



# Emergency Preparedness in Illinois

Is Illinois prepared for anything and everything?

# Emergency Preparedness in Illinois

By Patricia S. Rushing



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Illinois is no stranger to disaster. Tornadoes are common, floods have devastated farm fields and towns repeatedly in recent years, and the state's vast transportation network means first responders must be wary of the potential for hazardous materials whenever there is an accident. Events such as the shootings at Northern Illinois University last year serve as a reminder that tragedy can strike anywhere at any time. Fortunately, Illinois has used its resources to prepare itself well. This chapter examines that preparedness from a statewide perspective, comparing Illinois with other states and assessing how the state uses its financial resources to develop tools for dealing with emergencies. However, policymakers need to keep in mind that areas of vulnerability remain, particularly in the protection of infrastructure and communications.

Illinois has a well-established network for emergency response and state agencies work with local first responders to provide training, equipment and other resources. Illinois' strategy for distributing federal homeland security dollars is to use the Illinois Terrorism Task Force (ITTF) as a central repository that distributes the money to local agencies, programs or initiatives based on need. We will examine how the federal dollars that flowed into the state after 9-11 have been put to use.

The ITTF and the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) are responsible for the overall security strategy for the state. The ITTF provides recommendations and guidance for complying with homeland security laws, policies and procedures, and works with 63 other governmental agencies, organizations, associations and communities to help train first responders and others to deal

with nearly any terrorism situation that might arise. IEMA is responsible for coordinating the state's response to other disasters, natural and man-made. The state has forged partnerships with the federal government, other states, local governments and the private sector to ensure the safety of Illinois citizens and critical infrastructure in the event of a catastrophe.

While the threat of terrorism is behind much of federal homeland security funding, the efforts of the ITTF benefit the state most by keeping it ready to respond to more likely events such as a tornado, a hazardous materials leak or a chemical plant explosion. Therefore, as emergency responders prepare for acts of terrorism that seem unlikely to the typical resident, they are building the capacity for communities across the state to cope with ice storms, power outages, floods, and other more frequent events. In fact, federal authorities have called Illinois' mutual aid structure and specialized response teams models for the rest of the nation.

## **Illinois Funding Levels: How We Compare to Other Midwestern States**

Illinois ranked fifth among the 50 states and District of Columbia in 2007 in securing grants dedicated to establishing a statewide homeland security program. Only California, Texas, New York, and Florida consistently rank higher. Table 1 indicates the rankings of other Midwestern states are scattered.

Illinois' portion of the national total funding trended upward from 3.1 percent of the total in 2002 to 5.33 percent in 2006, and then declined to 4.78 percent in 2007 and 4.43 percent in 2008. It is difficult to maintain one master database that allows a state-

by-state comparison because the programmatic makeup and anticipated outcomes of each grant period differ from year to year.

In summary, Illinois received \$966 million of the \$22 billion dollars allotted nationally between FY03 and FY08 as indicated by Table 2.

### A Shift in Focus: State vs. Urban Comparison

Comparisons between state and urban allocations reveal a shift from funds dedicated to the *state* at large to *urban area* all-hazard preparedness. National statistics for fiscal years 2005 and 2006 rank Illinois fourth in national funding behind California, New York, and Florida as it relates to the overall State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSP), the Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program (LETPP), the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) and the total percentage of national funding dedicated to domestic preparedness.

From fiscal years 2002 through 2007, Illinois' average share of the total national Homeland Security Grant Program (combining the State Homeland Security Grant Program and the Urban Area Security Initiative) was 4.08 percent.

Funding for the statewide program (SHSP and LETPP) generally exceeded UASI funding from 2002-2004 and in 2005 was almost equal (\$48.6 million to \$48.2 million). In 2006, UASI funding exceeded the state grant funding by \$14.3 million, beginning a trend toward increased funding for high-risk urban areas that continued in 2007 and 2008.

Table 3 shows year by year comparisons, followed by the national rank-order, for state grant vs. Chicago/Cook County UASIs.

