



EVACUATION & SHELTER-IN-PLACE

How jurisdictions decide who moves, who stays, and how everyone gets home — zones, transportation models, phases, and the plans behind the order.

Primary source: FEMA, Planning Considerations: Evacuation and Shelter-in-Place — Guidance for State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Partners (July 2019) · [fema.gov](https://www.fema.gov)

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Source: FEMA, Planning Considerations: Evacuation and Shelter-in-Place — Guidance for State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Partners, July 2019. Free download:

<https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/planning-considerations-evacuation-and-shelter-in-place.pdf>

Eight million people under evacuation orders — in one year

8M+

Americans affected by evacuation orders in 2017 alone — across floods, hurricanes, and wildfires.

180,000

Oroville Dam flooding, California — February

780,000+

Hurricane Harvey evacuations, Texas — August

6.8M

Hurricane Irma orders, Florida — a record — September

100,000+

California wildfire evacuations — October

Protective actions are now commonplace regardless of hazard — the challenge is tailoring them to a community's demographics, infrastructure, resources, and authorities.

Two protective actions, one goal

“Evacuation: organized, phased, and supervised withdrawal, dispersal, or removal of civilians from dangerous or potentially dangerous areas, and their reception and care in safe areas.”

“Shelter-in-place: the use of a structure to temporarily separate individuals from a hazard or threat.”

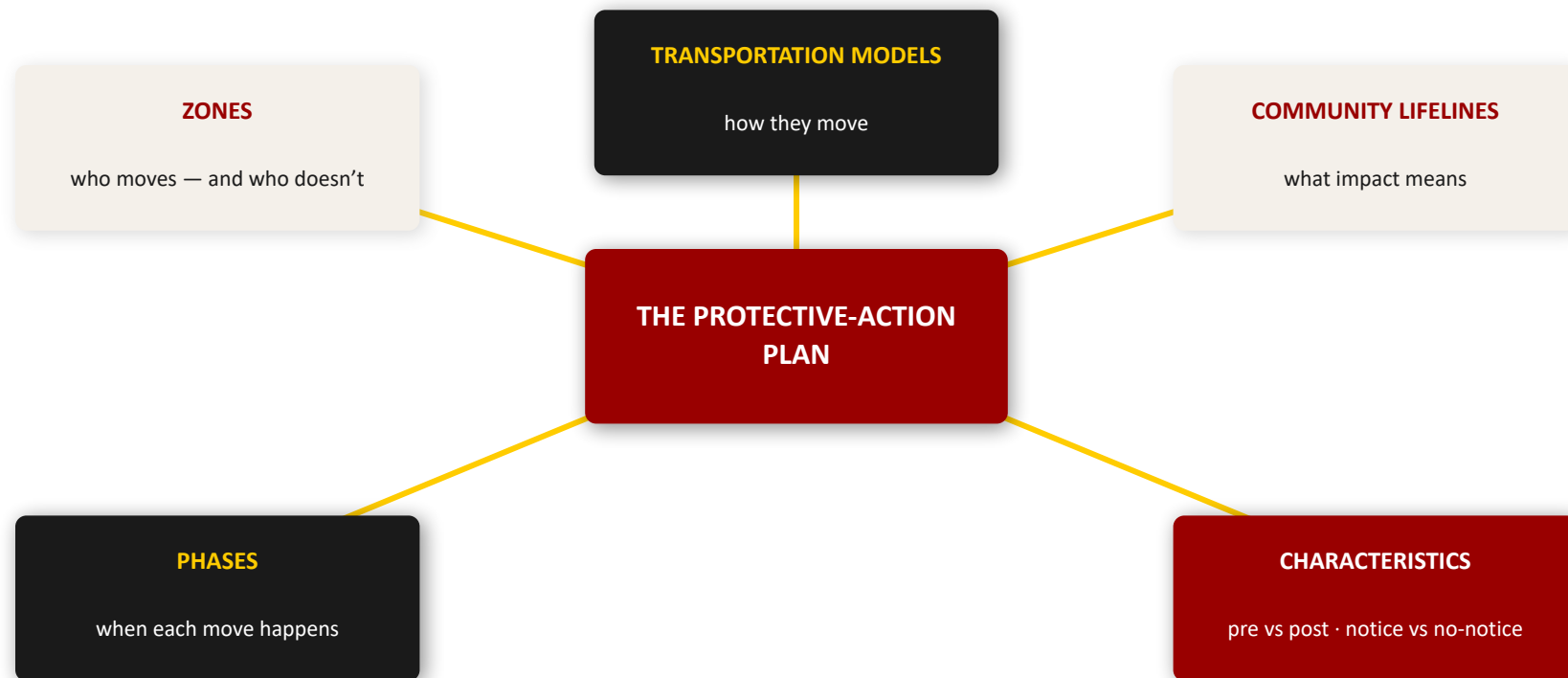
THE GOAL

Move as few people as needed the shortest distance to safety. Zone-based plans cut resource burdens, ease re-entry, and speed recovery.

