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STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

**Submitted to the House Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure**

**Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and
Emergency Management**

United States House of Representatives

***A Review of Building Codes and Mitigation Efforts to Help Minimize
the Costs Associated with Natural Disasters***

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COMMITTEE

Introduction

Chairman Denham, Congresswoman Norton, Distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the citizens of West Virginia and all Americans that were so affected by this devastating storm known as a "derecho." I have been the Director of Homeland Security and Emergency Management for the State of West Virginia since 2005, and previously served for twenty-two years as a local, county and state official dealing with numerous disasters. I can honestly report to you I have never witnessed anything of this magnitude with the impact it had on our state. The wide spread devastation this storm produced in West Virginia was without precedent.

Strategic Overview

The June 29 derecho was one of the most destructive fast-moving severe thunderstorms in North American history. This massive storm brought straight-line winds of over 100mph and traveled close to 700 miles in just 10 hours. It devastated 10 states, left over 4 million homes and businesses without electricity, and resulted in the deaths of at least 22 people.

In West Virginia, we realized almost immediately that the damage would be particularly heavy. Before 10 pm on June 29, 2012 Governor Tomblin had already declared a state of emergency for all 55 counties. I had activated the state Emergency Operations Center and Adjutant General Hoyer had activated the West Virginia National Guard Joint Operations Center and the first compliment of Soldiers and Airmen.

For West Virginia, the major impact from the storm was the loss of electrical power, which at its peak included almost 700,000 customers, or roughly 1.6 million citizens. The power outages resulted in as many as 87 Public Community Water systems going offline, as well as hundreds of

families depending on privately-owned water wells without power to pump, leaving tens of thousands of Mountaineers without water. The suffering from this lack of power and water was compounded by the record heat wave that swept the country during the outage period. With high humidity and a heat index touching 110 degrees, our most vulnerable populations were particularly at risk. The lack of power impacted much more than the comfort of an air conditioner. With most gas stations inoperable, the few that had power saw lines of over two hours long. Grocery stores lost the ability to keep perishable foods and lost most business for over a week. Pharmacies were unable to dispense badly needed medications, cell phone towers became inoperative, and at least 50% of the states hospitals were on generator power.

Immediately, we set out to coordinate one of the largest response efforts in West Virginia history. Governor Tomblin took swift action in activating the State Emergency Operations Plan and requested federal assistance as soon as the magnitude of the storm was realized. Hundreds of state employees from almost every state agency reported for duty, ready to assist their fellow citizens. At least 50% of our Division of Highways support was solely dedicated to disaster response, clearing 1846 roads and delivering fuel to all 55 counties. Our Department of Health and Human Resources activated its health command center to assist. At one time during the storm, up to 40-50 percent of the hospitals reporting were on generator power, 38 long term health care facilities were on backup power, 79 percent of the community water systems in the state were impacted by the storm and at least 146 used generators in one or more water plants. Another major issue encountered during this event was the lack of our ability to acquire oxygen for patients who used concentrators. Lack of power caused them to switch to bottled oxygen which was in short supply and local home health providers were unable to meet the demand. FEMA also assisted us in acquiring additional oxygen. I have attached a report from DHHR on their activities, however, as with many agencies; they are still gathering data from this event.

I have attached slides that give an overview of the power outages across the state and the amount of people / customers affected. I would like to discuss the overall response to this disaster by organization. This list is not all inclusive as we are still working on the final report.

Response

FEMA

The FEMA response to this disaster was immediate. From my notification to FEMA June, 30, 2012 at 3 a.m. relief supplies and personnel began arriving within six hours. FEMA established two Incident Support Bases, one in Morgantown and one with the National Guard at the 130th Airbase in Charleston, WV. These two sites had commodities and began distribution by 5p.m. on July 1, 2012. Throughout the duration of this event, FEMA personnel were extremely helpful and responsive to our needs. The following table shows commodities supplied by FEMA to supplement commodities purchased by the state and those donated.

COMMODITIES	Shipped	Received	Issued
Generators	97	97	58
Water (liters)	2,592,000	2,592,000	2,246,000
Food MRE	669,073	669,073	550,000
Infant Kits	20 kits	20 kits	13 kits

Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management

The West Virginia Emergency Operations Center focused on immediate response determining initial impacts to the counties and their needs. Even with the large volume of communication systems not functioning our Statewide Interoperable Radio Network (SIREN) allowed us to have solid and reliable communications throughout the

emergency. On Saturday, June 30, 2012 we knew certain that the storm had directly and severely effected 53 of 55 counties in our state. The initial requests from the counties was to help provide emergency power to hospitals, public utilities, and establish shelters for citizens. Our office coordinated the delivery and requests for the affected counties. Our staff went above and beyond to assist our citizens and to ensure the overall response was coordinated. These “behind the scenes” workers receive little credit but do yeoman’s work to care for our citizens. I thank and commend them for their hard work.

