

Risk Management Roundtable  
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## **Information Resources for Disaster Recovery in the US: Local vs. Federal Government Roles**

A fundamental difference between Federal and local government information requirements has developed over time, based on both budgetary resources and operational responsibilities. Local governments require data and information for operational purposes, such as permitting and taxation, and for local emergency response and management. The Federal government requires data for monitoring and management purposes and for emergency response across jurisdictions. However, since September 11, there has been a growing national concern over homeland security and an evolving definition and identification of information requirements for this purpose that may alter the roles, responsibilities, and capacity of the two levels of government.

In brief, agencies of the Federal government are scrutinizing available information resources and capabilities in terms of their potential utility for homeland security. There is a special focus on aggregating urban data through a program informally called "120 Cities." Not only will this activity enlist the resources of multiple Federal agencies and pool their data on the selected cities, but it also means that these data become part of the security apparatus of the country and thus may be publicly inaccessible. Moreover, the concern over possible terrorist use of geospatial data has a chilling effect on state and local governments and some, like New York State's GIS Clearinghouse, are now reviewing their own data resources in terms of their applicability to homeland security concerns. It is possible that this self-censorship will remove other data from public accessibility.

These actions are taking place in the context of changing local government information management practices. The growing recognition of the utility of geospatial resources and the advent of high resolution remote sensing data available through both public and private sector sources, together with mounting Federal information requirements placed on local governments, have led many local governments to invest in new types of geospatial data resources. They are also improving their capacity to use external sources of geospatial data. However, local governments are also currently facing budgetary shortfalls. In this situation of growing needs and declining resources, it is vital that Federal data that might be used to meet ongoing operational and emergency management data needs of local government are not removed from the public domain because of national security information requirements.

Since September 11, the relationship between civil and military information managers in the Federal government, like that between Federal and local governments, has been

changing rapidly. Even prior to September 11, the cost of maintaining Federal information resources was driving civil and military agencies into cooperative efforts in which both were expected to benefit, e.g., the Department of Defense and NOAA are cooperating on the NPOESS geostationary satellite, and NASA and NIMA are collaborating on the Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM). The post-9/11 build up of Homeland Security capabilities draws on both civil and military resources, but it appears that the military managers are dominant. This may cause problems in terms of the definition of future data requirements and declining civilian access to previously open data sources

One of the lessons of September 11 is that both the data typically maintained by local government and data primarily available to the Federal government are needed for emergency response. Information managers in New York City have said that in the WTC emergency response, they needed what they described as Federal technology expertise and high tech data, such as remote sensing, in combination with the foundation data framework of local government, such as the New York City base map and digital elevation and building information data bases in their response to 9/11. The potential advantages to local governments of having access to both local and Federal sources of information in an emergency situation may be threatened by growing differences in data access policies between military and civilian agencies.