

Architects formally acknowledged in the FEMA National Incident Management System

An AIA Disaster Assistance Committee special advisory

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Background

Utilizing our inherent understanding of building systems and the safety requirements of occupants, architects are ideally positioned to assist in times of crisis. Across the country AIA's Safety Assessment Program (SAP) trained architects work within states when called upon to assess the condition and fitness of damaged structures, known as a building safety assessment. The trained volunteers engage with local jurisdictions to address the sheltering needs of the community as it is often critical that people shelter in their homes. Yet each state has been doing this differently because until now there hasn't been a nationally recognized framework for the roles, qualifications and protocol for these building safety assessment teams.

Modifications to the Stafford Act & the National Incident Management System

On October 5, 2018, the Federal Disaster Recovery Reform Act (DRRA) was passed into law; amending the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act) and modifying the Pre-disaster Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. The Act required the federal government to work with architects and engineers to develop best practices for building-safety assessments that focused on a building's structural integrity and post disaster livability; resulting in [*FEMA P-2055 Post-disaster Building Safety Evaluation Guidance*](#) (November 2019).

Additionally, Section 1241 (b) of the DRRRA directed FEMA to “develop a National Incident Management System (NIMS) Resource Typing (RT) Building Safety Assessment Team and associated job titles.” To accomplish that mandate FEMA recruited a group of stakeholders – including AIA – to revise, update, and enhance the Resource Type definitions associated with post-disaster building evaluations. Thanks to this effort, the following new and revised resource types have been published:

- [Post-Disaster Building Safety Evaluation Strike Team Leader](#)
- [Post-Disaster Building Safety Evaluation Strike Team Technical Supervisor](#)
- [Post-Disaster Building Safety Evaluator](#)
- [Post-Disaster Complex Architectural System Condition Evaluator](#)
- [Post-Disaster Complex Structural Condition Evaluator](#)

These resource types define the roles of licensed design professionals and others in the disaster response effort.

Architects can qualify to serve as:

- Evaluators
- Strike Team Leaders
- Technical Supervisors
- Complex Architectural System Condition Evaluators

The Complex Architectural System Condition Evaluator is envisioned to work together with the Complex Structural Condition Evaluator in the assessment of large, complex buildings, such as high-rises, multi-use facilities, and buildings with special functions (such as hospitals or prisons). The engineer brings their knowledge which addresses structural stability while the architect addresses life safety (egress, active and passive fire safety), MEP, and accessibility concerns.

Why the new NIMS resource types matter

When a disaster overwhelms the capability of a state to respond, the state can request a Federal Disaster Declaration. A federal declaration authorizes funding of FEMA’s Public Assistance Grant Program. This program provides funds for the jurisdictions impacted by the disaster. This includes funding for building safety inspections, whether from in-state resources, or for intrastate assistance through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), a national mutual aid program.

Over many years FEMA has worked to establish a methodology that enables jurisdictions and organizations to work together to share resources, integrate tactics, and act collaboratively when disasters strike. The FEMA National Incident Management System (NIMS) creates shared vocabulary, systems, and processes that enable jurisdictions and organizations to act collaboratively when disasters strike. NIMS Resource typing definitions establish a common language and defines a resource's minimum capabilities for the mobilization of resources.¹ For a community to be able to request assistance (resources) through the system, the resource must be listed in the FEMA NIMS Resource Typing Library. Prior to the recent update to the Typing Library *architects were not recognized as a resource* that could be called on (requested) to assist with building assessments.

Now that architects are recognized and officially defined by NIMS, their assistance can be requested anywhere in the country (including U.S. territories) through EMAC. Inclusion in the NIMS Resource Typing Library increases visibility, creates awareness of architect's skills, and advances the profession as a useful asset in times of trouble.

What the new NIMS resource types mean for AIA State Disaster Assistance Programs

The National NIMS resource types represent the *minimum criteria* recommended for the associated capability and therefore provide guidance on training requirements. Training requirements may vary by state, but according to NIMS, training for a [post-disaster building safety evaluator](#) includes:

- One of the following:
 - ICC When Disaster Strikes Institute
 - Cal OES Safety Assessment Program (SAP); *this is the baseline for AIA's Safety Assessment Program and completion of the AIA program meets this standard*
 - ATC-20 and ATC-45 programs with additional concepts of operations trainings
- And completion of select FEMA ICS courses. These must be completed [online](#), individually, by each AIA disaster assistance volunteer:
 - IS-100: Introduction to the Incident Command System (2 hours)
 - IS-200: ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents (4 hours)
 - IS-700: National Incident Management System, an introduction (3.5 hours)
 - IS-800: National Response Framework, an introduction (3 hours)

¹ *NIMS Components – Guidance and Tools*. FEMA. 2020. <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/nims/components>

Importantly, AIA's Disaster Assistance program previously recognized the ICS courses as recommended, but now will require them. Credentialing is essential in validating the identity and attributes (e.g., affiliations, skills, or privileges) of emergency personnel. AIA State Disaster Assistance Programs will need to align members' experience level and training with the defined NIMS resource types.

What was the role of AIA in this policy change?

Thanks in large part to the efforts of Rachel Minnery, FAIA, and the AIA Federal Relations staff, the AIA proposed and successfully lobbied for the language regarding Building Safety Assessments that was eventually included in the federal Disaster Recovery Reform Act (DRRA). The AIA was successful in ensuring the inclusion of two key provisions:

- including architects in NIMS Resource Typing Definition for Building Safety Assessment Team
- defining building safety assessments as beyond structural integrity to include livability

The AIA's efforts, from proposing the DRRA draft legislation language, to helping write new NIMS resource type definitions, to working to produce the Post-disaster Building Safety Evaluation Guide (P2055) are unlocking opportunities for architects to volunteer to assist our communities. These efforts advance the AIA's mission and goals and provide a method for members to meet (and exceed) their ethical obligation to "render public interest professional services, including pro bono services ... after disasters or in other emergencies."

Key Takeaways:

- The new NIMS resource types may or may not impact your state's qualifications and protocol. We encourage you to familiarize yourself with the new guidance and confer with your state emergency leaders.
- NIMS requires completion of certain Incident Command System (ICS) training as a minimum qualification. These training courses total approximately 12.5 hours of additional study, and can be [found free online](#).
- NIMS includes several new definitions and roles for architects including Strike Team Leader, Technical Supervisor, and Complex Architectural Condition Evaluator

- Post-Disaster Building Safety Evaluator resource type requires “four years of experience in building design or analysis... or general construction;” suggesting that contractors may serve as Type 3 Post-Disaster Building Safety Evaluators .
- “A bachelor’s in civil or structural engineering or... architecture or related field” may be substituted for the required four years of experience at the AHJ’s discretion; enabling unlicensed building professionals to serve as Type 3 Post-Disaster Building Safety Evaluators.