

## **VALIDATION OF QUALITY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ACADEMIC PROGRAMS THROUGH ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION**

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### **Abstract – Practitioner talk.**

Increase in Education Requirements for Emergency Management Hires.

In the past 15 years, an academic degree has become routinely required for even entry level emergency management positions, and a degree in some area of emergency management is a definite plus. Even taking the role of experience into account, the advantage of a comprehensive emergency management education can often tip the scale in making hiring decisions.

### How Does One Evaluate a Degree?

The question then becomes, how does one evaluate this degree? The fact is a lot of people have asked this question, and the answer is ‘it hasn’t been determined.’ That is changing with the growth of an organization devoted to assessing higher education emergency management related degree programs. However, while the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offered encouragement and assistance in building programs, including course materials and content, FEMA was never in a position to mandate any standards. There was then, and still is now, a wide variance in the scope of content and, thus, the quality of education in the field from school to school, or program to program.

### Peer-Accepted Standards for EM-Related Degrees

CAEMHSE has established peer-accepted standards for emergency management-related degrees, and has been working to assess and accredit programs at the associate’s, bachelor’s, and master’s degree levels. CAEMHSE, for example, has established that EM bachelor’s degree programs should instruct at least 30 credit hours of EM content (or 24 credit hours of core EM content and another six of directly-related EM content, such as homeland security (HS) or business continuity content).

### As EM/HS Fields Continue to Mature, Mandated Accreditation Is More Likely

The EM and HS fields continue to mature. They are not as mature as fields like nursing or engineering. Those fields require that in order to become licensed in the field, the person must be a graduate of an accredited school. EM has no such requirement, but we want to paint a picture of a scenario that might prompt movement toward requiring EM (and HS) programs to become accredited. What about a situation where a jurisdictional emergency manager (not an EM graduate or CEM® certified) makes a

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decision, in the heat of the response battle after a disaster, which proves to be significantly wrong? A lawsuit is initiated against the jurisdiction (city or county), including the mayor and the emergency manager. The findings include the lack of any formal education of the emergency manager, and the city/county ends up paying multi-millions of dollars in settlement of the lawsuit.

#### A Growing Trend

Might this prompt the growing trend of ensuring that the people directly involved in life-and-death, post-disaster decision-making be qualified? The requirement(s) for education and certification would grow, as would a push for accreditation of programs readying people for this field of work, as laws are passed requiring accredited programs and licensure of individuals. That's the future as we see it! What's the benefit of an institution becoming accredited? The answer is that when you hire an accredited program graduate, you can be assured of a level of capability and knowledge of the field in the applicant.

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