Matt Cowles

Deputy Director, National Emergency Management Association (NEMA)

Speaker Bio:

Matt Cowles is the Deputy Director of the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA), where he oversees strategic priorities and leads the association's advocacy efforts in Washington, D.C. representing state emergency management directors to federal agencies and Congress. From 2015 to 2017, he serves on the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee's Homeland Security Subcommittee, managing a $23 billion portfolio covering FEMA, the U.S. Coast Guard, and DHS health and security programs. He has played a key role in advancing national emergency management priorities, including security critical grant funding, expanding public safety communications, and supporting mutual aid initiatives. Cowles also contributes to the Center for Homeland Defense and Security, providing strategic guidance and participating in executive-level homeland security seminars. With prior roles at DOJ, DHS, and in Michigan state politics, Cowles brings deep experience in policy, program management, and emergency preparedness.

Presentation:

FEMA, Congress, and the Future of Emergency Management Policy

In the wake of the 2026 midterm elections, Washington's shifting political landscape raises important questions about the path forward for emergency management policy. Join IAEM Director of Government Affairs Thad Huguley, IAEM President Josh Morton, NEMA Director of Government Affairs Matt Cowles, and longtime emergency management policy expert Mike Herman for a candid discussion about the future of FEMA, congressional efforts to reform federal disaster policy, and the challenges and opportunities facing the emergency management community. Drawing on decades of experience navigating federal policy, the panelists will offer insights into the political and legislative landscape, what lies ahead, and how emergency managers can help shape the future of the profession.