



# SENATOR MATT BARTLE

**District 8** – Capitol Building, Room 319 Jefferson City, MO 65101

**Column for Week of:**  
**September 10, 2007**

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## **The State Emergency Management Agency – Protecting Missouri from Natural and Man-made Threats**

Just outside of Jefferson City, buried 18 feet underground, lies the nerve center of the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA). This facility, the State Emergency Operations Center, or SEOC, is a state-of-the-art facility with the ability to receive information from the field and from local governments via landline, cell and satellite phones, and radio communications.

In times of crisis such as natural disasters, terrorist attack, or other emergencies, this facility is alive with activity as members of Missouri's law enforcement, first responder, and military communities work to coordinate responses to any threat to the safety of citizens of the Show-Me state.

Such was the scene six years ago on the morning of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, as agency emergency responders automatically reported to the SEOC. On that fateful morning the Legislature was scheduled to convene in Jefferson City (as we did again this past week) for the constitutionally-mandated veto session. The governor convened the House and Senate for a rare joint session to address the Legislature, but much of the activity that morning was centered on the SEOC just a few miles east of the capitol building, where Missouri's civilian and military planners were hard at work trying to determine what threats might yet materialize. As we all remember, in those first hours following the cowardly attacks on American citizens, the size and scope of the threat was not known, and the SEOC was abuzz with activity trying to assess the threat. Video feeds from news outlets covering the events in New York and Washington were projected on the walls at the front of the underground bunker, creating a surreal atmosphere as the scope of the attack became apparent.

Twenty-four hours a day, SEMA is on duty to respond to both natural and man-made threats. Its mission is to protect the lives and property of all Missourians when major disasters threaten any region of the state and to work with local governments to provide training and assistance in the preparation of disaster response plans.

Natural disasters include major snow and ice storms, floods, tornadoes, and other severe weather, as well as the threat of a serious earthquake along Missouri's New Madrid Fault. Our state's worst-case scenario from a natural disaster standpoint would be a catastrophic earthquake along the New Madrid Seismic Zone. While the 47 counties along the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers

are most at risk from an earthquake, such a tragedy would affect every corner of the state and our own county would certainly have a role in the disaster response.

Manmade disasters for which SEMA prepares may include hazardous material incidents, nuclear power plant accidents, and other radiological hazards. Since September 11<sup>th</sup>, SEMA has had an active role in terrorism response planning. To keep Missouri safe, 28 Homeland Security Response Systems Teams have been established, equipped, and trained to respond to possible terror attacks.

As we commemorate the sixth anniversary of our nation's worst domestic attack, we pause to reflect on the work of the fine professionals at SEMA and our local law enforcement officers and first responders who daily put their lives on the line to protect and serve the citizens of Missouri.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at [matt\\_bartle@senate.mo.gov](mailto:matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov) or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.