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**Statement for the Record**

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**Before the**

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**Committee on Homeland Security  
Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response**

**“Assessing the Capabilities and Coordination of Federal Emergency Response Teams”**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Thompson, Subcommittee Chairman Cuellar, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today.

I am Robert F. Powers, Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Disaster Operations Directorate at FEMA. I look forward to working with this Subcommittee and Congress to continue improvements to enhance the capabilities of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Based on our experiences and lessons learned over the years, we are building a new FEMA to further improve our Nation's all-hazards preparedness, protection, response, recovery and mitigation systems and capabilities. We are taking the first steps in what will be a multi-year effort to significantly increase FEMA's core operational capabilities and capacity to better serve and protect our Nation and its citizens.

FEMA learned significant lessons from the 2005 Hurricane Season. Following Hurricane Katrina, the White House recommended in its report, "The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina Lessons Learned," that FEMA strengthen operational disaster response capabilities. Similar recommendations were made in General Accountability Office, Inspector General, and the Senate and House of Representatives reviews. More recently, the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (Post-Katrina Act) articulated new expectations for FEMA, established new leadership responsibilities, brought an expanded scope of missions, and called for FEMA to undertake a broad range of activities involving preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation both before and after terrorist events, natural and manmade disasters. Specific responsibilities assigned to FEMA in the Post-Katrina Act are the need to:

- partner with non-Federal entities to build a national emergency management system;
- improve Federal response capabilities; and
- establish national and regional emergency response teams.

Our goal is to build a new FEMA that will be the Nation's preeminent emergency management and preparedness agency. FEMA is adopting a more forward leaning and collaborative disaster response approach and, we are strengthening our capabilities across the full spectrum of operational and support missions. Central to this effort will be developing more robust National and Regional disaster response teams that will provide the critical support needed to help State, local, and tribal governments respond to disasters. It is my pleasure to discuss with you today in more detail our current disaster response teams and assets, and actions we are taking to improve our capabilities to serve the American people.

## **BACKGROUND**

FEMA's primary mission is to reduce the loss of life and property and protect the Nation from all hazards, including natural disasters, acts of terrorism and other man made disasters by leading and supporting the Nation in a risk-based, comprehensive emergency management system of preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation. FEMA has the primary responsibility for leading and coordinating the Federal government's disaster response efforts.

The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act provides the legal basis for FEMA to provide disaster response and recovery assistance. Following a major emergency or disaster declaration by the President, FEMA is authorized to dispatch its own disaster response teams and assets to provide support or to issue a Mission Assignment to the National Response Plan (NRP) signatory Departments and Agencies for support. In addition, FEMA can surge assets into an area in anticipation of an approaching storm or event that is expected to cause a significant impact and result in a declared emergency or major disaster. This surge allows FEMA to position for a quick response, but actual assistance cannot be provided until the Governor requests and a Presidential declaration is made.

The Mission Assignment is the vehicle used by FEMA in a Stafford Act major disaster or emergency declaration to order immediate, short-term disaster response assistance from Departments and Agencies to help State, local, and tribal governments that are overwhelmed by the event and unable to perform the necessary work. To streamline and facilitate rapid disaster response, FEMA has also approved a number of Pre-Scripted Mission Assignments (PSMAs). In 2006, FEMA had a total of 44 PSMAs in place for support - 16 Department of Defense PSMAs and 28 United States Army Corps of Engineers PSMAs. By June 15, 2007, we expect to complete an additional 141 PSMAs for a total of 185 to support our disaster response activities.

