

Hope for the Future: Taking our Skills to the World

By Leslie L. Wilson, Program Manager, Rays of Mercy, Tajikistan

High in the Pamir Mountains of Central Asia, an earthquake-triggered avalanche in 1911 buried the remote little village of Usoi. Word of the disaster in this isolated region took about six weeks to reach Russian authorities. In the narrow mountain pass, the avalanche formed the Usoi Dam, named for the 300+ villagers entombed at the base. Over a century later, at 1,860 feet, it remains the tallest dam in the world. Impeded water from the river below created massive Lake Sarez.

YouTube videos from an [earthquake in 2004](#) show severe shaking at the top of the earthen dam and avalanches sliding into Sarez. The volume of water, if it was all unleashed, would flood massive portions of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan potentially all the way to the Aral Sea, affecting over 5 million people.

However, in 2000, a [UN-sponsored study](#) concluded that total failure of the dam is unlikely. Still, the threat of even a portion failing could trigger a massive disaster for the many villages below.

High Risks and Challenges, but Few Resources

Disaster risks are high. Challenges in this harsh area are enormous. Resources to manage disasters are few. During a United Nations Development Program [\(UNDP\) interview](#), the Tajik government's Committee of Emergency Situation reported the grim 2017 statistics: 720 avalanches, 41 mudflows and 23 landslides. Tajikistan is a country about the size of Illinois. At 10,455 feet, the nation has the third highest average

elevation in the world. The rugged and remote Pamirs dominate the eastern half, including two of the highest 100 peaks in the world. Welcome to Tajikistan.

Current State of Emergency Management

On this, my fourth trip since 2010, I was invited to participate in a [disaster risk management summer course](#) on the University of Central Asia's (UCA) Khorog Campus in the Pamir Mountains. The experience opened my eyes to the extensive work being done uniting emergency management with the science behind disasters. Professors came from Switzerland and Austria, as well as an American professor on the UCA faculty.

English is the working language for classes in the tri-nation chain of campuses. As the only native English speaker in this gathering of students and faculty from eight countries, I was delighted and relieved, given my limited language skills.

Our hosts are part of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) and the associated Aga Khan Agency for Habitat (AKAH), major players in all phases of the disaster cycle here and in neighboring nations. On one of our many field trips, we met a trained team of disaster volunteers for one village under the guidance of Swiss nonprofit [Caritas](#), which views Tajikistan as one of the most vulnerable nations to climate change. Part of their training stems from our Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program.

As a culture of preparedness gradually takes shape, hundreds of villages now have a disaster risk management plan with guidelines on multi-hazard responses. Given

the remoteness of many villages, high-tech strategies play a dominant role, where Google Earth Pro backed by ground truthing combine with current academic research. Adhering to the Sendai Framework, AKAH partnered with government agencies to develop the [Open Center platform](#) "to enhance the collaboration on information management and dissemination amongst both government agencies and international partners." which "eventually contributes to effective emergency planning and management." Additionally, sifting through vast Soviet archives and gleaning knowledge from local villagers all impact the detailed disaster plans tailored to each village and many cities.

Seeing America's Incident Command System embraced was a happy surprise. Even so, much of the training is based on introductory courses. The wealth of free online courses such as EMI's Independent Study Program were unknown to emergency management teams here.

The Red Crescent of Tajikistan can do little compared to our robust American Red Cross, given the extreme shortage of funds and resources. The International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent (IFRC) has a permanent presence in the country to help fill in the gap.

Still another aspect is the need for psychological support. However, the field is almost nonexistent here.

A casual conversation with my doctor (seems I developed a bad case of pneumonia while hiking mountains with my class) revealed a huge need throughout the nation for

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medical evacuation procedures. She collaborated with the UN and other humanitarian organizations to begin this expansive undertaking. Hopefully, serving as a liaison, I'll be able to help further her efforts. There are many in the United States with far greater expertise who could find a wealth of opportunities to hone their skills while gaining a global perspective on the complex disaster landscape.