THE SCOPE

Community-scale protective actions for state, local, tribal, and territorial partners. Builds on CPG 101; ships job aids and checklists to customize. Building-level occupant plans are out of scope.

Five concepts every plan is built on



The seven Community Lifelines — Safety & Security · Food, Water, Shelter · Health & Medical · Energy · Communications · Transportation · Hazardous Materials — frame how decision makers read impact; evacuation reports under Safety & Security.

Who owns what before the order drops

INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES

Know your zone and your routes from home, work, and school. Kit to self-sustain 72 hours to 14 days when sheltering in place. Set reunification points and a communications plan that survives a cell outage.

PRIVATE SECTOR

Safeguard employees: plan and execute workplace protective actions, keep a continuity-of-operations plan for disruption, and lend the jurisdiction what it lacks — buses, stores as arrival points, water, power, fuel.

GOVERNMENTS

Primary authority: issue orders, manage traffic, publish routes and zones, identify shelters, run “know your zone” campaigns, test warning systems, and monitor social media to correct rumors.

People heed orders from a trusted authority — a governor, a police chief — and from trusted community channels, more readily than unofficial word of mouth.

01

UNDERSTAND

Zones, models, phases — the grammar of protective action.

Zones: evacuate the block, not the county

WHY ZONES WIN

- ▶ Target orders to the most vulnerable zones — spare areas not under threat
- ▶ Cut resource burdens, ease re-entry, accelerate recovery
- ▶ Draw boundaries people recognize: neighborhoods, school and fire/police districts, ZIP codes, census blocks, USACE hurricane zones
- ▶ Map zones in GIS wherever possible
- ▶ Zones must read the same to responders, residents, and the media

IN PRACTICE — VIRGINIA “KNOW YOUR ZONE”

Coastal Virginia runs a tiered evacuation strategy of four zones, A through D — only the zones that must move, move.

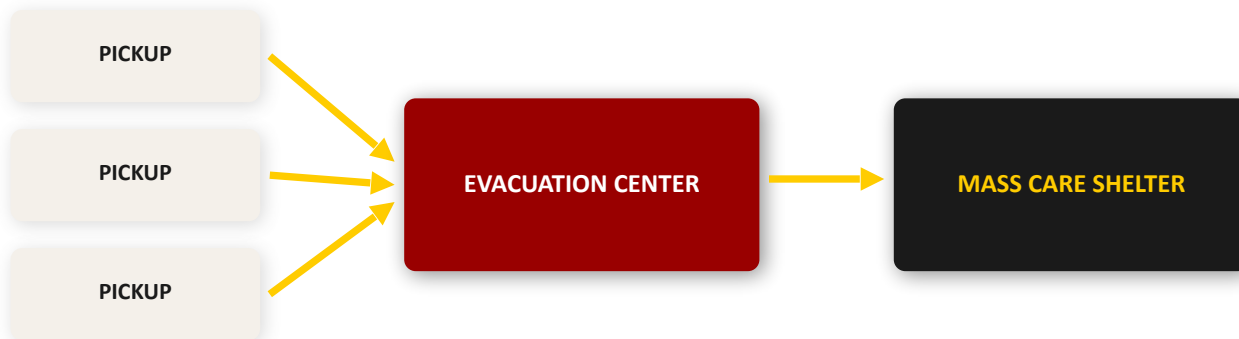
To teach residents their zone, VDEM built an address-lookup site and pushed it everywhere: media outreach, placards on gas pumps, utility-bill inserts, stickers on residential trash bins.

Six months in, nearly 23% of surveyed residents could correctly name their evacuation zone.

“The goal of an evacuation is to move as few people as needed the shortest distance to safety.”