Disaster response support is coordinated through one or more of the NRP's 15 Emergency Support Functions (ESFs). The ESFs serve as the primary operational-level mechanism supporting FEMA in providing State and local disaster assistance in functional areas such as transportation, communications, public works and engineering, firefighting, mass care, housing, human services, public health and medical services, search and rescue, agriculture, and energy. The 32 Departments and Agencies signatory to the NRP provide substantial disaster response assistance in their areas of expertise and in essence become force multipliers for FEMA when assigned missions to support the disaster response. In addition, FEMA can surge its own teams and assets into an area in anticipation of an approaching storm or event that is expected to cause a significant impact and result in a declared emergency or major disaster and can turn to other DHS components such as the U.S. Coast Guard for assistance. The surge capability allows FEMA to pre-position for a quick response, but actual assistance cannot be provided until the Governor requests and a Presidential declaration is made.

### **FEMA DISASTER RESPONSE ASSETS**

FEMA has multiple disaster response operations centers and teams that allow us to provide and coordinate disaster response assistance. As stated above, our approach is to lean forward aggressively in pushing resources out and sustaining the flow of these resources to ensure immediate and continued support to the impacted governments.

### **OPERATIONS CENTERS**

FEMA manages a network of FEMA operations centers to coordinate and sustain response operations, maintain situational awareness and a common operating picture for DHS and FEMA leadership, 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 components of this network are the National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) in FEMA Headquarters; the Regional Response Coordination Centers (RRCC) located in each of the ten FEMA Regions; the FEMA Operations Center (FOC) located at the Mt. Weather Emergency Assistance Center; the five Mobile Emergency Response Support (MERS) Operations Centers (MOC) located in the States of Massachusetts, Georgia, Texas, Colorado, and Washington; and the Logistics Response Center at Headquarters.

## NRCC

The NRCC is a multi-agency center that functions as the operational component of the DHS National Operations Center (NOC) to provide overall Federal response coordination for Incidents of National Significance, disaster response operations, and emergency management program implementation. The NRCC maintains situational awareness linkages with the RRCCs, State Emergency Operations Centers (EOC), selected local EOCs in each of the ten FEMA Regions, Regional DHS components, Regional ESF EOCs, State Fusion Centers, Joint Terrorism Task Forces, Regional Department of Defense Operations Centers, and other key operational nodes. The NRCC routinely supports program implementation and disaster response and resource planning; coordinates incident management operations; monitors potential or developing Incidents of National Significance; supports regional and field components; and provides overall response and resource coordination for DHS and FEMA. In addition to maintaining a 24/7 Watch Team, the NRCC is augmented by the ESFs during disaster operations and is responsible for:

- Drafting and distributing operational warnings and orders;
- Monitoring the preparedness of national-level emergency response teams and resources;
- Initiating MAs to other Federal Departments and Agencies;
- Activating and deploying national-level teams and entities;
- Tracking and managing Federal resource allocations;
- Coordinating operational response and resource allocation planning with other Departments and agencies, the RRCCs, the Joint Field Office (JFO), including the use of Federal remote sensing/disaster assessment support; and
- Collecting, evaluating, and disseminating information and incident reports on resource status.

The Logistics Response Center is part of the NRCC and manages logistics activities at the Headquarters level. The Mobile Emergency Response Support Operations Centers also support the FEMA Regions, DHS Components, State EOC(s) and other MERS deployed command and control assets while supporting emergency communications in the field during Incidents of National Significance.

## RRCC

The RRCCs are regionally-based multi-agency coordination centers that perform a complementary role to the NRCC. Operating in the ten FEMA Regions, the RRCCs provide situational awareness information, identify and coordinate response requirements, perform

capabilities analysis, and report on the status of Federal disaster response operations. FEMA is in the process of hiring two new Watch Analysts in each Region. The RRCCs deploy liaison officers and the Emergency Response Team-Advanced (ERT-A) to initiate Federal support, facilitate initial delivery of goods and services to save lives and property and stabilize local infrastructures, and facilitate prioritizing “in theater” interagency resource allocation and coordination, and support multiple concurrent disaster operations within the Region. NRCC and RRCC activations and operations are scalable and based on the nature, scope, magnitude, and potential impacts of the potential or actual incident.