Table 1  
**Funding of Homeland Security Grants for Midwestern States**

	FY '08 State Homeland Security Grants	FY'07 State HS Grants	Population Rank
Michigan	11	10	8
Indiana	19	18	14
Missouri	21	20	17
Wisconsin	25	21	18
Iowa	35	34	30

Table 2  
**A National Comparison: State Homeland Security Grant Program**

FY	National Funding	Illinois Award
03	4.3 Billion	152.9 Million
04	4.1 Billion	162.2 Million
05	3.7 Billion	152.4 Million
06	2.9 Billion	155.9 Million
07	4.2 Billion	201.7 Million
08	3.1 Billion	140.9 Million
Total	22.3 Billion	966.0 Million

Table 3  
**Comparison of State Grants vs. Chicago/Cook County UASIs**

Year	State Grant	National Rank	Chicago/Cook Co. UASIs	National Rank
03	\$68.9	4	\$40.9	2
04	\$73.5	5	\$34.3	2
05	\$48.6	5	\$48.2	4
06	\$37.9	5	\$52.5	3
07	\$38.7	4	\$47.6	4
08	\$45.0	5	\$45.8	4

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*The ITTF has divided Illinois into 19 Homeland Security Regions, each built around seven layers of special response teams.*

The Transit Security Grant Program (TSGP) funds directed to the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) in FY03 and 04 were factored into the UASI appropriation. From FY05 to present, the TSGP became a separate award (Table 4).

**Table 4**  
**The Transit Security Grant Program (TSGP)**

FY	Illinois	National	%	Rank
05	\$12.45m	\$134.1m	9.3	4
06	\$12.5m	\$136.0m	9.2	4
07	\$20.6m	\$262.9m	7.8	5
08	\$26.0m	\$350.1m	7.4	5

**The Illinois Strategy: The Infrastructure of the Illinois Terrorism Task Force**

The ITTF has divided Illinois into 19 Homeland Security Regions, each built around seven layers of special response teams: three local teams (Level-A Hazardous Materials, technical rescue teams, and law enforcement weapons of mass destruction [WMD] special regional teams), three types of state-level teams (WMD teams, Illinois Medical Emergency Response Teams and an Urban Search and Rescue Team), and one federal-level team (the 5<sup>th</sup> Civil Support team). Complementing these teams are the Chicago Urban Area programs, which are funded and managed cooperatively between the Chicago Office of Emergency Management and Communications (OEMC) and the Cook County Board of Commissioners. Chicago has been an Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) city since 2003 and has historically been one of the top five cities in the country in terms of funding, which is decided based upon a combination of risk and programmatic effectiveness.

The ITTF is comprised of 15 committees. These range from a committee that focuses

