

# EDUCATION

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## Educating our Guardians

By Daniel J. Kaniewski, Assistant Vice President for Homeland Security, George Washington University

As the recent storms that led to widespread power and communications outages demonstrate, disaster preparedness in the public and private sectors is lacking in the Washington area. The long-term solution to this problem is neither political nor technological. Rather it is education that will improve the nation's resilience for disasters in the future.

I teach a course in emergency management at the George Washington University, where I stress an "all-hazards" approach to managing disasters. Simply put, all-hazards means that whether it is a man-made disaster, such as a terrorist attack or industrial accident, for example, or a natural disaster, the overall response effort is the same --cities, states, and the federal governments embrace common skills and doctrine.

However, as seen with the recent DC storms, government can only do so much. Eighty percent of the nation's critical infrastructure is owned or operated by the private sector, thus it is imperative that the private sector be engaged in preparedness efforts prior to an event so that a response to an incident will be effective.

Two infrastructure providers in the DC area, Pepco and Verizon, must be full partners with governments in the Washington area—otherwise the results can be disastrous. For example, 911 centers are operated by local public safety agencies, but to function they require robust electrical and communications networks. Should the

privately-run networks fail, 911 calls will go unanswered. Such a situation imperils citizens and erodes confidence in government.

To instill the lessons from this disaster, we must educate our current and future public safety, emergency management and homeland security leaders. This includes offering emergency management and homeland security programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. A handful of undergraduate and graduate emergency management programs and an ever increasing number of homeland security programs exist. These programs should stress the all-hazards approach and provide the tools necessary for students to navigate complex coordination challenges, such as those with the private sector.

But we should not simply focus on the particular circumstances of the last disaster; rather, we should contemplate what the future could hold. Consider, for example, if the power and communications failures were not due to Mother Nature, but instead the result of a malicious cyber-attack. The consequences could have been even more devastating. It is thus imperative that stakeholders stay ahead of the curve and understand emerging threats. To this end, several area universities, including GW, offer degrees in cyber security.

Preparing for increasingly complex contingencies in the future should be a priority. To do so, we must provide the best educational opportunities possible for those responsible for ensuring our continued resilience as a nation.

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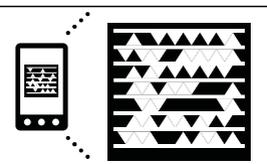
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