

Paul Downing, MA

Director, OEM, Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida

Speaker Bio:

Paul Downing is the Director of the Office of Emergency Management for the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida and a retired U.S. Army veteran with more than 22 years of military service. He has led tribal emergency management programs in both Florida and the Northeast, including disaster response, continuity planning, hazard mitigation, homeland security coordination, and federal preparedness initiatives.

Paul previously served as Director of Emergency Management for the Seminole Tribe of Florida and as a Tribal Executive representative on FEMA's National Advisory Council. His work focuses on strengthening tribal preparedness capabilities, integrating tribal sovereignty into emergency management policy, and improving coordination between tribal, state, and federal partners.

He recently completed the Master's Program at the Center for Homeland Defense and Security at the Naval Postgraduate School, where his research focused on structural inequities in homeland security grant funding for tribal nations. Paul is a frequent speaker on tribal emergency management, continuity, mitigation, and intergovernmental coordination. He is also a qualified instructor for the FEMA's EMPP, EMU Tribal Curriculum, RDPC, and ICS courses.

Presentation:

Sovereignty and Preparedness in Tribal Emergency Management

Tribal nations face many of the same hazards as surrounding jurisdictions, yet often operate within vastly different legal, geographic, and resource environments. This session provides a practitioner-focused discussion on the realities of tribal emergency management, including sovereignty considerations, funding challenges, continuity planning, intergovernmental coordination, and operational preparedness in underserved communities.

Drawing from real-world experience leading emergency management programs for tribal governments in Florida and the Northeast, the presentation examines how

tribal emergency managers navigate federal and state systems while maintaining sovereign governance structures and protecting culturally unique communities.

The session will also explore recurring gaps in preparedness funding, the importance of relationship-building before disasters occurs, and practical strategies for improving coordination between tribal, local, state, and federal partners. Attendees will gain a clearer understanding of how tribal emergency management differs from traditional municipal or county models and why meaningful inclusion of tribal nations strengthens national preparedness as a whole.

This presentation is intended for emergency managers, planners, homeland security professionals, and public safety leaders seeking a better operational understanding of tribal emergency management and intergovernmental collaboration.