Operational Planners have been hired at FEMA Headquarters and will be hired for the Regions to augment the ability to conduct more sophisticated analyses in the NRCC and RRCCs. In addition, ongoing assessments of capabilities are underway to identify shortfalls and equipment needs in order to improve coordination and connectivity between the Regions and Headquarters.

#### FEMA Operations Center (FOC)

The FOC supports the NRCC with a 24-hour watch. The FOC implements notifications to the Departments and Agencies that support the NRCC as well as activating emergency management staff. The FOC receives, analyzes, and disseminates all-hazards information within FEMA and DHS and to Departments, Agencies, and disaster response team members. The FOC, in coordination with the National Operations Center, facilitates distribution of warnings, alerts, and bulletins to the emergency management community using a variety of communications systems such as the National Warning System, the Washington Area Warning System and the National-level Emergency Alert System.

### **DISASTER RESPONSE TEAMS AND ASSETS**

To assist State, local and tribal governments overwhelmed in a disaster situation, FEMA’s Disaster Operations Directorate can immediately deploy multiple disaster response teams. We regularly test the capability of our teams and systems to execute their mission by participating in multi-agency and State and local exercises. Several different types of disaster response teams can be deployed to support disaster response, as discussed below. In accordance with the Post-Katrina Act, FEMA is developing a next generation of rapidly deployable interagency National and Regional emergency response teams, tentatively identified as Incident Management Assistance Teams (IMAT). These teams will eventually replace existing Emergency Response Teams at the National and Regional level and the Federal Incident Response Support Teams (FIRST) and be designed to provide a forward Federal presence to better manage and coordinate the National response for catastrophic incidents. The new IMAT concept is discussed later.

#### Emergency Response Teams-National (ERT-N)

FEMA’s ERT-Ns are deployed by FEMA Headquarters in response to Incidents of National Significance and major disasters. Their purpose is to coordinate disaster response activities, coordinate and deploy key national response assets and resources, provide situational awareness, and maintain connectivity with key Department of Homeland Security operations centers and

components. ERT-Ns are made up of approximately 32 individuals from FEMA Headquarters and Regions who also have day-to-day responsibilities beyond their team assignments. ERT-Ns are organized according to National Incident Management System/Incident Command System (NIMS/ICS) standards, which provide a systematic, proactive, and coordinated approach for governmental and nongovernmental organizations at all levels to effectively prepare for, prevent, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of incidents. ERT-N members typically provide the initial staffing cadre for a JFO supporting a major disaster/Incident of National Significance. The JFOs and ERT-Ns are supported by FEMA's MERS detachments which provide support in operations, communications, and logistics. FEMA is working toward achieving NIMS compliance for all teams.

#### Emergency Response Teams-Advanced (ERT-A)

ERT-As are located in the ten FEMA Regions and can be deployed in the early phases of an incident to work directly with the States to assess the disaster impact, gain situational awareness, help coordinate the disaster response, and respond to specific State requests for assistance. The ERT-As are made up of approximately 25 individuals from the FEMA Regions, who also have day-to-day responsibilities beyond their team assignments, and representatives from the ESF Departments and agencies. The ERT-A initially establishes its presence in the State Emergency Operations Center and later staffs the JFO to support the disaster response. The ERT-As deploy with basic communications capabilities including cell phones, wireless laptop computers, and a limited number of satellite cell phones. As needed, they can also be supported by the MERS detachments and their capabilities. A small component of an ERT-A, the Rapid Needs Assessment Team, is designed to collect disaster information in field needed to determine more specific disaster response requirements.

#### Federal Incident Response Support Teams (FIRST)

FIRSTs are emergency response teams consisting of approximately five individuals who can be deployed immediately to an incident or disaster, particularly an Incident of National Significance. We currently have two FIRSTs, one located in Region IV in Atlanta, Georgia, and the other in Region V in Chicago, Illinois. They are designed to serve as the forward component of the ERT-A and will provide the core preliminary on-scene Federal management that supports the local incident commander or area commander to ensure an integrated inter-jurisdictional response. Current Federal incident response support provided by these teams includes a command vehicle and communications capabilities consisting of Trac-star, Global Star, Iridium, high frequency, very high frequency repeaters, CATV, INMARSAT/BGAN, internet, computers, mobile radios, and GPS Units. The FIRSTs will ultimately be consolidated into the next generation of emergency response teams, tentatively being called IMATs, which are being developed.