Two ways to move a city

HUB AND SPOKE — TRIAGE FIRST



Short trips aggregate evacuees at the hub, where the jurisdiction triages needs — some only need a rental car, not a shelter. Maximizes routes; moves people out of danger immediately.

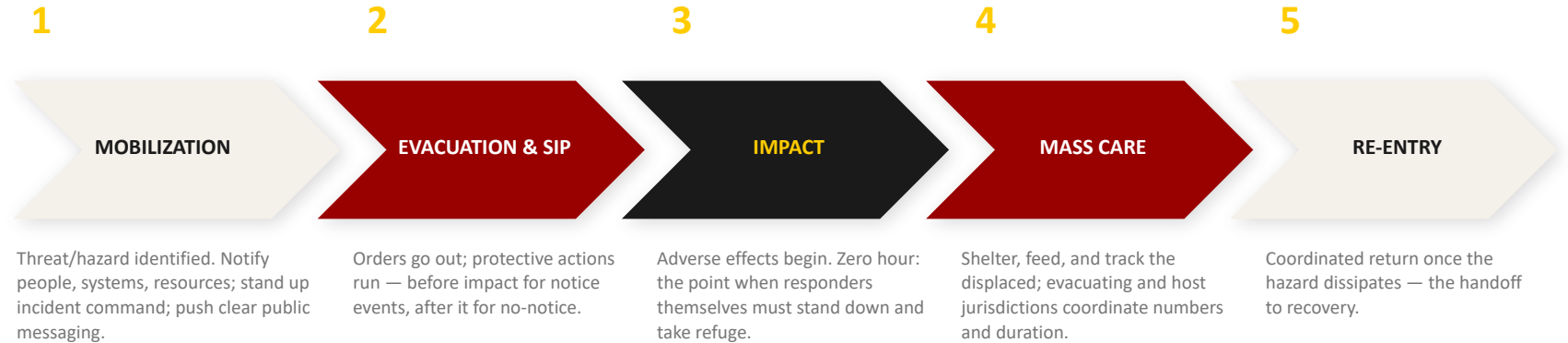
POINT-TO-POINT — SPEED FIRST



Fastest, most direct, least resource-intensive — but shelters fill quickly, and it fails when the host isn't known, as in wide, unpredictable no-notice events.

New Orleans marks seventeen 14-foot “evacuspot” statues as assembly points — five reserved for seniors — so residents without cars can reach the hub.

Five phases from first warning to homecoming



Phases can compress, overlap, or fire out of order — in a no-notice event, impact comes first and mobilization happens inside the response.

Timing the call: pre- vs post-incident

	EVACUATE	SHELTER-IN-PLACE
PRE-INCIDENT	PRE-INCIDENT EVACUATION Move the most vulnerable out before impact. Officials must balance costly, hazardous, or unnecessary evacuations against lives lost to an untimely one.	PRE-INCIDENT SHELTER-IN-PLACE Let less-impacted zones stay put — fewer negative impacts, and the roads stay clear for those in the most immediate danger.
POST-INCIDENT	POST-INCIDENT EVACUATION Only when staying is unsafe — a hazmat plume shifting with the wind. Competes for the same resources as life-saving response.	POST-INCIDENT SHELTER-IN-PLACE An ongoing active shooter or complex coordinated attack — protection in place while the threat is still moving.

Pre-incident shelter-in-place can still end in post-incident evacuation if the hazard arrives with little warning — plan both halves.

Five kinds of evacuees — plan for all of them

CHILDREN & UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

Gathered at schools, childcare, hospitals in a no-notice event; need specialized care and a reunification process.

SELF-EVACUEES

Have their own transport — car, boat, a neighbor's truck, on foot — and leave with minimal assistance.

CRITICAL TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

No access to transport; require assistance — including accessible transportation — to leave safely.

ANIMAL EVACUEES

Pets, service and assistance animals, livestock, zoo and research animals — all need evacuation support.

