
Statement for the Record

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Before the

**Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
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Region IV Preparedness for the 2009 Hurricane Season

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INTRODUCTION

Chairwoman Holmes Norton, Ranking Member Diaz-Balart and Representative Brown, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today in Florida.

I am Major Phil May and I am privileged to serve as the Region IV Administrator for the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In this role, I oversee FEMA's all-hazards efforts in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

As the primary FEMA representative and coordinator for a natural disaster-prone region, I oversee the planning, development, implementation and execution of all FEMA Region IV programs and initiatives. I have planning and operational oversight of special projects related to building a strong, capable, and responsive Region. My goal has been to make sure that FEMA Region IV has a robust infrastructure and all the appropriate resources, in terms of people, operational systems, planning and assessment tools, training, exercises, and equipment.

In addition, I work to foster the necessary relationships before disasters strike among the full spectrum of emergency management at all levels of government, the private sector, non-profit, and non-governmental entities. DHS Secretary Napolitano has made communications and outreach to tribal, state and local officials a high priority for the Regional Administrators. We are building strong ties on the ground before disasters strike, so that we are not exchanging business cards when we meet in the emergency operations center.

We work closely with our state counterparts to deliver effective disaster assistance to individuals and communities affected by a disaster. We call it "engaged partnership." That is the FEMA you saw in last fall's series of storms and hurricanes—Fay, Gustav, Hanna, and Ike. You saw it in the ice storm in Kentucky this winter and you see it now with the declarations just made for flooding in the Florida panhandle, Georgia and Alabama. Already In the first four months of 2009 across the country, FEMA has been working side by side with states on over 24 federally declared disasters, with several requests in process.

Within minutes of the President's declaration of a disaster, FEMA deploys operational and technical experts to the disaster site. FEMA leads the charge by coordinating an effective Unified Command with other federal agencies, and state and local officials, working together to help a devastated community.

FEMA's Region IV has been preparing for an active 2009 hurricane season. We have engaged our tribal, local, state and federal partners in thorough and informed hurricane planning. We are building FEMA Region IV's operational capabilities for a more effective response and recovery. Amplifying our stance on hurricane readiness will put FEMA in a good position to meet whatever challenges unfold.

BACKGROUND

FEMA continuously evaluates and learns from past hurricane seasons. While Hurricanes Katrina and Rita served as catalysts for major changes in federal policy, one of the most tangible results has been the strengthening of relationships among the Department of Homeland Security, FEMA, the private sector and all levels of government.

The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (PKEMRA) codified and expanded FEMA's regional office structure and strengthened our all-hazards operational framework and coordination capabilities. The ten Regional Administrators provided for in the Act report directly to the FEMA Administrator. Even prior to PKEMRA, three of the ten Regional Administrators, including myself, were career senior executives. Having career staff in three of the Regions allows for continuity of best-practices from administration to administration.

PKEMRA also provided for the creation of Regional Advisory Councils (RAC) and new regional Incident Management Assistance Teams, called IMATs. I am pleased to advise that Region IV was the first in the country to establish both of these strategic elements.

ENHANCED REGIONAL COORDINATION

Regional Advisory Council

Regional Advisory Councils provide valuable advice and recommendations to the Regional Administrator on regional emergency management issues as well as identify weaknesses or deficiencies in preparedness, protection, operations, assistance, and mitigation for state, local and tribal governments. This new structure has helped facilitate and further enhanced our national and regional planning efforts to include the areas of evacuation and catastrophic planning.

Defense Coordinating Officers

FEMA and the Department of Defense (DOD) have taken major strides to ensure that federal and military response is coordinated and seamless, especially at the regional level. DOD has assigned Regional Defense Coordinating Officers (DCO), supported by Defense Coordinating Elements (DCE), in each of FEMA's Regions to ensure military coordination at the Regional level. Currently, all 10 FEMA Regions are staffed by a DCO and support DCE.

Regional Communications

Among the lessons learned after the 2005 hurricane season, none has been taken more seriously than the breakdown of inter-agency and intra-agency communications. Communication among the federal government and our partners at the state and local levels is an integral part of emergency management. Over the past four years we have taken major steps to make sure this breakdown does not happen again.

Critical information is shared and problems are solved among the state and federal agency partners in the Regional Response Coordination Center, or RRCC. The RRCC identifies and coordinates response requirements, performs capabilities analysis, and reports on the status of federal disaster response operations. The Regional Response Coordination Center has representation from each of the 26 agencies with responsibilities under the National Response Plan as well as secure links to key offices around the country and the capability to bring state and local officials into the conversation.

During Katrina, we experienced a failure in communications with people in the field, which ultimately led to confusion. Let me give you an example of what was done this year in Kentucky when it had an ice storm, the worst natural disaster in the history of the state. Emergency responders were without communications in large areas of the state. We sent a FEMA strike force, known as the Mobile Emergency Response System (MERS), which provided communications links rapidly in the disaster-stricken areas.

MERS is made up of high-tech vehicles, highly trained crews and support equipment trailers. In Kentucky the MERS crews distributed hand-held radios to National Guard units to facilitate the distribution of commodities that FEMA was channeling into the state. They also worked with the Kentucky Division of Emergency Management to pinpoint areas of need, then erected three portable Land Mobile Radio towers (LMR), which were quickly moved to new areas as power was restored and needs changed. These units aided law enforcement, relief teams, medical professionals, as well as citizens. The MERS crews established four mobile command posts utilizing satellite-communications trucks, known as Mobile Emergency Operations Vehicles. These command posts were in Frankfort, the state capitol, and three staging areas that received and distributed emergency meals, water and other supplies from FEMA. We were able to provide rapid-patch phone and internet service to the Kentucky National Guard and a Red Cross shelter serving some 250 occupants.

