

A disaster declaration is a formal statement by the jurisdiction's chief public official that a disaster or emergency situation could exceed our local capabilities. It may be put into place when a disaster has occurred, or when a jurisdiction may be under imminent danger. Such is the case with COVID-19 and its rapid spreading capabilities. A disaster declaration allows the County Judge in our case, to take actions that are made possible through the Stafford Act and Section 418.108 of the Government Code, giving him the authority to control ingress and egress, order evacuations, and activate the appropriate recovery and rehabilitation aspects of our emergency management plan. This declaration also enables the county judge to spend funds, enter into emergency contracts, enact curfews, take other actions, and enact related fines and penalties.

The disaster declaration includes the entire county, not just county employees or offices. The cities of Madisonville and Midway fall under our interjurisdictional emergency management plan and are considering city-level disaster declarations, also. They, too, would then be able to enact the same activities as a county judge, but only to the extent of their own jurisdiction.

The County's emergency management plan is actually a series of plans that provide planning as an "all hazards approach". This means that basically law enforcement functions as law enforcement, fire department performs fire department duties, public works do their work, public health does public health etc., but with a much broader scope, and many times with assistance from outside of our jurisdiction. The plan addresses what local government is responsible for and provides general guidelines that allow us to utilize resources to focus on emergency operations; thereby allowing some routine functions to be suspended for the duration of the incident. This includes personnel, equipment, and supplies. This plan works directly with government legislation to allow for the orderly prevention, response, and recovery of a community.