Emergency Management Follow-Up Audit

Why this audit is important

In 2018, the audit **Emergency Management: Strengthen basic elements to prepare for disasters** found that Metro had not developed a program or formal structure to respond to emergencies for the agency as a whole. This meant that Metro relied mostly on employee initiative and experience to manage emergencies. As a result, Metro was more vulnerable to disasters.

The audit made seven recommendations for Metro to clarify and strengthen roles, responsibility, and authority. This mattered because unclear roles can lead to confusion and make it difficult to assign appropriate resources.

This follow-up audit was designed to connect previous recommendations to real-world emergency response and recovery efforts. The intent was to help Metro prioritize additional efforts to implement the original audit recommendations while responding to a global pandemic.

Safety sign at Oregon Zoo

Source: Oregon Zoo

What we found

Metro made progress implementing most recommendations from the 2018 audit. Six recommendations were in process and one was not implemented. This was reasonable given the amount of time since the original audit.

Status of Recommendations

2018 Audit Recommendations	Status
To strengthen its regional role during a disaster, Metro should:	
1. Complete appendices outlined in the Disaster Debris Management Plan	In process
2. Specify what, if any, additional roles Metro intends to fulfill during a disaster	In process
To prepare for severe emergencies and disasters, Metro should:	

3. Clarify roles, responsibilities, and authority by
  a) determining which elements of NIMS, including ICS, it will use and formally adopt them
  b) formally approving an agency-wide emergency operations plan
  c) assigning responsibility to specific position(s) for maintaining the emergency operation plan and procedures
  d) providing training and exercises for the employees who will be involved in response and recovery operations
	In Process
	(Implemented)
	
	(In process)
	(Implemented)
	
	(In process)

4. Formalize emergency procedures by developing written agency-wide procedures, at a minimum, for
  a) tracking and reporting emergency-related damage and costs
  b) manual payroll and vendor payment processes for when normal systems are unavailable
	In process
	
	(In process)
	(In process)

5. Maintain an up-to-date inventory of emergency management resources	Not implemented

6. Plan for continuity of operations by
  a) finishing current continuity planning efforts for solid waste and supporting functions
  b) planning for other essential and remaining agency functions
	In process
	(Implemented)
	
	(In process)

7. Improve emergency communication by
  a) developing a back-up emergency communications system
  b) implementing a notification system(s) that reaches all Metro employees
	In process
	(In process)
	(In process)

Source: Auditor's Office analysis of emergency management documents and interviews

Although previous recommendations were not fully implemented, Metro did put into place best practices to respond to a series of emergencies over the past year. However, Metro's regional role remained unclear. Finalizing the emergency management plan, developing continuity plans, and then structuring training and exercises on those plans was needed to provide additional clarity. Finally, lack of continuity planning and limitations in agency-wide processes reduced Metro's ability to proactively manage non-health and safety risks as emergency response transitioned to recovery.

Based on our review of Metro's response to Covid-19 and the 2020 wildfires, prioritizing recommendations related to roles and responsibilities would better prepare Metro for responding to emergencies. Prioritizing recommendations for continuity planning would better prepare Metro to manage risks other than those related to health and safety as it recovers from emergencies.