SPONTANEOUS EVACUEES

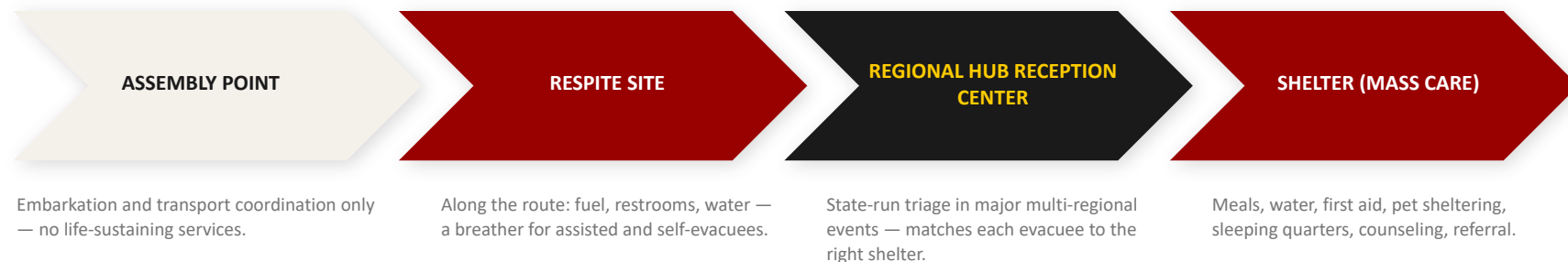
Leave on their own read of the threat, order or none — adding confusion and load to every route.

THE COUNTER-MOVE

Blunt spontaneous evacuation with pre-event education, clearly defined zones, and unambiguous orders with expected actions.

Pre-incident population data is incomplete — assess evacuees' health, language, and social-service needs as they arrive, and keep the picture current.

The road out runs through four kinds of sites



Pass-through communities sit between evacuating and host jurisdictions — they may be asked to stand up extra shelters. Plan with them, not around them.

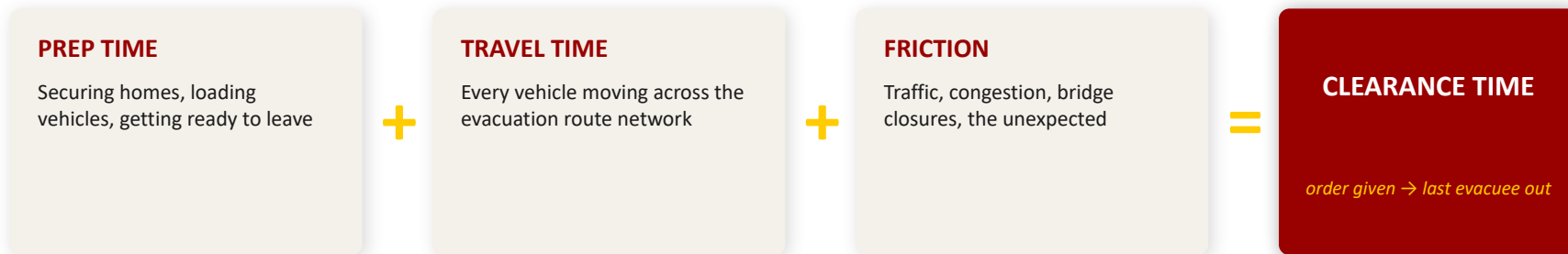
Welcome centers and information points at state borders orient self-evacuees: directions to shelter, restrooms, a charge, limited food and water.

02

WEIGH

Eighteen hard considerations decide whether the plan survives contact.

Clearance time: the number behind the order



Count everyone: individuals with access and functional needs, spontaneous evacuees, and pass-through evacuees from neighboring jurisdictions.

The clock stops when the last evacuee leaves the zone — or when the hazard arrives and everyone still inside must shelter in place.

Clearance-time analysis feeds the order's timing — issue it too late and the math forces people to ride it out.

Keep the routes moving — and fueled

CONTRAFLOW

Reverse inbound lanes to double outbound flow. State-coordinated, resource- and time-hungry — and an uncoordinated handoff at a border can stall the whole evacuation.

SHOULDERS

Paved, wide shoulders add outbound capacity while leaving the inbound lane open for emergency services heading in.

SIGNS & SIGNALS

Mobile message boards flag hazards, welcome centers, shelters, fuel exits, hospitals. Watch overlapping modes: drawbridges and rail crossings on the same route.

FUEL MANAGEMENT — FIVE MOVES

Route past pass-through towns with ample fuel businesses · supply secondary and tertiary routes too · coordinate extra private-sector deliveries · push station owners to install generators (no power, no pumps) · map and publicize alternative-fuel sites.

Fuel shortages ripple into traffic patterns and slow the whole operation — reserve a supply for responders and evacuation support.

The people mainstream plans miss

HOMELESS POPULATIONS

Mainstream media won't reach them — word of mouth rules, and rumors ride it. Put homeless service providers in the notification system; their outreach teams have the trust to persuade, and can drive people to pickup points. Staff shelters with trained specialists.