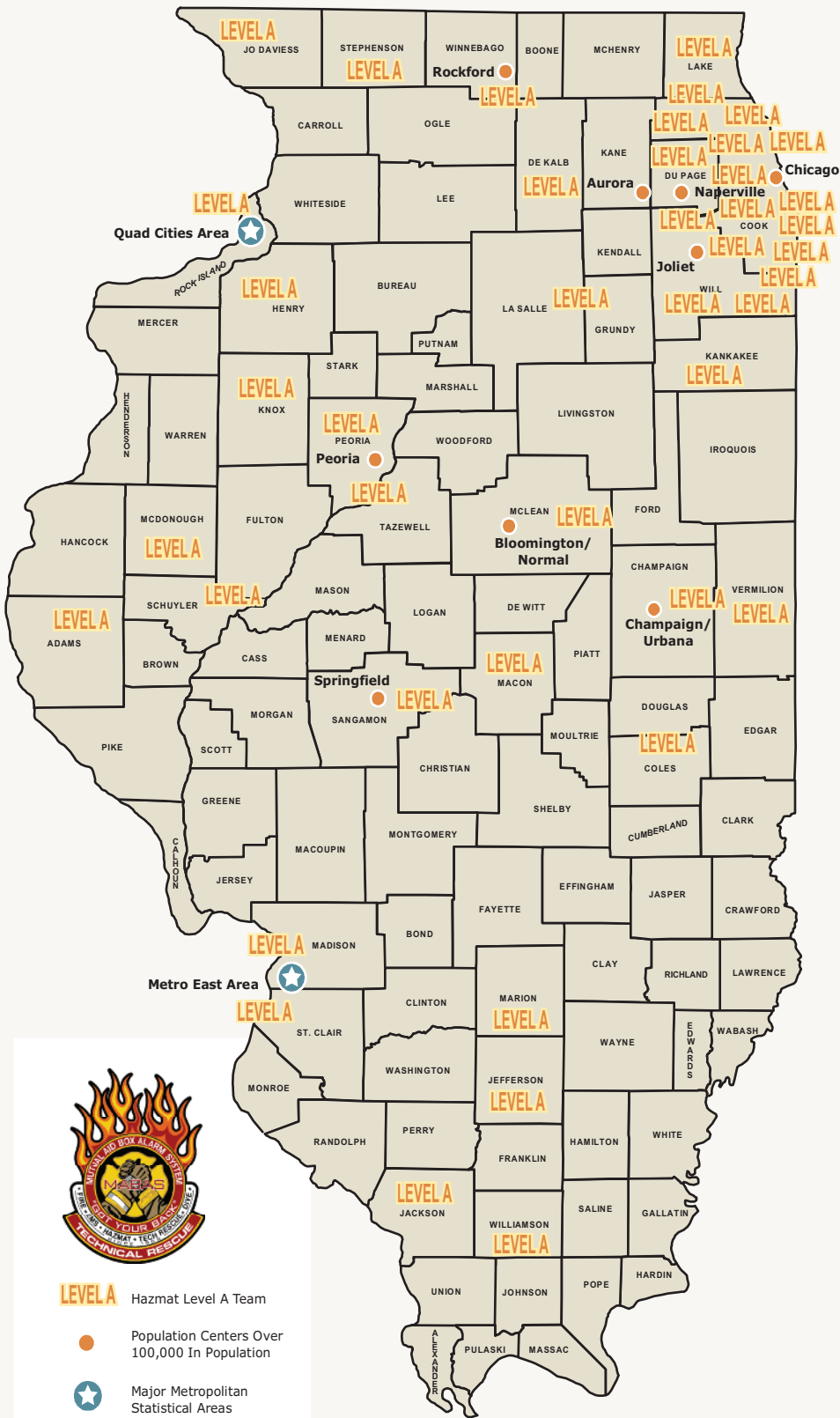
almost exclusively on preparing to respond to bioterrorism – which has already positioned Illinois as one of the best-prepared states – to one that works to improve the methods of communication across the state when disasters of any kind occur. Other task force committees deal with strategies for emergency response, coordinating that response among various law enforcement and emergency response agencies, and coordinating partnerships between the public and private sectors. These committees have been recognized for their achievements nationally, including receiving an Innovations in American Government award in 2007 for developing a system to share important information among law enforcement agencies in real time.

**Three Preparedness Initiatives: Mutual Aid, Intelligence and Communication**

The Illinois Law Enforcement Alarm System (ILEAS), the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) and the Illinois Public Health Mutual Aid System (IPHMAS) are three of the largest mutual aid organizations in the nation. These organizations – in which agencies depend upon help from each other in times of crisis – can only work when those involved are continually trained. Mutual aid in Illinois can become more effective by integrating representatives from these organizations and others – including the state Department of Transportation, the National Guard and the private sector – into the operations of the Statewide Terrorism Intelligence Center and other statewide emergency communications efforts.

