

Executive Order 12656

Synopsis

On November 18, 1988, following the election of George H.W. Bush as president, Ronald Reagan issued Executive Order No. 12656, entitled “Assignment of Emergency Preparedness Responsibilities.” The provisions of this executive order, which superseded two earlier EOs — ## 10421, (December 31, 1952) and 11490 (October 28, 1969) — would apply during a **national security emergency**: defined in the executive order as “**any occurrence**, including natural disaster, military attack, technological emergency, or other emergency, that **seriously degrades or seriously threatens the national security of the United States.**” (Emphasis added).

EO 12656 authorized dramatic increases to federal control over American life. For example:

- ! Each Federal department and agency was instructed to “**develop plans to set priorities and allocate resources among civilian and military claimants**” (Section 203(4));
- ! The Secretary of **Agriculture** was instructed to plan and provide for:
 - ! “**the domestic distribution of seed, feed, fertilizer, and farm equipment to agricultural producers**” (Section 301(1)) and
 - ! the allocation of “**water to be used in agricultural production and food processing** in national security emergencies” (Section 301(5));
- ! The Secretary of **Commerce** was instructed to:
 - ! participate in the preparation of “plans to **regulate and control exports and imports** in national security emergencies” (Section 401(6)) and
 - ! “provide for the **collection and reporting** of census information on **human and economic resources**, and maintain a capability to conduct **emergency surveys** to provide information on the status of these resources as required for national security emergencies” (Section 401(7));
- ! The Secretary of **Defense** was instructed to participate in the development of:
 - ! “plans for the **management, control, and allocation of all usable waters** from all sources within the jurisdiction of the United States” including all potable water (Section 501(6)) and

- ! “**procedures by which military assistance to civilian law enforcement authorities may be requested, considered, and provided**” (Section 501(12));

- ! The Secretary of **Energy** was instructed to participate in the development of “plans and operational systems for ... allocation of **all energy resource requirements** for national defense and essential civilian needs” (Section 701(1)(b));

- ! The Secretary of **Health & Human Services** was instructed to prepare **national plans** to set priorities and **allocate health, mental health, and medical services' resources** among **civilian** and **military** claimants (Section 801(3));

- ! The Secretary of **Labor** was instructed to develop plans and procedures for **wage, salary, and benefit caps** (Section 1201(2)); and

- ! The Secretary of **Transportation** was instructed to prepare to **direct**:
 - ! “Implementation of **priorities** for all transportation resource requirements for service, equipment, facilities, and systems” (Section 1401(2)(a));

 - ! the “allocation of transportation resource capacity” (Section 1401(2)(b));

 - ! “**management and control** of civil transportation resources and systems, including **privately owned automobiles, urban mass transit, intermodal transportation systems**, the National Railroad Passenger Corporation and the St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation” (Section 1401(2)(c)); and

 - ! coordinate “the **management of all Federal, State, city, local, and other highways, roads, streets, bridges, tunnels, and publicly owned highway maintenance equipment** to assure efficient and safe use of road space during national security emergencies” (Section 1401(5)).