HOSPITALS & RESIDENTIAL MEDICAL

Transfer patients to partner facilities outside the impact zone, with meds and equipment to last through intake. Sheltering in place? Plan as if utilities are gone for 72 hours — power, potable water for dialysis, fuel for generators.

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Jails hold pre-trial and short-sentence inmates under local authority; prisons hold convicted felons under corrections departments. Evacuating either takes coordinated local, state, and federal law enforcement — planned in advance.

Every one of these populations appears in the guide's critical-considerations list — because every one has broken a real evacuation.

More people mainstream plans miss

SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC & SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Guard their PII — secured registrations, no exposed client lists. Arrange alternate safe housing (DV-program shelters, safe homes, hotel placements with locks). Post hotline numbers visibly: 1-800-799-SAFE.

CHILDREN & UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

Work reunification with social services before the disaster; register separated minors with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children; place them under Child Protective Services at shelters.

TOURISTS & ACCESS/FUNCTIONAL NEEDS

Some jurisdictions move tourists out first, alongside self-evacuees but reliant on air and rail. ADA obligations never pause; conditions controlled at home can degrade en route — monitor, and reconnect care in the host area.

Accessibility runs through everything: interpreters, translated and alternative-format orders, accessible transport and facilities.

No pet plan, no compliance

65%

of American households have pets
— and a significant share will refuse
to leave without them.

CO-EVACUATE, CO-SHELTER

Keeping people with their animals raises order compliance, builds survivor resilience, and stops risky re-entry to rescue a left-behind pet.

THE LAW RIDES ALONG

Service animals stay with their owners at all times — ADA and Rehabilitation Act. The PETS Act funds rescue, care, and shelter for household pets after declared disasters.

THE LOGISTICS ARE REAL

Tracking, transport, feeding, veterinary support, vaccination records — plus separate areas for unvaccinated animals and for evacuees with allergies.

Plan for all animals — livestock, working dogs, exotics, animals in shelters — not just the family dog.

Say it so people actually move

“The public does not use the same common terminology as emergency management professionals — mandatory, voluntary, recommended, phased, zoned may all be heard quite differently than intended.”

PLAIN LANGUAGE

Pre-approved, leadership-cleared messages in clear terms — with accessible formats, translation, and channels beyond the usual alert systems.

TRUSTED VOICES

People heed a governor or police chief — and faith-based organizations, community radio, local TV, known social accounts — over anonymous feeds.

RUMOR CONTROL

Monitor social media and correct inaccurate accounts fast. Clear zones and unambiguous orders shrink spontaneous evacuation.

Tell people what to do, where to go, and what the hazard will do to them — flooding expected, power loss likely — in the first message.

Track everyone — or lose them

WHY TRACKING EARNS ITS KEEP

- ▶ Follows evacuees — plus animals, luggage, and durable medical equipment — across jurisdictions
- ▶ Gets displaced people with access and functional needs home, not defaulted into institutions
- ▶ Feeds family reunification
- ▶ Builds the records federal reimbursement requires

NMETS — THE NO-COST OPTION

FEMA's National Mass Evacuation Tracking System: software- and paper-based, free to states. But equipment, training, and assembly take real time — stand it up in the steady state, not landfall week.

START EARLY, GUARD THE DATA

Begin tracking at embarkation or arrival points; deconflict access and privacy issues with any third-party system before you need it.

Without tracking, situational awareness, accountability, and reunification all get harder — at once.

03

PLAN

Twelve principles and a six-step process — the architecture of a workable plan.

Twelve principles, three layers

A PLAN EVERY JURISDICTION CAN EXECUTE

PEOPLE

Critical transportation needs · service & assistance animals and pets · evacuee tracking & accountability · mass care

STRATEGY

Shelter-in-place first · zone-based operational strategies · all-hazard planning · whole community · flexibility & scalability