The Illinois State Police, the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police, and other partners have developed the Statewide Terrorism Intelligence Center (STIC). This center coordinates all terrorism-related inquiries from law enforcement on a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week basis. The STIC recently created an Internet Crimes Unit that takes requests from law enforcement officials and from

Figure 1  
Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) - Hazmat Level A Teams

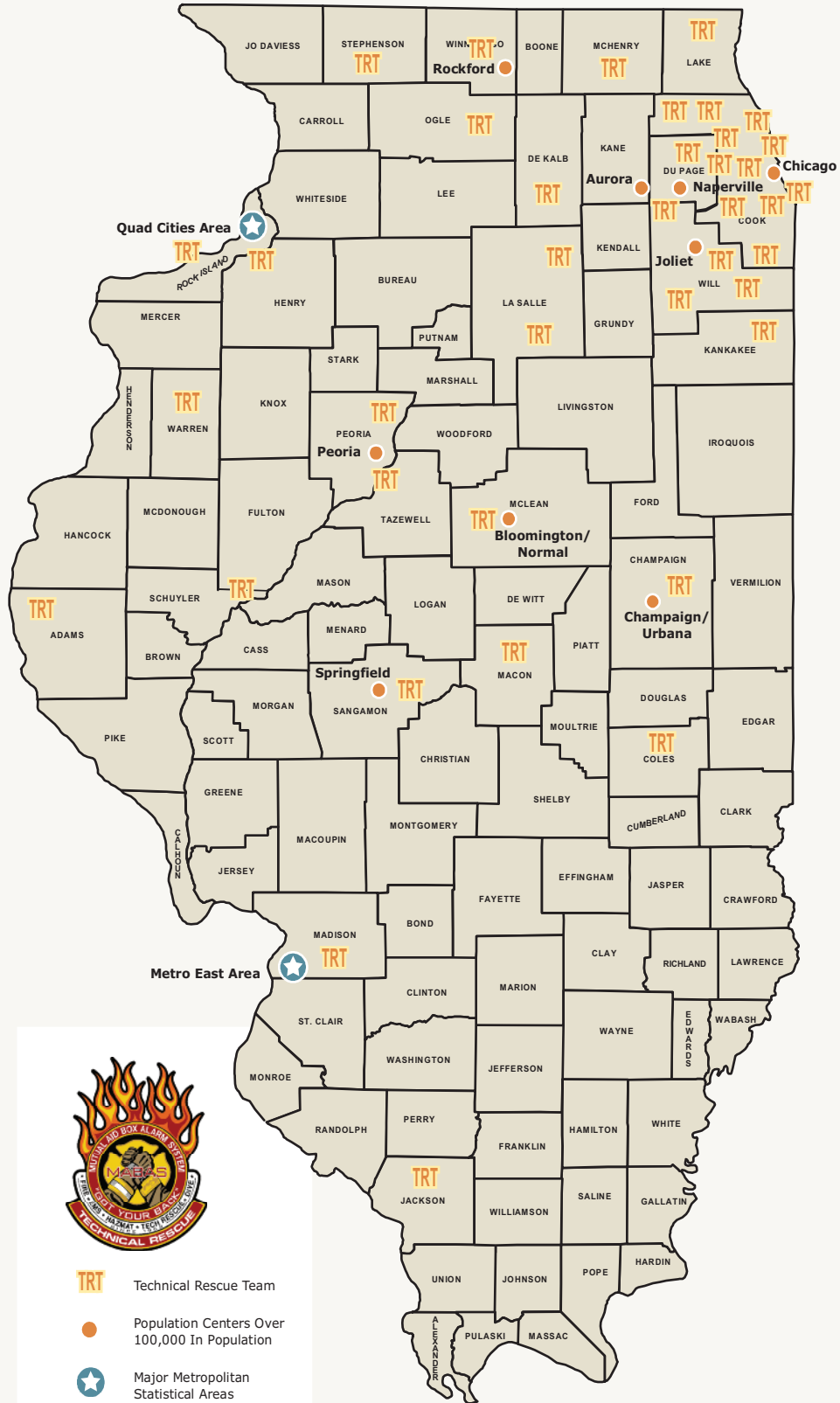


*From fiscal years 2002 through 2007, Illinois' average share of the total national Homeland Security Grant Program (combining the State Homeland Security Grant Program and the Urban Area Security Initiative) was 4.08 percent.*



Illinois is one of five states to have a senior intelligence analyst from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and is the first to include analysts from law enforcement, fire, public health, emergency management and Internet crimes to bolster counter-terrorism capabilities.

