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BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISASTER RESPONSE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

U.S. SENATE

July 17, 2008

ASSESSING FEMA'S PROGRESS IN IMPROVING ITS DISASTER RESPONSE

Good morning Chairman Landrieu, Ranking member Stevens, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) progress in responding to several recent natural disasters, particularly the October 2007 California Wildfires, the February 2008 tornadoes that affected the States of Tennessee and Arkansas, and the flooding that occurred in the States of Texas and Oklahoma in March of 2008.

The time since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the Gulf Coast has been a period of reformation and change in disaster response and recovery not just for FEMA, but for the country and especially for those of us involved in emergency management. Based on the many lessons learned and statutory changes made, FEMA has instituted numerous reforms to improve its ability to respond to and recover from disasters. In addition to FEMA's internal transformation designed to improve the Agency, FEMA has worked closely with other components within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to implement the provisions in the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA).

The combination of FEMA's transformation and those changes enacted from PKEMRA has resulted in a new FEMA that is able and ready to carry out the core emergency management competencies necessary to assist States in supplementing their emergency needs following a disaster event.

I have been asked to testify with specifics on three recent disasters. However, it is worth noting that since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, FEMA has responded to 158 major disasters, as well as over 250 emergencies and fires. In particular,

- In October 2007, the State of California was affected by a series of wildfires across Southern California. Over 3,097 homes were destroyed and over 500,000 acres of land were burned from Santa Barbara County to the U.S.-Mexico border. At the height of the disaster, 23 active fires were burning in the region. Seven people died as a direct result of the fires and 124 others were injured, including firefighters. On October 24, 2007, President Bush issued a major disaster declaration for the State of California and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local response efforts.
- In February 2008, flooding, severe thunderstorms, and tornadoes swept through several Mid-South states destroying homes and infrastructure. On February 7, 2008, President Bush declared a Public Assistance major disaster for the State of Arkansas. On February 8, 2008, Individual Assistance was added to this declaration to assist residents whose homes were damaged or destroyed. On February 7, 2008, President Bush issued a major disaster declaration for the State of Tennessee, making Individual Assistance available to affected individuals and households.

- The President has also made several disaster declarations for a series of storms that have struck the State of Oklahoma throughout the spring. Specifically, President Bush issued declaration number 1752 for severe storms, tornadoes, and flooding during the period of March 17-23, 2008. This declaration made federal funding available to State and eligible local governments for emergency work and the repair or replacement of facilities damaged by the event.

Utilizing new tools, programs, and processes that we have implemented, FEMA responded to each of these disasters quickly and efficiently in partnership with the States, the Interagency, and the non-profit community to provide direct assistance to the impacted States and local governments, financial and direct housing assistance to residents affected by these events, and reimbursement to State and local governments for emergency response and the repair and replacement of damaged public facilities.

FEMA's primary mission is to reduce the loss of life and property, and to protect the Nation from all hazards, by developing a comprehensive, risk-based, emergency management system of preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation. The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act) authorizes the President to issue an emergency or major disaster declaration and provide direct and financial assistance to individuals, families, State and local governments, and certain non-profit organizations.

Our program, process, and capability improvements over the past two years have resulted in a FEMA that is more agile, responsive, and pro-active with our State and local partners. In every disaster event, we proactively engage and coordinate with the impacted States and local jurisdictions and work hard to ensure that Federal assistance is delivered as quickly and as seamlessly as possible. As we move forward, we continue to work to fine tune our operational capabilities and incorporate feedback from all of our stakeholders to ensure that we have a strong working relationship with all States. These improvements can be seen in FEMA's response activities, recovery activities, as well as our logistics management.

Response: Life Saving and Life Sustaining Measures

Immediately following a major disaster or emergency that overwhelms communities and States, FEMA coordinates and provides the core Federal disaster response capability needed to save lives, reduce suffering, and protect property.

FEMA has made improvements to its network of operations centers that have improved our capability to maintain situational awareness of the disaster and its effect; obtain visibility of FEMA and other Federal support activities and interpret all of this into a common operating picture. These improvements facilitate information sharing between FEMA and non-FEMA entities; and provide internal and external stakeholders a consolidated, consistent, and accurate status of on-going incidents, responses or potential events. The key component to providing situational awareness is our National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) at FEMA Headquarters. All of these enhancements have contributed to an improved disaster response capability by FEMA and all our partners.