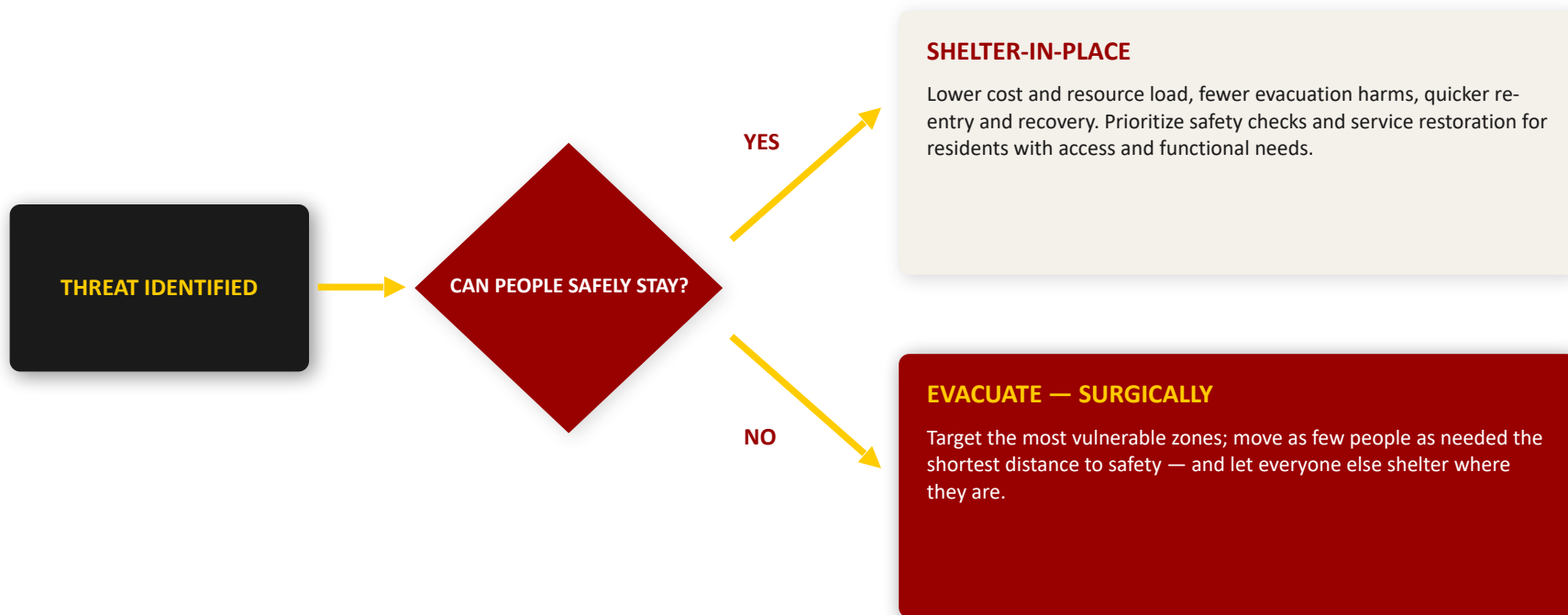
FOUNDATION

Defined authorities · common understanding · unified coordination process



Authorities and shared language hold up the strategy; the strategy exists to move — or shelter — actual people, animals included.

Shelter-in-place is the default — evacuation is the exception



"Jurisdictions should always consider shelter-in-place as the first/default option, when feasible."

The six-step planning process (CPG 101)



Step 6 is where plans live or die — tabletop to full-scale exercises, and lessons from real events, keep the annex current.

What good looks like on paper

DESIGN AIMS FOR THE ANNEX

- ▶ Shrink the evacuation — zones target only the areas at risk
- ▶ Shelter evacuees as close to home as safely possible; keep communities together for internal support
- ▶ Pick shelter sites the hazard can't reach
- ▶ Disperse evacuees across host communities — no single jurisdiction swamped
- ▶ Make tracking, reunification, and sheltering systems interoperable
- ▶ Meet federal and state accessibility requirements
- ▶ Deconflict shared resources and routes with neighboring jurisdictions

SUPPLEMENT, NEVER DUPLICATE

The annex covers what the base EOP doesn't — it must not conflict with or repeat it.

CATASTROPHE CHANGES MATH

Nation-state threats and major hurricanes strain resources for longer — plan the federal integration before you need it.