Figure 2  
Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) - Technical Rescue Teams (TRT)



the general public about incidents involving Internet fraud, sexual predators, and suspected intrusion of secure computer networks. Illinois is one of five states to have a senior intelligence analyst from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and is the first to include analysts from law enforcement, fire, public health, emergency management, and Internet crimes to bolster counter-terrorism capabilities. In addition, there is a direct link between the STIC and Chicago's Office of Emergency Management and Communication. Using technological advances, including portal, web conferences, and virtual workspaces, the STIC will expand partnerships to enhance preparedness across Illinois.

The ITTF continues to implement a statewide communications platform that allows various agencies' voice and data systems to communicate with each other. This program also has distributed more than 2,800 sophisticated emergency communications radios to public safety agencies. Nine Illinois Telecommunications Emergency Communications Systems (ITECS) are now operating across the state. Future endeavors include strengthening emergency communications on college campuses. An initiative is in progress to purchase additional radios that will provide colleges with the capability to access the shared communications network used by responders during an emergency. The ITTF will identify training needs and implement programs that will help campus security prepare for, respond to, and recover from security incidents on campus.

#### **Animals in Disasters – An Illinois Distinction**

In 2006, the Regional Institute for Community Policing, a unit of the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois, received a grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to help prepare the nation for catastrophic events involving animals; the first award of its kind. The Pets Evacuation and Trans-

portation Standards (PETS) Act requires that state and local emergency preparedness plans address the needs of individuals with household pets and service animals following a major disaster or emergency. Communities are now compelled to prepare for individuals to evacuate with their companion or service animals in order to be eligible for Category B FEMA Public Assistance Grant funding. Because of the 2006 PETS Act, planning for pets and emergencies is now part of the local, state and federal preparedness efforts in Illinois.

#### **Preparedness at Illinois Nuclear Power Plants**

Illinois has more nuclear power plants than any other state, with 11 operating nuclear reactors at six nuclear power plants and two reactors that have been shut down. Each plant stores its own spent nuclear fuel.<sup>1</sup> The Illinois Emergency Management Agency is responsible for monitoring the reactors and has several programs in place to protect Illinois in the event of a nuclear incident.

IEMA constantly inspects all of the reactors whether they are operating or, in the case of the Zion nuclear plant, closed down. It uses an integrated, computer-based system that continually monitors the reactors and is capable of identifying and measuring the presence of radioactive materials in the surrounding environment.

IEMA also places a full-time state inspector at each power station and coordinates a program that ensures pressurized systems in the plants meet state and federal standards and the American Society of Mechanical Engineers Code. A third program involves quarterly joint inspections with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. These inspections ensure compliance with state laws and that any release of radiation is reported to the state.

The state's Radiological Task Force (RTF) responds to nuclear power plant and other radiological emergencies in Illinois. The



<sup>1</sup> [http://www.eia.doe.gov/cneaf/nuclear/page/at\\_a\\_glance/states/statesil.html](http://www.eia.doe.gov/cneaf/nuclear/page/at_a_glance/states/statesil.html).



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RTF consists of the Radiological Emergency Assessment Center (REAC) in Springfield and the Radiological Assessment Field Team (RAFT). The REAC provides an assessment of the event, determines if there is any radiation danger, and then recommends action to the State Emergency Operations Center. The field team is dispatched to the affected area to measure radiation, collect environmental samples, ensure contamination control and sample chain of custody, analyze samples, and coordinate with other field responders. The RTF also sends personnel to monitor the public for signs of radioactive contamination and to assist the Red Cross and hospitals in establishing contamination control protocols. Federal authorities also respond to any incident at the state's nuclear reactors.

#### **Areas of Vulnerability**

By most measures, Illinois is well prepared to handle emergencies of all kinds. Yet there remain several areas of vulnerability for policymakers to consider.

