



PUBLIC WORKS PROFESSIONALS ARE FIRST RESPONDERS

Public works professionals play an essential role in emergency response and recovery alongside law enforcement, fire, and EMS partners. From the start of an incident through full community restoration, public works professionals are on the scene, providing vital support and protecting essential services. Emergency events include natural disasters, manmade events, and even civil unrest. Once the emergency has passed, it is often public works who are responsible for restoring critical services and getting a community back to normal.



The federal government and some states recognize public works as first responders through official actions, including:

FEDERAL ACTION

2003—The enactment of Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD) 8, the federal government recognized public works as first responders. In 2011, Presidential Policy Directive 8 (PPD-8) became the National Preparedness Goal, <https://www.fema.gov/pdf/prepared/npg.pdf>

2019—The US Senate passed Senate Concurrent Resolution 15 (S.Con.Res.15), "Expressing support for the designation of October 28, 2019, as Honoring the Nation's First Responders Day." Public works is specifically included in the resolution and First Responder Day is since recognized annually on October 28. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-concurrent-resolution/15/text>

STATE ACTION

2024—Vermont passed Act 143, formerly S.310, <https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2024/Docs/ACTS/ACT143/ACT143%20Act%20Summary.pdf> to officially recognize public works professionals as first responders and expanded the definition of "first responder" within the state to include public works.

2022—New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu signed into law SB325, formally recognizing public works employees as first responders. <https://legiscan.com/NH/text/SB325/id/2580558>. New Hampshire also adopted HB 536, "An Act relative to death benefits for public works employees killed in the line of duty, and relative to workers' compensation offsets for certain retirement system benefits." <https://legiscan.com/NH/text/HB536/id/2580983>

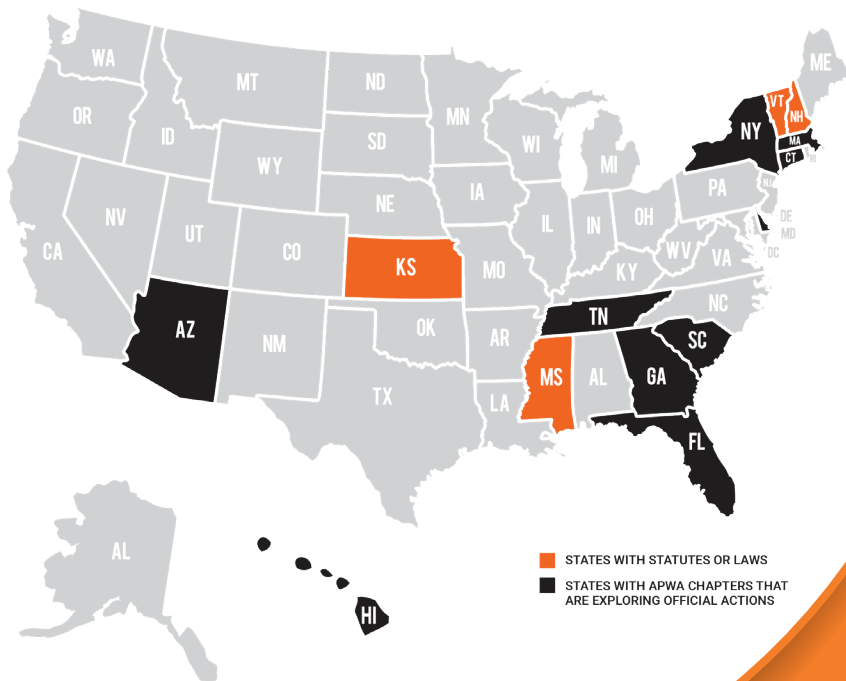
2021 Kansas State Statutes 48-949 https://ksrevisor.gov/statutes/chapters/ch48/048_009_0049.html includes public works personnel in the definition of Emergency responder.

2010—Mississippi, with House Bill (HB) 664, recognized public works professionals as first responders. <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2010/html/HB/0600-0699/HB0664PS.htm>

Refer to the APWA website for the latest information.



FIRST RESPONDER ACTION AT THE STATE LEVEL



The National Incident Management System (NIMS) <https://training.fema.gov/nims/> includes public works along with police, fire, and public health in National Incident Management System, 3rd edition ([fema.gov](https://www.fema.gov)).

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO INCREASE RECOGNITION OF PUBLIC WORKS AS FIRST RESPONDERS

- Establish a chapter-level public works awareness committee.
- Arrange networking sessions with public works professionals to share ideas, experiences, and public works first responder success stories.
- Put together a short presentation/video to share with elected officials at the local, county, state, and federal levels highlighting the vital role public works professionals perform as first responders.

Here is sample language to consider when reaching out to elected officials:

“The Honorable (elected official),

As a member of APWA, I am seeking your support for legislation or official action at the (city, county, state) that would recognize public works professionals alongside fellow first responders. The federal government has taken steps through Presidential Policy Directive (PPD-8): National Preparedness to recognize public works as first responders. Other states and local governments have also adopted similar measures. I would greatly appreciate your sharing any such language at the (city, county, or state). If language does not exist, are you aware of any efforts to introduce such language, and if so, how can APWA be of assistance to advance these efforts?”

Refer to the APWA website for the latest information.



Contact APWA Sr. Government Affairs Manager Marty Williams at (202) 218-6732 or mwilliams@apwa.org, or email the Emergency Management Committee EMC@apwa.org with questions or for assistance.