In addition, FEMA relies on our Regional Response Coordination Centers (RRCC), in all 10 regions, to perform a complementary role to the NRCC and provide situational awareness information, identify and coordinate response requirements, perform capabilities analysis, and report on the status of the Federal disaster response. Upgrades have been and are being made to the RRCCs to improve physical facilities, information technology and video teleconferencing capabilities. These upgrades also include such things as providing new computer hardware and software capabilities, encrypted radios, modular workstations, backup generators, mapping upgrades and physical facility upgrades.

The response to the 2007 California Wildfires provided an opportunity to implement and evaluate many of FEMA's new/enhanced operational capabilities as follows:

- The NRCC/RRCC upgrades increased operational capability by providing seamless connectivity with DHS National Operations Center (NOC) and California and other Interagency Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs), which provided a forum to share situational awareness and common operating picture, and immediate decision-making.
- The NRCC also exhibited its new and improved ability to coordinate and exchange information. FEMA held regular/ongoing video teleconferences (VTCs) to facilitate synchronized efforts between the State of California, the Joint Field Office (JFO) and the NRCC. Approximately 25-30 organizations participated by video and 50 by audio in daily National VTCs, including substantial and direct involvement of DHS components and other interagency partners such as the U.S. Forest Service. Using U.S. Forest Service weather reports, a first for FEMA, proved to be invaluable in supporting response efforts.
- FEMA also demonstrated the flexible/scalable response capability of its Federal response teams. Emergency Response Team – National (ERT-N) members were deployed to staff the JFO; Federal Incident Response Team (FIRST) Atlanta provided real time situational awareness onsite (deployed to Qualcomm Stadium and then to Local Assistance Centers); FEMA had complete and full integration of FEMA and the California Office of Emergency Services (OES) operations at the JFO.
- The new Operational Planners also provided improved planning capability at FEMA Headquarters. The Planners worked in coordination with the NRCC Activation team and demonstrated their ability to rapidly identify critical issues; helped coordinate medical evacuation planning with the Defense Department, HHS and the JFO; and synchronized interagency planning with NORTHCOM and the DHS Incident Management Planning Team.
- There was a stronger unity of effort among Federal, State, and local partners. In support of the State's response, FEMA helped coordinate and lead several task forces including the Air Quality Task Force, JFO Tribal Task Force, JFO Housing Task Force, and the JFO Debris Task Force. Each task force consisted of numerous partners at all levels of government.

Recovery: Leveraging the Capabilities across all Sectors of Government to Assist Individuals in Recovering

One major shift in our business philosophy is that FEMA recognizes that response and recovery efforts often operate on a continuum. While some believe that there is a clear beginning and end to the response and recovery phases of a disaster, we have come to understand that successful recovery for individuals affected by disasters requires early collaboration between State and local governments, continued planning and evaluation of housing options and needs, and leveraging of a variety of services and programs to move applicants forward in their desire for self-sufficiency and sustainability following a major disaster.

An immediate challenge following a major disaster is ensuring that the emergency mass care needs of individuals are met. Since the revision of the National Response Framework (NRF), the Emergency Support Function (ESF) #6 – Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Housing, and Human Services Annex has made many improvements, which are a direct result of PKEMRA. The Federal role in ESF #6 has been expanded, designating FEMA as the sole Primary Agency responsible for mass care and added additional authorities and responsibilities for evacuation; tracking and family relocation; pet rescue and shelter considerations; and medical and specialized accommodations for sheltering. In a large mass care operation requiring Federal support to a State, FEMA will direct and coordinate the provision of necessary support from Federal partner agencies, and others), as well as with our longstanding partner, the American Red Cross.

