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Partner Profile – Matthew Wall

Matthew Wall is the Executive Director of the Western States Seismic Policy Council (WSSPC). Prior to his current role, he worked almost 12 years at the Virginia Department of Emergency Management in multiple positions such as Emergency Support Team Coordinator and Hazard Mitigation Program Manager and Coordinator. Mr. Wall served as the Fire Captain for the City of Richmond for 26 years. He received a bachelor's degree in urban studies and a Master of Urban and Regional Planning from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Q: What is the background/history of your organization?

A: The WSSPC was initially formed in 1979 when multiple states, commissions, councils, and agencies became inspired to coordinate efforts. The inspiration to create the council was driven by the 1977 Earthquake Hazards Reduction Act and the establishment of the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP) in 1978. In 1996, WSSPC incorporated and received its 501 (c)(3) nonprofit status. More information on WSSPC's origin can be found [here](#).

Q: How did you get interested in research/disaster safety/response and recovery/resilience?

A: In 1980, I became a firefighter for the City of Richmond (VA) Fire and Emergency Services. It was then that I really began to see and experience first-hand how events and disasters could impact people. When you are holding or talking with someone who's just lost their home or a family member, their emotion paints an indelible mark on your soul. It changes you. It made me want to do more.

Long story short, I learned if I wanted to make a difference I needed to understand the nature of events and their impacts. I needed to understand communities, cascading consequences, infrastructure, service delivery, land use, social vulnerabilities, economic base, etc. I discovered there was no single solution but rather a giant jig-saw puzzle of pieces to fit together to support the diversity of who we are and what we need to do to move forward.

Q: What do you see to be the future of earthquake science/engineering/research/outreach/response and recovery to increase resiliency? What do you think is moving the cause of resilience forward?

A: I see increased future coordination supporting the efforts to increase resiliency. As an example, the NEHRP's Reauthorization Act of 2018 emphasizes the concept of partnerships and working together to achieve positive impacts. The program's reauthorization reminds us synergy isn't just a lab term, but a *boots on the ground* process based on research, technical design, and identified best practices. I believe the increasing severity of events and their impacts are going to be the key trigger for society to increase resiliency.

Q: Can you tell us about a specific project your organization is working on in earthquake safety/science/engineering/research/resilience/outreach field?

A: In March 2019, we supported an Earthquake Clearinghouse exercise in Boise, ID where the Idaho Office of Emergency Management and the Idaho Geological Survey implemented their new plan for the first time. It was very successful, received much positive feedback from participants, and identified some future multi-agency, multi-state coordination opportunities.

On March 25-26, we participated in the Guam Mitigation Strategies and Opportunities Workshop: *Mitigating Guam's Earthquake and Tsunami Risk*. During this event, we supported and coordinated with the Offices of Guam Homeland Security and Civil Defense (GHS/OCD).

Q: Do you have any other comments or words of wisdom for our readers?

A: Here are a few of the ideas I genuinely believe in:

- If you want fulfillment in who you are and what you are doing, believe in something bigger than yourself and become dedicated to it.
- Identify ways to honestly measure your successes and failures. You will have both and will experience growth if you choose to learn from them.
- It really *is* about helping people.