

Policy Agenda to Secure the People of America's Counties

Counties are the first responders to terrorist attacks, natural disasters and other major emergencies. County public health, law enforcement, fire, emergency medical, and other public safety personnel, are responsible for on-the-ground response and recovery action. Counties also own, operate and secure key aspects of the nation's infrastructure, such as airports, transit systems, water supplies, schools and hospitals. Finally, elected county officials and county emergency managers provide the essential regional planning and coordination function in preventing, preparing for and managing the response to emergency events.

County officials believe it is critically important that emergency preparedness plans be coordinated and rehearsed among local, state, and federal levels, as well as coordinated across the various federal agencies and state agencies with a role in emergency response. Similarly, counties have unique responsibilities for effectively coordinating the plans and response actions of their law enforcement, public safety, public health, and other departments that assist in response action.

With regard to the federal response in the event of a public health or other emergency, county officials request that the federal government quickly identify the controlling federal authority and chain of command at the scene, and that all federal agencies diligently follow the lead of the controlling federal authority. The controlling federal agency should serve – to counties, the public, and other parties participating in the response – as a single point of entry and source of information.

With regard to coordination among levels of government, the National Association of Counties has formally requested that Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge create an official State and Local Advisory Committee to the White House Office of Homeland Security. The committee, comprised of elected officials from state, county and city governments, would provide input and assistance to federal homeland security activities and facilitate coordination among levels of government.

Additionally, the 43-member NACo Homeland Security Task Force at its first meeting Oct. 26 recommended a number of policy actions to secure America's counties. These recommendations are outlined on the following pages. Many of them are intended assist President George W. Bush and the Congress as they make investments in local programs to improve homeland security. Already, counties across the country are raising and redirecting local funds to secure their communities, demonstrating commitment at the county level to this national goal.

Public Health

1. Fund the Public Health Threats and Emergencies Act

Congress should provide adequate funding for the Public Health Threats and Emergencies Act. An appropriation of a minimum of \$1.8 billion is needed to implement the law fully and effectively, with at least \$835 million dedicated to building and maintaining local and state public health preparedness and infrastructure.

2. Improve the Health Alert Network

The Centers for Disease Control-Public Health Practice Program, the CDC office that best understands local dynamics, should continue to coordinate and communicate with county health departments, including a focus on improving the Health Alert Network and on assistance with technological upgrades for county health departments.

3. Ensure an Adequate Supply of Vaccines and Antibiotics

The federal government should ensure an adequate supply of appropriate antibiotics, vaccines and other relevant medications and medical supplies, to be made available to counties and other local communities in a timely manner as part of the stockpiled push packages administered by the CDC.

4. Develop a National Policy to Prioritize Medical Treatment

The federal government should develop a national policy to prioritize, in the case of a public health emergency, who gets treated first under what circumstances when demand for treatment exceeds supply.

5. Train Health Personnel

Public and private sector health personnel should receive adequate training to manage public health emergencies, in cooperation with federal, state and local governments. While specific training relative to bio-terrorism is needed, general competency building in public health is also needed to assure that the workforce is fully prepared.

6. Ensure that Adequate Medical Surge Capacity Exists

The federal government, in cooperation with state and local governments, should ensure that the medical surge capacity needs associated with events of mass casualties can be met, particularly in communities that serve as regional medical centers.

Local Law Enforcement and Intelligence

7. Authorize a Local Anti-Terrorism Block Grant

Congress should enact a new local anti-terrorism block grant at a minimum of \$3 billion to comprehensively fund county and municipal law enforcement and public safety agencies and programs. Funding decisions under the block grant should be made countywide as an outgrowth of the existing "all hazards" emergency management planning process.

8. Include Counties in Anti-Terrorism Task Forces

The Justice Department should expand the composition of its newly-created law enforcement Anti-Terrorism Task Forces to specifically include elected representatives of county and other general purpose local governments. Security clearance should be provided to county officials for intelligence information commensurate with their responsibilities.

Infrastructure Security

9. Reimburse Counties for Airport Security Costs

Congress should enact an airline security bill immediately, to provide county-owned and operated airports with federal reimbursement for additional costs of security measures mandated by the federal government. In addition, the federal government should assist airports in financing security measures by allowing flexibility with the Airport Improvement Program, Passenger Facility Charges, and tax exempt bonds.

10. Assist Ports and Transit Systems in Financing Security Measures

The federal government and state governments should provide assistance to counties for securing ports, transit systems, commuter rail and freight rail systems.

11. Help Localities Secure Public Utilities and a Safe Water Supply

Congress should authorize funds for drinking water systems and other public utilities, large and small, to conduct physical vulnerability assessments and emergency planning. Additional research should be conducted into the threats to water and sewer systems and other public utilities and the development of methods and technologies to prevent and respond to attacks.

12. Include Security in Infrastructure Development

The federal government and state governments should evaluate threats and consider security as a criterion in the funding and development of new infrastructure, including physical infrastructure (such as transportation, schools, flood control and water systems) and cyber infrastructure. Security measures associated with the development of infrastructure should be eligible for federal funds.

13. Reimburse Counties for Securing Federal Facilities

The federal government should reimburse counties for the local public safety and law enforcement costs associated with requests to provide security to federal installations and federally-owned infrastructure within their jurisdictions.

Emergency Planning and Public Safety

14. Train County Officials to Prepare for and Respond to Acts of Terror

Federal, state and local governments should collaborate to train first responders to respond to acts of terror, utilizing and expanding upon existing training facilities and opportunities to their fullest extent. Curricula also should be established for the specific purpose of training elected county officials and other representatives of general purpose local governments. A standard, core set of competencies should be developed.

15. Assist Public Safety Communications Interoperability and Interference Issues

The federal government should assist counties in obtaining additional spectrum as soon as possible to address interoperability and dead zone problems created by congestion and interference with commercial services. In the event of a disaster or terrorist attack, all first responders should have access to a common set of frequencies that can be used to communicate between agencies. To make this effective, particularly if the federal government chooses to use the 700 MHz band and digital communications, financial assistance should be provided to ensure that counties can afford to use this new technology.

16. Establish a Public Communication Network

A communication network capable of delivering information in a timely manner between the federal government, state and local governments, and the general public should be established.

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