One of the challenging components, as always in this poorest of former Soviet Republics, is the expense. Tajikistan has over 50% unemployment. Many of its citizens work in Russia and other countries. The money they send home – remittances – comprised 29% of the nation's GDP in 2018, one of the highest in the world according to the [World Bank](#).

International nonprofits have shouldered much of the expense to achieve recent great strides, but much more needs to be done. With increasing temperatures of recent years come more glacial melt, triggering more mudflows and other disasters. Winter snows, avalanches, and rockslides are just a few of the common hazards that can leave stricken communities totally on their own for days, perhaps weeks. Last month a [researcher at UCA](#) reported one of the largest glaciers had retreated by more than four miles in just a few decades. Changing climate patterns have impacted traditional life for these otherwise resilient people of the Pamirs. To further complicate the situation, a growing population is expanding into high risk areas. The increasing needs must be addressed now. However, outside help is absolutely mandatory

for this young nation struggling to gain a firm foundation in dealing with its disasters.

Great Potential for Expanding Positive American Efforts Globally

That's where I hope to see more Americans, particularly in emergency management, lend a hand. We have a rich heritage of response to disasters. The knowledge and experience compiled into excellent source material is readily available, actively practiced, and repeatedly fine-tuned. In fact, the field of emergency management has made tremendous leaps forward in recent years to now include degree programs. Our volunteer force, which never ceases to amaze me, shoulders a major share of the work when disasters strike. Some also work internationally where the need is great. But they usually arrive after the fact. More help is needed in preparedness, mitigation and prevention, as well as training of local volunteers to shoulder more of the load.

But what of the many reservists, part-time and retired responders, trainers and specialists in all areas of emergency management? Working here *pro bono* in recent years has given me opportunities to soar beyond the available employment and opportunities for growth back home. Our disaster-trained personnel – so many now trained and more coming – often are without work in the field.

Additionally, the academic community could seize many opportunities to develop projects, secure grants, provide online programs, and exchange students and professors with institutions like the University of Central Asia. Several years ago, I had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Adenrele

Awatona, at the University of Massachusetts/Boston, to discuss the challenges of a post-earthquake housing development in Tajikistan. As founding director of the Center for Rebuilding Sustainable Communities after Disasters ([CRSCAD](#)), his interest in visiting Tajikistan, its universities, and its disaster sites was encouraging. I hope the time may now be ripe to make the trip a reality. Training for Tajik workers in programs like [ICISF's](#) Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) courses would be invaluable.

Cumulatively, we have a great wealth of knowledge and resources to share. Countries like Tajikistan have willing emergency managers and disaster response personnel with whom we could brainstorm to devise solutions tailored for this unique nation.

The Challenge for Our Planet's Future

In this time of global changes in climate triggering greater and more frequent disasters, the problems are not just in America. We can be rightfully proud of the great strides we have made in the field of emergency management, including many standards adopted worldwide. With a global community growing ever closer and more intertwined in all aspects of life, isn't it time to enhance our reach beyond our borders? In the process, we enhance our own insights and gain better perspectives of the global impact of natural disasters. The future is upon us, shaping us and our responses to disasters everywhere. The time is now for a united front to more effectively shape the future of emergency management globally in our common battle against the increasing planet-wide disasters that face us all. ▲

IAEM Annual Conference Special Focus Issue: “Honor the Past, Treasure the Present, Shape the Future, Part 2”

Please sure to read the [October 2019 issue of the IAEM Bulletin](#), which includes Part 1 on the conference theme. The October issue included feature articles by speakers at this year’s conference. While Part 2 does include one conference speaker’s article, the remainder were written by IAEM members and others.