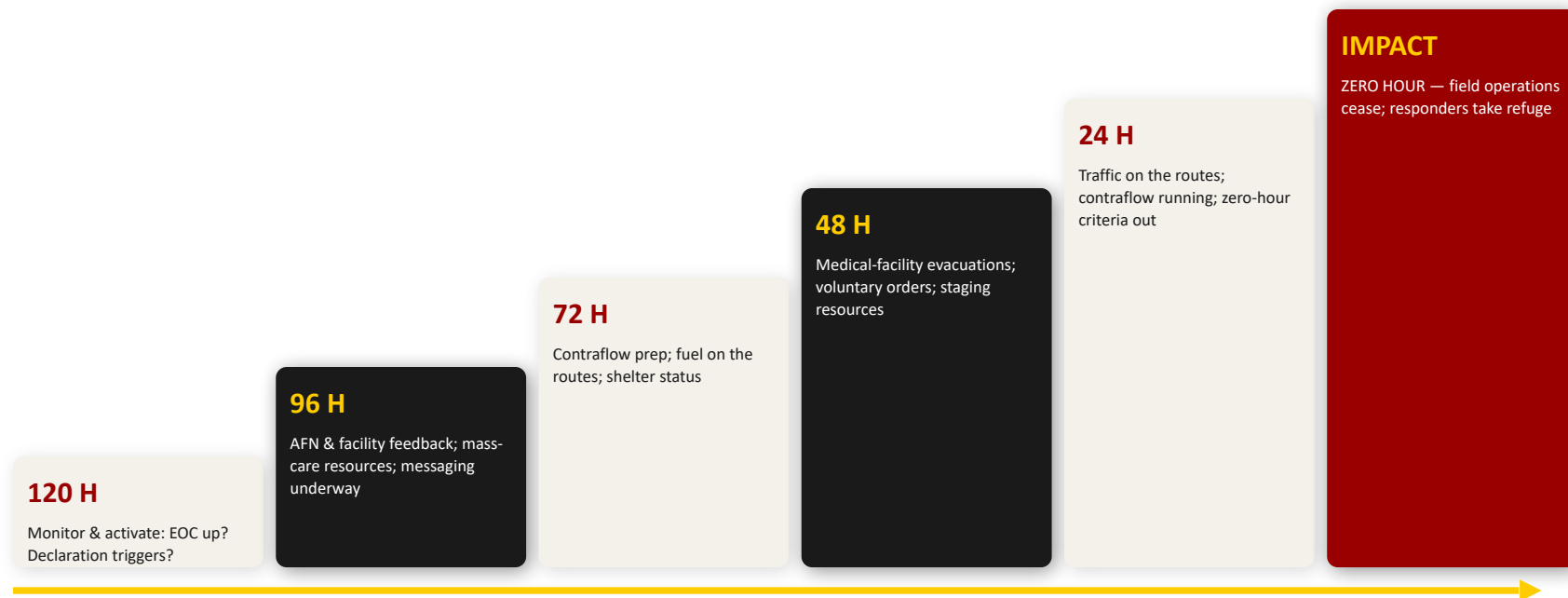
In a widespread catastrophe, keep displaced residents as close to the impact community — preferably in-state — as recovery allows.

04

EXECUTE

From the command job-aid to zero hour — running the operation.

The command countdown



then: MASS CARE — how long until re-entry, and what must be true first · RE-ENTRY — the handoff to recovery

FEMA's Command Job Aid (Appendix D) pairs each window with the questions leaders must answer — the sample numbers are meant to be re-tuned per jurisdiction.

The information battle rhythm

T-72 H

EOC ACTIVATION & DECLARATIONS

Forecast, hazard onset and timing, zones impacted, executive priorities — from NWS, predictive modeling, maps, census data.

T-8 H

WARNING-ORDER TIMING

First contact eight hours before the anticipated event — then updated twice per operational period: zones, time of day, routes, affected population.

AT NOTICE

INCIDENT-AREA BOUNDARIES

Initial estimate at notification, refreshed every operational period — modeling, remote sensing, rapid-assessment teams, 9-1-1 traffic.

POST +6 H

NEEDS & DAMAGE

First needs-and-damage estimate within six hours of landfall, updated every twelve — feeding re-entry and recovery decisions.

Every essential element of information names its responsible entity and its source — so the common operational picture never depends on one feed.

Execution checklists: who does what, when

ESF #1 · TRANSPORTATION

Evacuation-phase actions: run contraflow if authorized; close unsafe infrastructure; retime signals for outbound flow; activate VMS; tow breakdowns off routes; set and broadcast zero-hour criteria.

ESF #5 · INFO & PLANNING

Mobilization-phase actions: activate the EOC; weigh evacuation vs shelter-in-place; pick the transportation model; analyze zone demographics; stage resources; set the phased, zonal message.