#### Hurricane Liaison Team (HLT)

The HLT is a small team designed to enhance hurricane disaster response by facilitating information exchange between the National Hurricane Center in Miami, Florida, and other

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration components and Federal, State, and local government officials.

### Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Task Forces

The National US&R Response System is a framework for structuring local emergency services personnel into integrated disaster response task forces. The 28 National US&R Task Forces, complete with the necessary tools, equipment, skills and techniques, can be deployed by FEMA to assist State and local governments in rescuing victims of structural collapse incidents or to assist in other search and rescue missions.

The 28 Task Forces are located throughout the continental United States. Any Task Force can be activated and deployed by FEMA to a disaster area to provide assistance in structural collapse rescue, or may be pre-positioned when a major disaster threatens a community. Each Task Force must have all its personnel and equipment at the embarkation point within six hours of activation. The Task Force can be dispatched and en route to its destination in a matter of hours. There are three types of task forces. A Type I task force consists of 70 multi-faceted cross-trained personnel divided into six major functional elements: search, rescue, medical, hazmat, logistics, and planning, supported by canines and capable of conducting physical search and heavy rescue operations in damaged or collapsed reinforced concrete buildings. Each Task Force can be divided into two 35-member teams to provide 24-hour search and rescue operations and are completely self-sufficient for 72-hours. Task Forces are also equipped with convoy vehicles to support over the road deployments and can be configured into a Light Task Force to support weather events such as hurricanes and tornadoes and other similar type incidents. An intermediate size Task Force is currently under development.

The US&R Task Forces have the following specific capabilities:

- Ability to conduct physical search and rescue operations in damaged/collapsed structures;
- Ability to operate in a known or suspected weapons-of-mass-destruction environment;
- Ability to provide emergency medical care for entrapped victims, Task Force personnel and search canines;
- Ability to provide reconnaissance to assess damage and needs, and provide feedback to other officials;
- Ability to provide assessment/shut-off of utilities to houses and other buildings;
- Ability to provide hazardous materials survey/evaluations;
- Ability to provide structural and hazard evaluations of buildings; and
- Ability to stabilize damaged structures, including shoring and cribbing;

In preparation for the 2007 Hurricane Season, the US&R Hurricane Concept of Operations has been updated based on lessons learned. Also, in coordination with our partner agencies, including the U.S. Coast Guard, Department of the Interior, and Department of Defense, we have expanded the NRP ESF-9 Annex and to reflect a broader scope of search and rescue capabilities including water and wilderness search and rescue.

### Mobile Emergency Response Support (MERS)

Another key FEMA disaster response asset is the MERS System. The primary function of MERS is to provide mobile telecommunications, logistics, and operational capabilities for the on-site management of disaster response activities. MERS support falls into three broad areas:

- Operations - Mobile Emergency Operations Centers, quick reaction support, disaster preparedness (HAZMAT) officers, and MERS security officers.
- Communications - satellite, multiple radio vans, High Frequency line of sight microwave, land mobile radios, voice, video, and data capabilities, and wide area interoperability.
- Logistics - fuel, water, HVAC, life support, transportation, and power.

MERS provides support required by Federal, State and local responders in their efforts to save lives, protect property and coordinate disaster operations. MERS can provide prompt and rapid multi-media communications, information processing, logistics, administrative, and operational support. Staged in six strategic locations, one with offshore capabilities, the MERS detachments can concurrently support a large JFO and multiple field operating sites within a disaster area. The telecommunications function is accomplished using a variety of communications transmission systems including satellite, high frequency, and microwave line-of-sight interconnected by fiber optic cables to voice and data switches, local area networks, and desktop devices such as personal computers and telephones. MERS Telecommunications assets can be provided for one or multiple locations within a disaster area and can be used to establish or reestablish communications connectivity with the public telecommunications system or Government telecommunications networks. Facilities within a disaster region can be interconnected by MERS assets to enhance emergency communications interoperability and austere facilities can be wired for computer, telephone, and video networks.

