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Emergency Management

Washington's location and the variety of geography make it susceptible to several types of natural disasters, including fires, landslides, floods, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, that could severely affect the state's people, infrastructure and economy. In 2014, a landslide near Oso, Washington, killed 43 people. This landslide, one of the deadliest in U.S. history, required a large-scale response from emergency personnel and agencies. A review of the response efforts, conducted by the SR 530 Landslide Commission, identified many lessons and offered recommendations to further strengthen the emergency response system.

The Washington Military Department's Emergency Management Division (EMD) is responsible for minimizing the effects emergencies and disasters have on the state, but every level of government plays a part in preparing for and responding to disasters, from local fire districts to county executives. The Cascadia Rising Exercise in 2016 illustrated this point. This joint-response drill was designed to test the state's emergency response to a simulated 9.0 magnitude earthquake. Assessment teams evaluated governments at the local, tribal, state and federal levels on their ability to coordinate and respond cooperatively to a catastrophic disaster.

EMD reported that the exercise demonstrated Washington has more work to do if the state is to ensure it can respond to and recover from a disaster as quickly and effectively as possible. Other emergency management professionals have voiced similar concerns.

Preliminary scope and objectives

This audit is designed to follow up on two recommendations from the SR 530 Landslide Commission that focused on clarifying roles and responsibilities during disasters and on critical elements needed for identifying, requesting and managing resources. To determine the areas where EMD has made progress and what further improvements can be made, this audit plans to answer these questions:

1. Does EMD have guidelines and processes that clearly define roles and responsibilities for state and local emergency management personnel when responding to disasters?
2. What improvements can EMD make to request, track and mobilize resources more effectively during disasters?

Timing

We estimate audit results will be released in early 2019.

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