ESF #6 · MASS CARE

Mass-care-phase actions: run updates between EOC and evacuation sites; keep signage current; accommodate access and functional needs and pets; build re-entry objectives.

Sequential, time-phased, and deliberately editable — combine or delete actions to fit your annex and your EOP.

Appendix E carries the full checklists — one row per action, with primary and support agencies assigned.

What the federal bench provides

TRACKING & REUNIFICATION

NMETS (evacuees, pets, equipment); JPATS for patients; Red Cross Safe and Well; NCMEC Unaccompanied Minors Registry with an activatable call center.

NATIONAL CONTRACTS

Four standing FEMA contracts: medical transport & pre-hospital care; motor-coach evacuation planning; air transportation; aviation ground support for up to 20,000 CTN evacuees.

DECISION TOOLS

HURREVAC storm-tracking for evacuation decision timing; the free Real Time Evacuation Planning Model; SLOSH surge modeling; Hazus; GEAR™ spatial decision analysis.

Most federal resources arrive with — or in anticipation of — a Presidential declaration. The door in is your FEMA regional office.

DOT, FAA, FHWA, FTA, and FRA add buses, airspace management, highway support, and rail authority when the event outgrows the state.

How two counties run it

LOS ANGELES COUNTY — WOOLSEY FIRE

- ▶ 96,000 acres in 17 days; ~296,000 displaced across LA and Ventura counties
- ▶ Fire leadership defines the threat boundary and timing; law enforcement executes and holds the perimeter
- ▶ Complex evacuations get a daily Unified Command planning meeting and a live list of safe routes
- ▶ Lessons: pull GIS into route analysis faster; use multiple channels to keep residents current

LARIMER COUNTY — TIERED EVACUATION

EVACUATION POINT — out of danger — information and immediate resources



EVACUATION CENTER — food, water, power to charge phones — for prolonged events



SHELTER — overnight and multi-day stays in nearby communities

Any responder can call the evacuation. Opt-in text alerts reach residents and tourists; the Sheriff's Posse and Humane Society move livestock to fairgrounds.

Put it to work Monday

01 KNOW YOUR ZONES

- ☐ Boundaries people recognize
- ☐ Mapped in GIS
- ☐ Public “know your zone” campaign

02 PICK THE MODEL

- ☐ Hub-and-spoke vs point-to-point
- ☐ Sites and staging named
- ☐ CTN transport arranged

03 PLAN THE PHASES

- ☐ Triggers per phase
- ☐ Zero-hour criteria set
- ☐ Re-entry conditions defined

04 COUNT EVERYONE

- ☐ AFN and CTN populations
- ☐ Pets and service animals
- ☐ Homeless, medical, correctional, tourists

05 MESSAGE PLAINLY

- ☐ Pre-approved plain-language orders
- ☐ Trusted voices lined up
- ☐ Rumor watch assigned

06 EXERCISE IT

- ☐ ESF checklists trained
- ☐ Tabletop to full-scale
- ☐ Lessons learned folded back in

Every line traces to the source guide — the annex, job aid, and checklists in its appendices are built to be customized.

SOURCES

Sources & further reading

PRIMARY

FEMA, Planning Considerations: Evacuation and Shelter-in-Place — Guidance for SLTT Partners (July 2019). Free at [fema.gov](https://www.fema.gov).

GUIDE

FEMA CPG 101: Developing and Maintaining Emergency Operations Plans, v2.0 — the parent planning process. Free.

GUIDE

National Governors Association, Governor's Guide to Mass Evacuation (2014). Free.

FRAMEWORK

DHS Crisis Event Response and Recovery Access (CERRA) Framework (2018) — re-entry access. Free.

PUBLIC

Ready.gov — build-a-kit supply lists for 72-hour-to-14-day self-sustainment. Free.

TRAINING

FEMA EMI G0358 Evacuation and Re-Entry Planning; NTED MGT-412 Sport & Special Event Evacuation. Free.

Everything above is public and free — this deck draws on no paywalled standard.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Read the source. Then put your jurisdiction's numbers in the job aid.

1

Download the free guide — search “Planning Considerations: Evacuation and Shelter-in-Place” at [fema.gov](https://www.fema.gov).

2

Pull Appendix D and re-tune the Command Job Aid's sample numbers to your jurisdiction.

3

Walk one ESF execution checklist with the team that actually owns it.

4

Take G0358, Evacuation and Re-Entry Planning, at training.fema.gov/emi — free.

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