

Is It Emergency Management? Part Two

By Michael Prasad, MA, CEM, Executive Director,
The Center for Emergency Management Intelligence Research

In a previous issue of the Bulletin, the question “Is it emergency management?” was explored, focusing on what defines emergency managers, the nature of their work, and the educational paths that distinguish them from other professions. This issue revisits that question but now turns attention to actions and activities carried out by individuals who are designated as emergency managers, yet which fall outside the scope of generally accepted emergency management (EM) core principles and practices.

This distinction is similar to the way accountants—and those in EM’s Finance and Administration—adhere to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). Just as GAAP provides a framework for accounting professionals, emergency management also relies on established principles and practices to guide the profession. Actions that deviate from these standards raise important questions about whether they truly represent emergency management.

Two of those principles are found in the acronyms POETE and LIPER. POETE represents the planning, organizing, equipping, training, and exercising involved in all aspects of a major project, task, incident, etc. It is one methodology to manage the elements needed for problem-solving.

POETE can and should be applied across all operational timeframes, whether in steady-state operations or during disaster response. The consistent use of POETE—Planning, Organizing, Equipping, Training, and Exercising—serves as a foundational methodology for man-

aging projects, tasks, and incidents within emergency management. If an emergency manager chooses not to apply the POETE (or any other EM) framework to specific actions or missions, it raises a critical question: can those activities truly be classified as emergency management? This consideration highlights the necessity of aligning all actions with established EM principles to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the profession.

More critical than POETE is the LIPER acronym. This is every emergency management commander’s intent for Life Safety, Incident Stabilization, Property/Asset Protection, Economic/Environmental Restoration, and Recovery.

LIPER serves as the ‘North Star’ for emergency management professionals. By ensuring that all decisions, plans, and missions—whether they relate to preparedness (including protection and prevention), response, recovery, or mitigation—are guided by the LIPER priorities, and by following these priorities in that specific order, emergency managers can guarantee their actions align with established ethical standards and professional conduct. The LIPER is the “what” emergency managers do, and in what order it is done. Tasks not on the LIPER – or out of order – cannot be considered professional emergency management.

While there is currently no organizational accountability for ethical conduct in emergency management, in many cases, Sovereign Immunity applies. This still does not abdicate an individual’s responsibility – in any profession – to conduct themselves ethically. Calling out waste, fraud, and abuse must be codified and

protected in all organizations as an ethical set of principles and practices.

This question of ethical and professional conduct in emergency management is at the heart of this essay. When someone who is designated as an emergency manager or any organization acts unethically or unprofessionally under the designation of emergency management, it harms the reputation of all emergency managers and ultimately the profession itself. Thus, the value and importance of professional conduct for individual emergency managers of organizations like the IAEM-USA, as well as certifications such as the AEM® and CEM® – both of which have a consolidated Code of Conduct is critical.

Collectively, it is the professional emergency managers who get to define what emergency management is. We must communicate the narrative on this, as no one else is truly qualified to do so.

Please take some time ahead of this year’s NEMAM to both ask and answer such basic questions for yourself and your organization. As IAEM-USA members, please utilize IAEMConnect to help ensure that our efforts remain focused, effective, and true to the mission of emergency management and the benefit of professional emergency managers. ♦