These resources are an essential part of our communication strategy for dealing with any disaster we may face in the future.

Hurricane Preparedness

I know that at the National Hurricane Conference, Acting FEMA Administrator Nancy Ward briefed on FEMA's readiness for the hurricane season from the national perspective; however, please allow me to expand upon a few of its components and talk briefly about what we are doing here in Region IV to prepare.

Enhanced Response Teams

The IMAT teams support our efforts to meet the emergent needs of state and local jurisdictions. They have the capability to provide initial situational awareness for federal decision-makers as well as support the establishment of an initial unified command. Accurate information is critical to effective decision making. We need to know what is happening on the ground, as do our emergency management partners. Our IMAT teams provide this type of insight, through their communications unit which provides live video feed, digital images, and up-to-the-minute

reports of the situation on the ground. The IMAT teams provided real-time information to the RRCC and the state of Florida during last September's Tropical Storm Fay.

Our IMAT teams have been deployed nine times since May of 2008, both within RIV as well as to assist other regions. As a newly formed component of our disaster response and recovery team, RIV IMAT initiates efforts to build relationships and coordination with state and Region IV program and planning counterparts. IMAT team members have conducted state meetings, participated in training sessions, and assisted the states of Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi and Florida in table top and full scale functional exercises.

Evaluation Planning Initiatives and Coordination

Our Mass Evacuation Transportation Planning (METP) goal is to have updated state evacuation plans, with the focus this year on the Atlantic coast — South Carolina and Georgia. To make this effort work we coordinate with several key players such as Amtrak, as well as ambulance and bus contractors.

In 2008, the focus was the Gulf State region and we are confident those Gulf States' evacuation plans are functional and effective for the 2009 season.

Regional Exercise

To further strengthen our partnerships, FEMA is actively engaged with state governments in joint exercises to prepare for the 2009 hurricane season.

Region IV in partnership with the State of Florida is preparing for the Hurricane Suiter table top exercise scheduled May 28-June 3. Hurricane Suiter is a state-federal collaborative exercise to test selected systems and procedures prior to hurricane season. The National Hurricane Center of NOAA's National Weather Service, among other partners, are key collaborators in this effort. The exercise will provide Florida and Region IV with an opportunity to test new methodologies and approaches developed from the Florida Catastrophic Hurricane Planning process. Issues identified during the exercise will be addressed in June.

Activities will include:

- RIV RRCC activation. Staff will be assigned workstations and become familiar with time-oriented processes.
- The Region IV Liaison and both national and regional IMAT teams will be deployed to the Florida EOC to begin operational coordination efforts.
- The Region Air Operations Branch will be activated and will have a liaison deployed to the Florida EOC to address exercise issues related to air traffic control and resource management.
- FEMA headquarters will be activating a coordination cell to receive communications and informational updates.

- The Regional Evacuation Coordination Unit will be activated to test a new operational plan.

Pre-Scripted Mission Assignments

Other federal agencies have considerable resources and expertise that are critical to saving lives and providing major support to the disaster response and recovery process. FEMA identifies needs and tasks, and then “mission assigns” the appropriate agency to meet those needs. FEMA has developed Pre-scripted Mission Assignments (PSMAs) to standardize and speed the process. PSMAs are essentially checklists for federal, state and local partners that identify lists of required actions, necessary supplies, and instructions for getting supplies to the disaster site. Prior to Katrina, only 13 mission assignments were pre-scripted. FEMA now has 223 PSMAs with 31 federal agencies to facilitate a rapid response to a disaster.

Logistics

Over the last year, FEMA Region IV has greatly improved logistics capabilities. Commodities are now staged near a disaster in a National Logistics Staging Center, often a military base, where they can then be distributed to locations specified by the state for further distribution to the impacted area. Other initiatives supporting logistics are:

- Points of distribution (POD) training is available to all states and their Army National Guard forces.
- Region IV has collaborated in planning with the state’s logistics personnel to produce commodity distribution schedules that are specific to each state’s requirements and level of preparedness.
- Last year our Logistics staff piloted a cross-docking method of distribution. That has been refined and now offers the region and states a truly dedicated response fleet for commodity distribution at the incident level.
- The region’s state-assigned Logistics Liaisons are trained and proficient in the application of the new Logistics Capability Assessment Tool (LCAT). This new tool enables each state to measure their logistics capabilities at every level.

Lessons Learned from the 2008 hurricane season

Region IV updated the guide used by our Emergency Support Functions (ESF) during RRCC activations, as well as streamlined reporting with the IMAT and the NRCC. We have made improvements to the planning processes with our ESFs through review of our latest business practices. We are continuing to work with host states, states that have agreed to support disaster evacuees from other states, to provide solutions to issues that resulted from the 2008 hurricane season those host states provided support to the State of Louisiana.

CONCLUSION

I believe we have made real progress in strengthening relationships with our federal, state and local counterparts. As Nancy Ward stated, “If we do not plan together, train together and develop policies and procedures together, from the start, we as an emergency management community will never be as effective as we should be. It’s that simple.” Thank you for your time and I look forward to answering your questions.