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Retired Coast Guard Admiral highlights leadership symposium

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In a keynote address at the annual [International Association of Emergency Managers](#) Leadership Symposium, retired U.S. Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allen encouraged homeland security professionals to embrace complexity principles for preparedness and response.

The symposium, titled “Exploring Complexity: Sense-Making at the Confluence of Humanity, Technology and the Environment,” was hosted by the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security during the 64th annual International Association of Emergency Managers Conference in October in Savannah, Georgia.

“Admiral Allen is the perfect, real-world demonstration of the concepts we discussed in the symposium,” CHDS Director Glen Woodbury said. “Admiral Allen is the epitome of leading in complexity. He is able to tie the theory to practice, and vice versa, like no other leader I know. His experience, intellect and vision combine in perfect harmony to not just succeed through the most challenging events, but to exceed expectations at every level.”

Allen is currently Executive Vice President with the firm Booz Allen Hamilton. The 39-year Coast Guard veteran carries weighty credibility when it comes to complexity, having overseen federal efforts during hurricanes Katrina and Rita as well as serving as incident commander during the response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.



Thad Allen

“I can think of no one more qualified to inspire leadership in our community than Admiral Thad Allen,” said Nancy Suski, a [Georgetown University](#) professor who was on the symposium planning committee. “He speaks from years of public service and real-world experience. His message that ‘nothing is produced in terms of outcomes to critical problems or crisis these days that is not co-produced’ and his call for unity of effort and a sense of shared responsibility for outcomes is a rallying cry for future leaders in emergency management.”

Complexity is a common theme among pressing issues facing emergency managers: unprecedented population growth, global migration to urban centers, increasing reliance on public services. Coupled with climate, social and economic changes those issues will shape the world we live in, Suski added.

“The IAEM Symposium provided an excellent venue with presentations and discussions that will enable the emergency management community to be better informed and equipped to work together for the common good,” she noted.

During the symposium Suski, joined by Jessica Grannis of the Georgetown University Climate Center, delivered a presentation titled “Climate Change: A Global Perspective.”

Additional presentations included Woodbury, who led discussions on technology, future applications and complexity in emergency management, along with CHDS director of special projects Dawn Wilson who led a session on human activity. ELP alum and former FEMA official David Kaufman, now with the research firm [CNA](#), presented on emergency management trends.

For the past five years, IAEM and CHDS have partnered to present the symposium, scheduled in conjunction with the annual conference and sponsored by [FEMA](#).

“Our relationship with IAEM keeps us connected to the broader discipline of emergency management,” Woodbury noted. “It helps us test our ideas and curriculum with real world practitioners. Their annual conference is an excellent setting for this symposium.”

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