[Angola’s Community Health Emergency Rapid Response Team \(CHERRT\): An Example of Preparing a Low Middle-Income Nation \(LMIC\) to Respond at the Local and Regional Level Independent of International Support](#), by Michael D. Owens, D.O., MPH, CEM, FAAEM, Naval Medical Center Portsmouth 11

[A Local Implementation Model for the National Preparedness Goal: Streamlining Planning, Operations, Evaluation, and Capability Building at the Local Level](#), by Courtney Bernet and Emily Ruesch, DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency 13

[FEMA Provides No-Cost Exercise Support](#), by Bonnie Johnson, National Exercise Division, Federal Emergency Management Agency 16

[Finding the Funny Through the Years](#), by Jan McInnis, Keynote Speaker and Comedian. The author was a speaker at the 2015 IAEM Annual Conference 17

[Disaster Tourists](#), by Brad Milliken, Disaster Services Analyst & Response Lead, Pacific Disaster Center (PDC Global), managed by the University of Hawaii, Kihei, Maui, Hawaii 19

[EDXL in Emergency Healthcare Data Exchange: Saving Precious Seconds in the Golden Hour](#), by Rex Brooks, Secretary of the OASIS Emergency Management Technical Committee (OASIS EMTC) 21

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[BC Housing Releases Tool to Rapidly Assess the Safety of Structures After Disasters](#), by Steven Bibby, Director, Security and Emergency Services, BC Housing, Burnaby, BC, Canada 26

[From the IAEM-USA Training & Education Committee: We Are the Future of Emergency Management, but is the Field of Emergency Management Ready for the Future?](#) by Howard Simons, MS, Disaster and Emergency Management, Z.A.S. LLC Emergency Management, Baltimore, Maryland 29

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About the IAEM Bulletin

The *IAEM Bulletin*, the official newsletter of the International Association of Emergency Managers, is published monthly by IAEM to keep members abreast of association news, government actions affecting emergency management, and research and information sources.

The publication also is intended to serve as a way for emergency management colleagues to exchange information on programs and ideas. Issues from the past five years through the present are available in the members-only [IAEM Bulletin Archives](#).

The *Bulletin* is distributed electronically via the members-only archives to emergency management officials each month, representing all levels of government, industrial, commercial, educational, military, private, nonprofit and volunteer organizations.

Publishing an article in the *IAEM Bulletin* may help you to meet IAEM’s certification requirements. If you haven’t written an article lately, or at all, for the *IAEM Bulletin*, check out the [author’s guidelines](#).

The members of the IAEM Editorial Committee know that every one of us has a story to tell. ▲



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Special Focus Issue:
"Honor the Past,
Treasure the Present,
Shape the Future,
Part 2"

The [October 2019 Bulletin](#) included Part 1 of our double special focus issue.

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Think Tank Partners:



From the IAEM-USA President

An Optimistic Look at the Future of EM, Despite the Threats Facing Us

By Marty Shaub, CEM, UCEM, IAEM-USA President

I am optimistic as I end my term as President of IAEM-USA. While there is much to be concerned about, there is much to appreciate.

A World of Issues

In 2019, the United Nations released a preliminary report on Earth's biodiversity. It drew on the wisdom of 15,000 research papers to produce a 1,500+-page report. In particular, it looked at extinction and human factors like population growth and greenhouse gas levels. Gloomily, it warned of a massive biodiversity loss because of human activities. Factors like warming oceans, climate change, and deforestation are annihilating species at a break-

neck speed. The report concluded that in addition to animals at risk of extinction, half of the world's rivers and 40% of the oceans showed severe degradation.

Around 75% of the land showed the same negative human-related impact.

Our partners at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

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IAEM Think Tank Set for Nov. 19 on Increased Importance of Community Outreach to Emergency Managers

IAEM has scheduled an IAEM Think Tank on **Nov. 19, 2019, 8:00-9:30 a.m. EST**, to be held at the IAEM Annual Conference in Savannah, Georgia. The title of the event is "Community Outreach and Why This Is Important to Emergency Managers Now More Than Ever." Speakers will be: Herman Schaffer, assistant commissioner, NYCEM and Director of Community Engagement Division; Laura Mellem, public engagement manager, New Orleans Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness; and Sherry Lea

Botop, public information officer and community engagement manager, Baldwin County Commission, Alabama. Those not attending the conference can [register online](#) to participate via webinar.

About IAEM and Harvard NPLI Think Tanks

Based on the idea behind FEMA Think Tanks, IAEM partnered with Harvard NPLI to engage our partners, promote innovation, and facilitate discussions in

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