Reuniting families, coordinating donations, identifying housing options and resources, are all pieces of the recovery puzzle. Our efforts and improvements in service delivery of FEMA's recovery programs on behalf of disaster victims can be seen in the examples below:

DR- 1731-California

- **Housing Inspections** – Prior to the California declaration, housing inspectors were mobilized, and, as a result, inspectors arrived in CA immediately after the declaration and inspections were returned to FEMA as early as October 25, 2007, the day after the disaster was declared. There were 250 contract inspectors utilized to complete inspections in the six impacted counties. During the event, the inspectors completed 8,507 inspections with an overall average turn around time of 2 days, 15 hours. FEMA also deployed 250 Registration Assistants to QUALCOMM Stadium and 24 other shelter sites to take registrations from evacuees who were forced out of their homes. This effort allowed 2,900 applicants to register from these locations.
- **Fraud Controls** – The identity verification controls that FEMA has integrated into the Registration Intake process have proven quite effective. Since March 1, 2007, only 27 (.03%) of the 78,341 applicants who received IHP assistance do not show that the identity has been verified. A review of these kinds of cases indicates that the error was due to caseworker oversight.
- Identity verification controls in authenticated 99% of applicants in DR-1731 California at the time they registered for assistance.

- **Registration Intake** – Special Needs scenarios were added to FEMA’s registration intake script beginning with DR-1731-California. The Special Needs questions are designed to obtain information from applicants about any loss of support required for mobility, sight, hearing or taking care of themselves or members of their household as a result of the disaster. The information about applicants’ special needs is transmitted to the JFOs for appropriate follow-up.
- **National Processing Servicing Center (NPSC) Operations** – The NPSC expanded the hours of operation to 24/7 immediately following the California declaration. All inactive employees were recalled. All facilities were sufficiently staffed to meet the volume of calls and case processing activities.
- **Joint Housing Solutions Group and the Development of Comprehensive Housing Plan** - Following the California wildfires, the Joint Housing Solutions Group partnered with Federal, State and local governments, and voluntary agencies, to develop a comprehensive housing plan that includes identifying the most heavily impacted areas, on-the-spot registration of shelter populations, analyzing shelter and mass care operations, transitioning applicants to temporary housing, individual case management for applicants with major damage to their primary residences, identifying available rental resources, assessing and assisting special need populations, and working with local voluntary agencies to identify additional assistance resources available to residents.
- **National Emergency Family Registry and Locator System (NEFRLS) and the National Emergency Child Locator Center (NECLC)** – Both systems were activated and 55 registrations were processed. As a result of the disaster, 51 children were displaced, and all were accounted for. This is the only disaster activation of the NEFRLS since its inception. The National Emergency Child Locator Center (NECLC) was activated. NECLC was established to help local and tribal governments and law enforcement agencies track and locate children who have become separated from their parents or guardians as a result of a Presidentially declared disaster. The Center’s operations are managed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, with support from FEMA.
- **Mass Care Deployment to State Operations Center** – FEMA deployed a mass care staff member to the State Operations Center to promote situational awareness and enhance coordination with the American Red Cross and reporting of shelter statistics.
- **Launched a national multi-agency Disaster Housing Task force (NDHTF).** As members of the NDHTF, the agencies and organizations committed to fully supporting the Unified Recovery Strategy established by the California Housing Task Force. The NDHTF quickly responded to and filled requests for resources, staff, information; worked to de-conflict any policy, statutory or regulatory issues; and identified housing solutions to fill any gaps in available housing assistance.

- Deployed **mass care and donations management specialists** in support of State and local sheltering operations, implementation of the National Shelter System, donations management, and delivery of mass care services.
- Deployed the **FEMA Disabilities Coordinator** to provide technical assistance to the JFO. The Disabilities Coordinator has been invaluable advising mass care as well as DHOPs regarding unique issues and concerns facing those disaster victims with special needs. The Disabilities Coordinator was successful in working with donors to secure durable medical equipment for a number of evacuees.
- The State of California utilized the web-based volunteer and donations management application that was developed by **Aidmatrix** Foundation during the CA wildfires. This was the first major implementation of this new resource tool built to support State emergency management and FEMA's voluntary agency partners. The Aidmatrix system was activated for DR1731 and it was very instrumental in helping the Donations group acquire and disburse items.
- **Pets:** The JFO requested early the deployment of USDA-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) personal to support the Animal Care Task Force within the Mass Care Unit. The APHIS team consisted of one JFO representative and five field veterinarians. The field veterinarians partnered with CA Department of agriculture to support pet and animal sheltering and care.