FEMA deploys MERS capabilities to support the JFO and provide for its continuing operational communications and systems needs. FEMA focuses on providing seamless emergency communications across the full spectrum of disaster operations. To meet this objective, FEMA provides a national, tactical and fixed emergency communications capability for command and control and situational awareness at all levels of government during emergencies and incidents. Additionally, FEMA can use supplemental assets to provide Forward Area Wireless access (satellite, cellular and land mobile radio) to users across the department. This deployment strategy improves our support to State, county, and local first responders. As the Nation's preeminent emergency management agency, FEMA will extend its sphere of influence and assume a leading National role in the field of disaster emergency communications, supported by MERS, and in full coordination with all of the Federal stakeholders and ESFs partners.

#### Nuclear Incident Response Team (NIRT)

The NIRT teams are specialized teams managed day-to-day by the Department of Energy (DOE)/National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). They are operationally controlled by DHS/FEMA when activated to provide expert technical advice and support in disaster response operations and other needs involving:

- Nuclear weapons accidents and incidents of national significance;
- Radiological accidents;
- Lost or stolen radioactive material incidents; and
- Acts of nuclear terrorism.



The NIRT consists of assets from DOE and the EPA and, when activated, operates as a DHS organizational unit under the operational control of DHS. The NIRT is configured for rapid response to nuclear accidents or incidents. The NIRT interagency specialized teams are a quick deployment advance element with specialized equipment and trained personnel that assess situations and advise local, State and Federal officials on the scope and magnitude of response needs. NIRT teams have the capability to conduct specialized search and detection operations for nuclear weapons, improvised nuclear devices, or radiological dispersal devices in urban or other areas on the ground or by special air support. They support the full spectrum of all nuclear/radiological incidents or accidents considered to be Incidents of National Significance including: terrorist use of radiological dispersal devices or improvised nuclear devices as well as reactor accidents (commercial or weapons production facilities). NIRT consists of one or all of the following DOE/NNSA and EPA response assets:

- Aerial Measuring System: airborne radiological sensing and surveying;
- Accident Response Group: scientific technical expertise and equipment;
- Federal Radiological Monitoring and Assessment Center: operational and logistic management focused on radiological consequence management;
- National Atmospheric Release Advisory Capability: computer modeling of transport, diffusion, and disposition of radioactive and hazardous materials;
- Nuclear Emergency Support Team: umbrella team encompassing Nuclear/Radiological Advisory Team, Joint Technical Operations Team, and the Search Response Team;
- Radiological Assistance Program: regional first response capability;
- Radiation Emergency Assistance Center/Training Site (REAC/TS): cadre of physicians, nurses, and other specialists who provide advanced health physics and medical assistance and advice needed to treat victims of acute radiation exposure accidents.
- Radiological Emergency Response Team: provided by the EPA, works with other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and international organizations to monitor, contain, and clean up the release while protecting people and the environment from harmful exposure to radiation.

NIRT assets deploy at the direction of the Secretary of DHS in connection with an actual or threatened terrorist attack, major disaster, or other emergency in the United States. A U.S. Secret Service liaison is detailed to FEMA Headquarters to coordinate NIRT activities and is working closely with DOE and DHS to better define the roles and responsibilities of the multiple agencies involved with the NIRT.

