



Partners in Prevention

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Partner Spotlight – Michael Grimm

Mike Grimm serves as the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Assistant Administrator for Risk Management. Throughout his 23-year career at FEMA, Mr. Grimm has worked to improve coordination, collaboration, and transparency across the government, to reduce risk nationally and to create disaster-resilient communities.

Q: How did you get interested in disaster safety?

I grew up spending a lot of time outdoors. I remember being fascinated by nature and deeply curious about the earth. This interest grew and became a focal point for my education. I found that when you study nature, you also learn what can go wrong. I wanted to be able to help people avoid disasters. Or, in times when disaster couldn't be avoided, I wanted to help people prepare for, and recover from, them. I've been fortunate to make a career of this.

Q: What is your background, education, and experience?

I have a bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies from the University of Vermont and a Master of Science in Earth Resources from Colorado State University. My focus area was fluvial geomorphology which is about how rivers shape the landscape.

Before joining FEMA, I worked for the City of Fort Collins running the Floodplain Management Program; as a hydrologist for the State of Wyoming in the Department of Environmental Quality; and for the United States Geological Survey, National Research Program, in Denver doing research on paleoflood hydrology.

I then joined FEMA where I've had several different jobs; most recently I led FEMA's Individual Assistance Division and the Mitigation Directorate. In those roles, I managed FEMA recovery programs for individuals and families, and I directed pre-and post-disaster mitigation programs that support sustainable, resilient communities.

In my current role, I lead the Risk Management Directorate, delivering quality risk data, modeling, and programs that increase the public's awareness of risk and lead to actions that reduce risk to life and property. I've had the opportunity to help people recover from disasters and help people mitigate before them. These opportunities have shown me the impact that we can have if we act now to reduce risk, which is why I'm so proud of the work that we're doing in the Risk Management Directorate.

Q: Can you tell us about specific projects or programs you are working on in the risk reduction and resilience field?

Last year we set goals of doubling insurance coverage and quadrupling investment in mitigation by 2022. We call these moonshots because they're so ambitious. These moonshots are about starting a

shift in our culture, to build a culture of preparedness and make us all more resilient. We know that the moonshots are about more than just FEMA—they have to be. It's going to take a collective effort to accomplish these shared goals and reach the moonshots.

Risk Management's role is about more than just making people aware of risk, it's empowering them to do something about it. We're putting a greater emphasis on making the risk information that we already produce more actionable for people, and then connecting them with the resources and skills they need to take action. That means we also prioritize the longer-term actions that communities can take, like implementing higher building codes and effective mitigation plans.

When it comes to getting more people insured, we're doing our part to redesign how we rate risk. We're looking forward to rolling out a new rating tool under the National Flood Insurance Program that will improve our ability to offer more effective, accurate, and efficient flood insurance coverage.

Q: What do you think are the driving forces that are advancing the cause of resilience today, especially after last year's hurricane and wildfire disasters?

Active disaster seasons are sobering reminders of the importance of the real-world reasons for resilience and mitigation. Unfortunately, too often they highlight areas where we could've taken action ahead of time to reduce or eliminate the impact. It's not how it should work, but a lot of times it provides a first-hand experience in the value of mitigation. That's helping to change the conversation to focus more on resilience and building back stronger rather than just building back quickly and maintaining the same risk.

We know that for our nation to protect life and property and curb the increasing cost of disasters, we must bring resilient mitigation investments forward. Communities need to reduce risk to people, property, and taxpayer dollars – before an incident. That keeps us all safer and makes it easier for the community to recover.

Here's the thing, if we want to get ahead of the next disaster, we need to change our approach. Reducing risk cannot be the sole responsibility of one organization. I'll say it again, everyone has a role to play. And if we're serious about breaking the disaster cycle, we know it's going to take working at all levels of government and with our partners to make some hard choices – and stick to them. State and local governments can be, must be, leaders of this work. State and local officials can commit to adopting and enforcing floodplain and land-use regulations as well as building codes to guide construction. Even at the individual level, you can take personal steps to protect your homes and businesses through smaller projects like the purchase of flood insurance, for example. There isn't a one-size fits all solution, so we need to be having these conversations more publicly and making conscious decisions for our long-term resilience.

Q: What are your hopes for the future of resilience?

The future of resilience isn't just a responsibility of FEMA or of the government. I want everyone to understand their role and our shared responsibility. I hope that we can empower society with the information necessary to prepare for the inevitable. In fact, fostering a culture of preparedness is a top priority for me and my colleagues at FEMA. That means we're going beyond just promoting understanding, we want to drive real action.

With partners like FLASH advocating for strengthening homes and safeguarding families from disasters, my hope is that, together, we can build resilience to protect lives and property from future storms and disasters.

Q: Do you have any other comments or additional words of wisdom to offer our readers?

Disaster resilience is the backbone of emergency management, and while FEMA plays an essential role in advancing resilience, it is not something FEMA or any government can or should do alone. Every segment of our society, from the individual to the government, industry to philanthropy, must be encouraged and empowered with the information needed to prepare for disasters.

So, I ask FLASH readers, what steps have you taken to protect your home and your community against disasters? Do you have flood insurance? How are you going to take action?