DR-1744-Arkansas

- **Housing Inspections** - The Housing Inspection Service Contractor deployed 12 inspectors to the disaster area, with the first inspections completed less than a day after the declaration on February 7, 2008. There were 1,057 inspections completed with an overall average turn around time of 2 days, 51 minutes.
- **Fraud Controls** – Identity verification controls in NEMIS authenticated 98% of applicants in this disaster at the time they registered for assistance. Of the 2% who did not meet the identity verification requirement, only those who sent in identity verifying documentation to the NPSCs were processed for disaster assistance after their case was reviewed by a caseworker.
- **Air Quality Testing for Temporary Housing Units** – Air quality tests were conducted on all temporary housing units prior to deployment.

DR-1745-Tennessee

- **Housing Inspections** - The HIS Contractor deployed 24 inspectors to the disaster area. The first completed inspection was returned to FEMA less than 24 hours after the declaration. There were 2,523 inspections completed with an overall average turn around time of 2 days, 3 hours.

- **Fraud Controls** – Identity verification controls in NEMIS authenticated 98.5% of applicants in this disaster at the time they registered for assistance. Of the 1.5% who did not meet the identity verification requirement, only those who sent in identity verifying documentation to the NPSCs were processed for disaster assistance after their case was reviewed by a caseworker.

While these processes show improvement in disaster recovery delivery, FEMA has also instituted a method of gauging applicant feedback in an effort to measure and improve our performance and delivery of the Individual Assistance programs. Below are the results of surveys taken following recent disasters from disaster applicants who received assistance. The surveys were completed approximately 30-45 days after the close of the application periods for DRs 1731, 1744 and 1745.

Survey responses from Applicants who received assistance:	FY 2008 to date	DR 1731 CA	DR 1744 AR	DR 1745 TN
Overall Satisfaction with information and support	92.59%	84.30%	94.40%	96.15%
Satisfaction with length of time to receive assistance	96.63%	91.30%	94.82%	94.73%
Satisfaction with Housing Assistance	83.47%	80.85%	94.82%	94.73%
Rating of FEMA’s overall reputation in the community	91.26%	80.85%	98.50%	92.30%
Level of recovery: fully or somewhat	88.43%	78.43%	86.11%	84.61%
FEMA’s helpfulness in their recovery	91.33%	82.35%	92.95%	96.15%

Data used for comparison purposes, “FY 2008 to date,” is from October 1, 2008 through May 15, 2008.

Not only has FEMA improved it’s assistance to individuals, but we have also made improvements in our service delivery to States and local Governments through FEMA’s Public Assistance (PA) program.

FEMA’s PA program has traditionally been a paper based operation, where a PA inspector meets with a local public works director and completes Project Worksheets that captures the damages noted and the application is manually entered into NEMIS. Since 2004, FEMA has worked to transition and develop a system to automate these activities, thereby reducing time, resources, and man-hours, and granting States web-based access to the system. In 2007, the Emergency Management Mission Integrated Environment (EMMIE) grants management function was launched. EMMIE PA allows FEMA staff, PA applicants and States to perform all PA grant management activities online and will be capable of supporting the use of state-of-the art technology such as wireless handheld devices in the future.

EMMIE has really enhanced customer service by allowing PA applicants to apply for grants, see the status of their projects, and manage their grants online. Using EMMIE, State PA Program

Managers can perform all PA grants management tasks to meet FEMA requirements from declaration to program closeout. Additionally, state grant management funding provided by FEMA will no longer be needed to be used to purchase online services for States to utilize NEMIS because EMMIE is web-based, creating cost savings for the Federal government.

The first version of the system was piloted in FEMA-1735-DR-Oklahoma and is currently being used for 17 Fire Management declarations in Texas and FEMA-1750-Georgia, FEMA-1759-DR-SD and FEMA-1761-DR-GA. Current plans are to use EMMIE PA for all newly declared disasters on or after July 1, 2008.