The state must strengthen its transportation infrastructure and its systems for monitoring the movement of freight. Illinois has adopted California's national-standard program for keeping an inventory and assessing the state's critical infrastructure, but further steps need to be taken to protect roads and bridges. The Illinois Department of Transportation does have a program to equip bridges that have the highest traffic volumes with security cameras and fencing. Better protection also is needed on waterways and at rail freight yards, cargo storage areas and other critical sites. Illinois currently has two mobile Vehicle and Cargo Inspection Systems (VACIS), which use gamma rays to scan the contents of large trailers and shipping containers, but a third is needed. This could be permanently located at the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe's Center-Point intermodal shipping yard at Elwood, which has quickly become one of the

largest container transfer points in the world. Currently, shipping containers arriving from coastal shipping ports-of-entry are not being scanned. A new VACIS can only be considered if the Illinois Department of Transportation and the Illinois State Police have sufficient staff and resources to support its ongoing operation.

Also, the state could improve its anti-terrorism intelligence gathering and dissemination processes by: 1) hiring staff and funding technology enhancements to better analyze potential hazards, and 2) continuing to support efforts to increase intelligence sharing between the public and private sectors. Ongoing research continues to locate software that will provide better intelligence-gathering assistance for the STIC and other analysts.

Emergency communications across the state could be improved by: 1) securing backup emergency power for all priority emergency alert system sites, and 2) reviving the program to provide tone-alert radios at more public places to notify people of weather and other homeland security warnings. The ITTF should capitalize on new technology to expand the ways the public can be alerted to emergencies, including sending messages to mobile phones.

Finally, Illinois must activate the fiber-optic network along Illinois highways to complete the connection between St. Louis, Chicago, and population centers across Illinois for video, data-sharing, and other communications. This would allow communication centers, the STIC and other monitoring stations to receive real-time images from disaster scenes to aid in the deployment of police, fire, medical, and other first-response personnel.

#### **Summary**

Illinois is a safer state against natural and technological disasters and acts of terror-

ism today than it was after the attacks on September 11, 2001, or when Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast. In fact, the Office of the Inspector General in the Department of Homeland Security has recommended that several practices and procedures now used in Illinois be adopted by other states as “best practices.” These include:

- *Establishing the Illinois Terrorism Task Force:* Although a requirement of all states for receiving federal homeland security grant funds, Illinois’ 65-member Terrorism Task Force was cited as the most inclusive and efficient body for establishing a strategic vision for the state and for consensus-building among its membership.
- *Illinois’ Mutual Aid Organizations:* Illinois stands alone among states for establishing statewide mutual aid organizations for fire responders, law enforcement, emergency management, public health, and 9-1-1 centers. These organizations not only share their current resources, but also efficiently distribute new grants for safety equipment and other needs.
- *Illinois’ Special State and Local Teams:* State and local operations teams with specialized equipment and training are placed across the state to help ensure a prompt response to any emergency or disaster.

But best practices may not be enough when a disaster happens. Whether that disaster is a terrorist attack or a tornado, the outcome will be only as good as the training received by first responders and by the tactical response that follows in the hours and days after the event. Illinois has used its resources over the past decade to prepare well, but the need to stay prepared is constant and policymakers must not forget that vulnerabilities exist and take the necessary steps to make the state safer.

**Note:** The Ready Illinois website ([www.Ready.Illinois.gov](http://www.Ready.Illinois.gov)) contains extensive in-

formation residents can use to prepare for and respond to disasters affecting their families. Should an event occur, the “Current Emergency Information” component of the website would be activated for the posting of public information such as shelter locations, road closures and other contact information for public consumption.



**Patricia S. Rushing** is director of the Regional Institute of Community Policing, a unit of the Institute of Government and Public Affairs. Dr. Rushing was instrumental in securing the first-of-its-kind funding to address issues of animal safety in disasters and is involved in domestic violence and animal abuse, ethics, and public safety initiatives. During a 26-year career with the Illinois State Police, Rushing was instrumental in the development of the human resource plan, as well as the organization’s Leadership and Management Institute.



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