

Travers, Jr., *Superintendent, Maryland State Police*; Paul E. Welsh, *Public Affairs Consultant*.

The State Emergency Management and Civil Defense Agency's principal mission derives from the Federal Civil Defense Act of 1950 (Public Law 920, 81st Congress) as amended. The act outlines the intent of Congress to provide a civil defense system to protect life and property from attack and provide relief and assistance to people struck by disasters other than those caused by enemy attack.

Known as the Maryland Civil Defense Agency from 1950 to 1970, the Agency, in its earliest years, was primarily concerned with statewide nuclear attack preparedness and related missions (Chapter 563, Acts of 1949).

With the passage of the federal Disaster Relief Acts of 1969 (Public Law 91-79), 1970 (Public Law 91-606), and 1974 (Public Law 93-288), increased emphasis was placed on natural disaster preparedness under the direction of the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration (FDAA), Department of Housing and Urban Development. Changes in State law and the Agency name reflect this shift in focus: Maryland Civil Defense and Emergency Planning Agency (1970-74) and Maryland Civil Defense and Disaster Preparedness Agency (1975-80). The emphasis on non-nuclear attack preparedness was further enlarged by the creation of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in 1979. FEMA assumed responsibility for civil defense functions of the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency (DCPA), disaster relief functions of the FDAA, and emergency resources management functions of the FPA. At the same time FEMA absorbed the Federal Insurance Administration and the National Fire Prevention and Control Administration. By this consolidation, the Agency's responsibilities increased to include floodplain management, flood insurance initiatives, community preparedness programs for weather emergencies, earthquake hazard reduction, dam safety, emergency broadcast system, emergency warning, and terrorist incidents.

The 1970s also brought changes in the Agency's nuclear attack preparedness missions. In 1972 the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency was established in the U.S. Department of Defense. At this time, increased awareness of the U.S.S.R.'s impressive crisis evacuation capability contributed significantly to the development of the present Population Protection Program (PPP). This planning is adaptable to all natural disasters, peacetime emergencies, and nuclear attack. In-place shelter protection is to be used when time does not permit implementation of relocation.

The Three Mile Island Incident of 1979 resulted in additional federal emphasis on radiological emergency planning. During 1980 and 1981 the Agency expended considerable effort in the production of radiological emergency plans to cope with accidents at the Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant and the Peach Bottom Atomic Power Station. These plans were tested in 1981 and 1982. The State Radiological Plan is tested annually with a full-scale operational exercise.

Chapter 505, Acts of 1981, expanded the emergency powers of the Governor and changed the Agency's name to the State Emergency Management and Civil Defense Agency (MEMCDA). The law makes the Governor responsible for emergency management in the State. Now, the Governor has additional emergency powers to temporarily suspend State statutes, direct evacuations, control access, clear debris, and use private property when necessary. When the Governor declares a state of emergency, the Director of the State Emergency Management and Civil Defense Agency is responsible for coordinating the emergency activities of the offices of the State government and those of political subdivisions included in the declaration. The law also established the Emergency Management Advisory Council to advise the Governor on all matters pertaining to State emergency management and civil defense. The Council is appointed by the Governor and includes representatives from major State Departments, local government, and volunteer organizations, such as firefighters and rescue squads.

The Integrated Emergency Management System (IEMS) was initially implemented at all levels of government, statewide, in 1984. The System consists of three components: Hazard Analysis, Capability Assessment, and Multi-Year Development Planning. Its objective is to apply emergency preparedness and response resources to all hazards, and to take advantage of similarities that exist in planning and response function for peacetime and nuclear attack.

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