Additionally, the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act granted FEMA the authority to conduct a PA Pilot program to assess improvements in debris management and deliver of disaster assistance to States through estimating Project Worksheets. These pilot options are strictly voluntary. These programs were used following the February 2008 tornados in Tennessee and Arkansas, and the March 2008 floods in Texas and Oklahoma, The State of California opted not to participate in the pilot following the October 2007 California Wildfires.

Bearing in mind that, just as each disaster event is unique, the services provided and resources available must meet the needs of the State and residents affected by the disaster. FEMA has worked tirelessly with our State partners to ensure that every available recovery tool is examined and, when necessary, used to ensure the swift recovery of the community and its citizens. We believe that these efforts are paying off, and are evidenced by the responses of our State and individual customers.

Logistics Management: Leaning Forward to Support States' Needs for Emergency Assistance

A key element of FEMA's disaster response and recovery comes in the form of assisting States in meeting their emergency needs for commodities, services and goods.

In April, 2007, as part of the FEMA's reorganization, the Logistics Branch was elevated to Directorate level within the Agency. The Logistics Management Directorate (LMD) is FEMA's major program office responsible for policy, guidance, standards, execution and governance of logistics support, services and operations. Since that time, LMD has strengthened its business practices by enhancing its relationships with logistics partners for a more coordinated logistics response operation.

The responses to the California Wildfires have helped to validate the new business processes strategy and emboldened the "National Logistics Coordinator (NLC)" concept. For example, after the California Wildfires, FEMA Logistics reached out to our partners to assist in the response. Meals Ready to Eat were sourced and delivered by the Defense Logistics Agency from a local facility in California that was less than 12 hours away from the need. Cots and blankets were sourced and delivered by the General Services Administration. Water was sourced and delivered from an American Red Cross warehouse less than 2 hours away from the disaster. FEMA also delivered water from one of our warehouses to restock the American Red Cross

warehouse. These are examples of how the coordinated logistics response operation has become more efficient and expeditious.

In September 2007, LMD established a Distribution Management Strategy Working Group with its Federal, private and non-governmental organizations logistics partners to conduct a comprehensive analysis and develop a comprehensive distribution and supply chain management strategy. Partners in this group include GSA, DOD (USNORTHCOM)/DLA, HHS, USACE, USDA USFS, and ARC. This group includes a Resource Management Group that will adjudicate and resource all disaster requests for Logistics resources.

LMD has established contracts and Inter-agency Agreements (IAA) that provide an enhanced logistics readiness capability for contractor support (personnel/ organic drivers/ fleet management); vehicle maintenance contract (organic fleet) maintenance; supplies and services IAA / General Services Administration; transportation Services IAA/General Services Administration; national bus evacuation readiness; plastic sheeting (blue roof) blanket purchase agreement; supplies and services IAA / Defense Logistics Agency; asset visibility; Logistics Management Transformation Initiative (LMTI); and base camp support contract.

Overall, the Federal response to the recent disasters has been organized and effective. The Federal coordination of these events has shown an unprecedented level of collaboration and cooperation between all partners – Federal, State, local, tribal, and voluntary organizations. From the time FEMA begins monitoring an event, activating Regional and the National Response Coordination Centers, hosting daily video teleconference calls with Federal and State interagency partners, reviewing and working with States in the formulation of Governors' requests for major disaster declarations, alerting our national response teams and pre-staging resources and commodities, and deploying our housing task force; every effort FEMA makes is strategic, proactive and aimed at anticipating needs of the States and local governments before they arise. In this way, FEMA is moving forward to become the preeminent emergency management agency the American public needs and deserves.

Our testimony has highlighted just a few examples of the effective collaborative Federal/State response to recent disasters. I am proud of the milestones FEMA has achieved in our efforts to improve the way we do business. That said, we still have much work to do and I look forward to continued close collaboration and cooperation with our Congressional, Federal, State, local and Tribal partners. Whether man-made or natural -- whenever an incident occurs, FEMA is committed to establishing a unified command with State emergency management offices, deploying staff, and positioning ourselves as rapidly as possible in response to or in anticipation of disasters and emergencies. By pressing forward in an engaged partnership with our States, FEMA can work to ensure that the American people get the help they need and deserve.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.