#### Domestic Emergency Support Team (DEST)

The DEST is another specialized interagency U.S. Government team designed to expeditiously provide expert advice, guidance and support to the FBI On-Scene Commander (OSC) during a WMD incident or credible threat. The DEST is comprised of crisis and consequence management components and augments the FBI's Joint Operations Center with tailored expertise, assessment and analysis capabilities, providing the FBI OSC with expert advice and guidance in the following areas:

- interagency crisis management assistance;
- information management support;

- enhanced communications capability;
- contingency planning for consequence management support;
- explosive devices and their components;
- chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons/devices and their components and radiological dispersion devices; and
- technical expertise and equipment to operate in a contaminated environment to conduct threat sampling, take measurements, and collect tactical intelligence and evidence.

The U.S. Secret Service liaison detailed to FEMA Headquarters who is coordinating NIRT activities is also responsible for coordinating DEST activities. The liaison is working closely with the FBI to better define the roles and responsibilities of the multiple agencies involved with the DEST.

### Next Generation Emergency Response Teams--Incident Management Assistance Teams (IMAT)

To further enhance disaster response capabilities and ultimately provide for the three national-level response teams and regional-level emergency response “strike” teams required in the Post-Katrina Act, FEMA is developing the next generation of rapidly deployable interagency emergency response teams, tentatively identified as IMATs, designed to provide a forward Federal presence to facilitate managing the national response to catastrophic incidents. The primary mission of a FEMA IMAT will be to rapidly deploy to an incident or incident-threatened venue, provide leadership in the identification and provision of Federal assistance, and coordinate and integrate inter-jurisdictional response in support of the affected State(s) or US Territory(s). The IMATs will support efforts to meet the emergent needs of State and local jurisdictions; possess the capability to provide initial situational awareness for Federal decision-makers; and support the initial establishment of a unified command.

IMATs will meet the multi-disciplinary needs of emergency management and in the future may include members from the inter-agency community. For events where the Secretary determines, or may determine, that an Incident of National Significance exists, a national-level team will lead the response, supported by regional-level teams. The National teams are envisioned to have the capability to establish an effective Federal presence within 12-hours of notification, to support the State, coordinate Federal activities, provide initial situational awareness, and to be self sufficient for a minimum of 48-hours to augment potentially scarce local resources.

The new IMATs will eventually subsume the existing mission and capabilities of the FIRST and ERTs and their mission and capabilities and will incorporate similar leadership, emergency management doctrine, and operational communications concepts. The national-level and regional-level teams will be staffed with a core of permanent full-time employees, unlike the ERTs, which are staffed on a collateral duty basis; will be fully compliant with NIMS and ICS; and will train and exercise as a unit.

The National IMATs will consist of approximately 26 staff members and the Regional IMATs each will consist of approximately 15 staff members. Both teams can be augmented with additional staff as needed. The teams will be supported by FEMA’s MERS elements as described earlier. The teams are still being designed and decisions on team assets, equipment,

and expected capabilities have not yet been finalized. When not deployed, the teams will train with Federal partners and provide a training capability to elevate state and local emergency management capabilities. The teams will also engage in consistent and coordinated operational planning and relationship-building with State, local, tribal, and other stakeholders.

Initially, our goal is to establish interim Regional and National teams utilizing existing personnel within FEMA. The IMATs will be led by a credentialed Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO). Our short-term plan is to, at a minimum, stand-up one fully operational interim National IMAT and one fully operational interim Regional IMAT by June 30, 2007. The interim teams will form the nucleus of FEMA's next generation of emergency response personnel until we hire and train personnel to staff permanent teams. Our longer-term plan is to have one permanent National IMAT and three permanent Regional dedicated IMATs by September 30, 2007.

### **CONCLUSION**

We are taking FEMA in a new direction, one that reflects a broader mission challenge, a wider set of partners, and a greater depth of mission perspective. The new FEMA will require new skill sets, a greater investment in our people, and new tools to ensure more effective response, recovery and mitigation. We will be more engaged in operational planning to improve the capabilities of our disaster response teams, work proactively and collaboratively with our Federal, State, local, tribal, and private sector partners, and always maintain focus on our core mission to protect the American people.

Thank you for your time today and I look forward to answering your questions.