Non-Governmental Ministry, Department, Office or Organization

What is NEMA?

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) is a disaster management agency that coordinates disaster preparedness, response and the first phase of disaster recovery.

What does NEMA do Outside of Hurricane Season?

Outside of the hurricane season, NEMA conducts evaluations of difficulties encountered during disaster response and works with the various agencies to better manage those difficulties in the future. NEMA also coordinates with the other agencies to help them develop response plans and discuss how each agency is intended to collaborate with NEMA and the support agencies within each Emergency Support Function (ESF). NEMA also focuses on comprehensive disaster management in the event that any natural or man-made disaster happens. In addition to the previously mentioned tasks, NEMA also conducts, participates in and completes the following tasks to ensure the highest state readiness for hurricane season:

- Training and exercises
- Verifying and validating equipment lists and warehouse inventories,
- Evaluate and update plans (hurricane and non-hurricane related plans)
- Public education
- Coordinate with regional partners on training and plans, mitigation efforts

It is important to note that NEMA focuses on comprehensive disaster management. This means that NEMA prepares for, manages and responds to all national disasters including but not limited to: hurricanes, tropical storms, pandemics, tsunamis and any man-made disasters. Therefore, NEMA plans and prepares for any natural and man-made disasters annually by reviewing existing plans, creating new plans, participating in trainings, managing warehouse inventory and many other tasks throughout the year.

When does NEMA get Involved in an Emergency?

NEMA strictly responds to disasters. An emergency becomes classified as a disaster when the community or island impacted by the emergency is unable to effectively respond and recover from the emergency. Examples of disasters include: Pandemics, hurricanes, floods, tsunamis and tornadoes.

What does NEMA do when there is a Hurricane?

In the event of a hurricane, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) initiates a five (5) phase plan to facilitate immediate disaster response and recovery.

Phase 1:

The Bahamas Meteorological Department (MET Office) contacts The Director of NEMA to issue a Hurricane Alert. At this time, the Director, as the National Disaster Coordinator issues the order to partially activate the National Emergency Operating Centre (NEOC) and advises the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction, the Secretary to the Cabinet and the Prime Minister.

Phase 2:

During this phase, the Prime Minister is advised on the threat level of the approaching hurricane and possibility of evacuations and addresses the public. Once a Hurricane alert is given, the public should begin to engage in the following activities:

1. put a plan in place and ensure that everyone in your household is aware of it and knows what the plan is
2. Prepare your home and office with supplies well in advance
3. Practice your plan taking note of any glitches so that you can make adjustments to your plan as necessary.

Phase 3:

During this phase, the MET Office advises the Director on the imminence of the hurricane and the NEOC is fully activated, the Prime Minister is once again appraised of the situation, the media is informed, the public is advised and the regional branch of disaster management and response, The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) followed by The Pacific Disaster Centre (PDC) which is the International branch of disaster management are then advised on the situation.

Phase 4:

During this phase, disaster response has already been in play and all lifesaving efforts have been made. The MET Office issues the “All Clear” and the media as well as the Prime Minister are advised.

Phase 5:

During the final phase of NEMA’s disaster response and recovery mandate, the country enters phase two of the Recovery Phase, which focuses on long-term projects and rebuilding efforts. The NEOC is then deactivated and regional and international partners are informed. Finally, once the Prime Minister has declared the impacted area a Disaster Zone, the Disaster Reconstruction Authority is engaged.

What does it mean to activate the NEOC?

Activating the NEOC means that all relevant Emergency Support Functions (ESF) assemble at NEMA in two person teams to begin the process of engaging in their specialties to initiate lifesaving efforts.