

had long been demonstrated that emergency management issues were of low salience in most states and communities (Wright and Rossi, 1981; Wolensky and Wolensky, 1990). In fact, the literature often noted indifference or outright opposition to disaster preparedness (Kreps, 1991). Public officials and public administrators in local communities, we were often told, did not fully comprehend the nature of the emergency management function. A basic assumption still prevalent is that emergency management is primarily a "response" function and a concern only for first responders. Other public officials remain uninvolved and assume that they need not learn much about the field (Grant, 1996).

The development of the emergency management function at the local level is a rather recent development and grew out of federal legislation such as the Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act of 1986. But even with federal mandates assigning more disaster mitigation and preparedness functions to local governments, emergency management did not quickly become a priority at the local level. Unless a specific hazard was more or less immanent, sustained governmental interest and public support at the local level was difficult to sustain (Perry and Mushkatel, 1984). Policy makers and stakeholders alike have tended to underestimate hazard potentials. They have been inclined to see hazard occurrence as having a low probability and have thus been reluctant to impose limitations on private property, unwilling to bear the costs of hazard preparedness, and altogether ambivalent toward hazard mitigation (Grant, 1996). Emergency management remained a low priority, a resented un-funded federal mandate, and a responsibility often seen as being somewhat at odds with more important tasks such as economic development. These attitudes unfortunately shaped and restrained the early development of the emergency management profession in local communities across the country.

From its earliest days, the emergency management function suffered as a result of low political support and scarce resources. In many local jurisdictions it became an ad-on or part time responsibility for an already overburdened local official such as a fire chief. Often the individuals appointed to local emergency management directorships had little professional training or experience relevant for the job. As a result of low salience, poor training, and lack of support, the focus of the emergency management professional tended to be narrow, disaster specific, technical, and limited to very specific tasks. This is beginning to change. It is probably more accurate today to say that the emergency management function is on its way to becoming a distinct profession. But there remains a strategic tension that retards the development of the profession. What is lacking is a dynamic model for transforming a once limited function into a contemporary public management role connected to the whole of community life.

Any effort to enhance the professionalism of emergency managers will be frustrated if it is not connected to a strategic orientation that broadens the scope and impact of the profession. Many practicing emergency managers accustomed to the traditional or "old" definition of their role may resist the suggestion of an expanded view of their role, but such a transformation is necessary to promote greater productivity and success in the broader and more strategic environment that shapes the contemporary work of emergency management.

Like it or not, and even as significant progress is being made in improving the technical skills of the profession, emergency management is being relocated in a wider