National Guard

Among the most impressive response efforts came from our citizen Soldiers and Airmen of the West Virginia National Guard. Over 700 guardsmen dispersed throughout the state to provide life sustaining supplies and even do door-to-door checks in 34 counties. They drove over 400,000 miles delivering 2.5 million bottles of water, over half a million meals, and 437,000 bags of badly needed ice. As we have come to expect from our Guardsmen, they worked 18 hour days in unbearable heat, and did so without complaint, even though most left their own struggling families in order to serve others. I want to thank General Hoyer and the men and women of our West Virginia National Guard for their dedication, hard work and commitment to the Citizens of our State, and as Governor Tomblin will tell you, they are an invaluable asset and without them states could not respond to a disaster such as we just faced.

Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD)

Volunteer agencies became a critical component of our response. Agencies such as the Red Cross, Southern Baptist, Catholic Charities, Citizen Emergency Response Teams (CERT) and others too numerous to mention, down to the average citizen, provided invaluable assistance to

our citizens. Many of these organizations continue to work in stricken areas to meet a variety of unmet needs.

Private Sector

The support from the Private Sector was tremendous. Many companies contributed supplies such as water and food and worked side by side with us to help distribute these to our citizens. Our interaction with agencies such as the West Virginia Oil Marketers and Grocers Association were a tremendous support system for the state. At times, when fuel became an issue due to stations not having power to pump gasoline, they were able to coordinate delivery of fuel to stations with power to ensure an uninterrupted supply. In addition, working with their members and others, they were able to coordinate the donation of supplies to those in need. Partnerships fostered through our Critical Infrastructure Program as well as personal relationships developed through years of working together helped bring this valuable resource to the table. This is just one example of the private sector stepping up to assist the citizens of West Virginia.

Critical Infrastructure

Restoration of the functions of Critical infrastructure is the key to beginning the recovery from any disaster. Loss of key resources such as water, sewer, health care and communications impacts us and has a crippling affect on our daily lives. During the course of this response, we worked with numerous health care, private and public sector entities that provided critical services to our citizens. Our priorities for providing backup power were to hospitals, nursing faculties, water and sewer plants and public safety emergency communications including 911 centers. Although many hospitals have backup generator capabilities, many will not provide power to the entire facility including their heating and air conditioning systems. Even though essential functions could be

maintained, temperatures in patient rooms and other areas of the hospitals reached unbearable levels. Many water and sewer treatment facilities did not have back up power or the necessary facilities to accept a generator without modification. In addition, many did not readily know their power needs which caused delays while assessments were done to determine the appropriate generator for the facility. Information provided by two of the major utilities that serving West Virginia show that 226 transmission lines were replaced, 1,457 transformers were replaced, 2,328 poles: and 5,030 cross arms were replaced. Current numbers show that 8,875 total personnel were involved in their response and that 1,610,400 ft of wire was replaced.

The West Virginia Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management is partnering with the West Virginia National Guard and its Joint Interagency Training and Education Center (JITEC) to conduct power assessments on critical infrastructure along the footprint of the Bluestone Dam and we will most likely be looking at expanding this program statewide. The Guard has been trained by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers on how they conduct the assessments and we are looking at ways to improve on that process. Once completed, all of the information will be housed in two secure data bases, the Automated Critical Asset Management System and a Corps data base so that delays in getting generators on these facilities will be minimized. As mentioned above, another issue is being able to connect generators to facilities, there is no standard plug or connection that it used and we are also planning to review as part of this process how we can improve there as well.

Conclusion

I appreciate the opportunity to share with you what we in West Virginia dealt with over the first two weeks in July. Much like the rest of the region, our response was widespread and deliberate. We have learned a tremendous amount from this event and are currently

undergoing an extensive review of the overall response effort. Under Governor Tomblin's direction, all agencies are conducting an after action review. Our Adjutant General, the Governor's chief legal counsel and I, are coordinating this review, and look forward to reporting lessons learned that can be shared among all states. We intend to look at all aspects of this event, from the utility response, public safety communications, communications with the public, logistics and citizen preparedness. Our State and our Nation have invested a tremendous amount of resources to deliberately plan our preparedness and protect our citizens. Without a doubt, our review will identify areas in which we can improve all levels of response efforts, but in West Virginia, the fact that only three deaths were attributed to this storm is significant. I am sure you join me in applauding the selfless efforts of the men and women of West Virginia whose willingness to serve, volunteer, and respond on behalf of their fellow citizens is a testament to Mountaineer pride, and a credit to this great Nation. I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to thank all of our first response community at all levels, but especially West Virginia's First Responders and all of the men and women of the various state agencies that worked countless hours to take care of our citizens. To conclude, I wish to thank all of you for your invitation to appear before you today, and for your continued support of our Nation's first responders and the National Guard, which has been vital to our Nation in sustaining our all volunteer military through an unprecedented period of continuous combat operations, while simultaneously providing us with an unparalleled response capability here at home as well. Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I thank you again for your time and hospitality.