

Testimony of

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Before the

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

on

**Federal, State, and Local Coordination: How Prepared is Pennsylvania to Respond
to a Terrorist Attack or Natural Disaster?**

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Opening

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify on the important subject of emergency preparedness in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

My name is MaryAnn Marrocolo and I am the Deputy Managing Director for Emergency Management in the City of Philadelphia. I have been in this position since November 2006. Prior to that, I was the Assistant Commissioner for Planning with the New York City Office of Emergency Management where I worked from 1999 until 2006.

Today I am going to discuss with you the importance of developing detailed operational plans to support emergency response, focusing specifically on evacuation. I will discuss with you why plans fail, offer you an approach to planning that can minimize these failures, and describe how this approach is being applied to evacuation planning in Philadelphia.

Part 1 – Operational Planning

I will now read to you excerpts from several after action reports that highlight some of the issues with planning for and coordinating a large-scale response operation:

- There was a failure to have a single person in charge with a clear chain of command
- Command and Control was impaired at all levels of government
- There was an inability to cut through bureaucratic red tape
- A general lack of knowledge by key individuals and agencies, concerning the Integrated Emergency Management System, disaster response/recovery planning and implementation, and emergency management functions in general, led to confusion and frustration among responding agencies
- Leaders were not well versed in protocol and therefore failed to successfully implement the National Response Plan, and with it, the National Incident Management System
- There was a failure to heed past lessons learned from exercises and actual events
- The response operation lacked the kind of integrated communications and unified command contemplated in the directive, both within and among individual responding agencies
- Information that was crucial to informed decision-making was not shared among agencies
- Most senior management and elected officials interviewed were well distanced from, and in some cases ignorant of, salient pieces of the plans

These examples of post-disaster hindsight bring to light three key issues with emergency planning:

1. Plans do not clearly define roles and responsibilities

2. Key decision-makers and response personnel are too distanced from and therefore unaware of the plans they are expected to execute
3. Plans fail to adequately communicate to the “end user” what is to be done

We must end the practice of learning the same lessons at every disaster, but how?

The increasingly complex emergencies we face require plans that clearly articulate options, roles and tasks.

First, plans must be simplified. Too often, they are wordy and conceptual; failing to answer the basic who, what, when, where, and how that is essential to organize and execute a response.

Second, plans must be organized into strategies that link options and tasks.

Third, plans must link roles to tasks – beyond the “boots on the ground response.” This means that all roles, whether they are executives, emergency managers, personnel in the Emergency Operations Center, personnel operating at the scene, and personnel operating at agencies behind the scenes need to be clearly defined and connected together in the plan.

Plans should not be written by a planner locked in an office for days on end. Plans must be developed through an inclusive and collaborative process that is highly organized and structured.

Part 2 – Evacuation Planning

I would now like to focus attention on the issue of evacuation planning. There are two types of evacuations: no-notice and forecasted. No-notice evacuations are dynamic events where the hazard, safe areas, and protective actions are unknown until the time of the event. Forecasted evacuations are essentially the opposite.

Regardless of the type of evacuation, people in danger (and some who are not, but perceive they are) will evacuate on foot, by car, or by bus, subway, or rail. Depending on the type of incident, some modes of transit may not be available, which will shift demand.

Thus, evacuation plans must address all hazards, be flexible, and be scalable to the event. Further, these plans must be coordinated and connected across agencies to provide the greatest flexibility should one or more modes of transit become unavailable. Finally, evacuation plans must be regional in nature as evacuees often do not stop at the invisible political boundary.

In April 2007 the Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management launched a project to develop a Citywide Evacuation Plan, the foundation of which is identifying evacuation routes. To ensure the routes were operationally sound and addressed the needs of those

that would use them as well as those that would have to manage them, a Work Group was formed that included representatives from public safety and transportation agencies as well as community members and the private sector.

Through the Work Group, we have systematically identified evacuation zones and routes for emergency vehicles, pedestrians and mass transit, and private vehicles.

In conjunction with this, we have undertaken two projects to develop tactical evacuation plans: one for the Sports Complex Special Services District and one to coordinate high-rise building evacuation. Both of these projects were done in the same manner as identifying the routes: by bringing together the right people and utilizing a structured process to achieve a result.

Currently, we have arranged the first meeting with our partners in New Jersey to broaden the scope of our routing efforts.

Within Southeastern Pennsylvania, Philadelphia is part of the Regional Counter-terrorism Task Force. The Task Force is also working to coordinate evacuation plans across multiple jurisdictions in the state of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware.

Summary

In conclusion, developing sound operational plans is essential to an organized and coordinated emergency response. The planning process I described above produces documents that clearly articulate options, roles, and tasks and resonate with the personnel charged with implementing them. Coupled with this, is the buy-in that is necessary for the plan to work.

This process is being actively employed by the City of Philadelphia in development of the Citywide Evacuation Plan, the first step being identifying evacuation zones and routes.

Once again thank you for the opportunity to testify, I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Follow-up Address

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