

STATEMENT OF  
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT, INVESTIGATIONS AND OVERSIGHT  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
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Good morning, Chairman Carney, Ranking Member Rogers, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Frank DiFalco, Director of the National Operations Center (NOC) at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Thank you for inviting me to discuss what DHS, the Office of Operations Coordination (OPS), and the NOC have done to increase situational awareness within DHS and among the interagency stakeholders, streamline the information flow process during incidents, and improve our contingency and crisis action planning efforts.

As way of background, I would like to briefly describe the roles of OPS and the NOC. The mission of OPS, which is directed by retired VADM Roger Rufe, USCG, is to integrate DHS and interagency planning and operations coordination in order to prevent, deter, protect, and respond to terrorists threats/attacks or threats from other man-made or natural disasters. The NOC is a 24x7, multi-agency operations center that collects all-threats and all-hazards information across the spectrum of federal, state, local, tribal, private-sector, and other key sources. Its mission is to be the primary national-level hub for domestic situational awareness, common operating picture, information fusion, information sharing, communications, and operations coordination pertaining to the prevention of terrorist attacks and domestic incident management.

DHS takes these missions and the overall responsibilities laid out in the Homeland Security Act and various Homeland Security Presidential Directives seriously. We work every day of the year to ensure the situational awareness needs of DHS, other federal agencies, state and local partners, and other homeland security stakeholders are met. As you know, this is an evolving process. Lessons learned from real-life incidents and exercises are continually applied to improve the way the NOC and other DHS offices work. I hope my time with you today can help you better understand how the operations efforts of the NOC work within an overarching DHS framework.

**“Yesterday”**

Since 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, the Federal Government has done a tremendous amount to ensure there are improved and better coordinated efforts undertaken to manage all-hazards incidents. For example, at DHS, we have instituted improved policies, processes, procedures, training programs and systems to better enable the Department to function in support of the Secretary as the Domestic Incident Manager.

I will spend most of my time with you today relating how DHS, and the NOC specifically, has taken positive action prompted by the recommendations from Congress, GAO, and the White House. In addition, DHS, like other federal departments, looked closely at how we did business, and recognized that we have to continuously improve how we provide a national unified effort and manage domestic incidents. Since Katrina, much progress has been made in providing the Secretary and the President with better situational awareness than what was available during the time immediately following landfall of Hurricane Katrina.

For example, at the time of Katrina, the Homeland Security Operations Center (HSOC) had responsibility for providing situational awareness to the now defunct Interagency Incident Management Group (IIMG), while the Incident Management Division, a component of the IIMG, had responsibility for coordinating the federal response to the incident. The major “gap and seam” identified in this instance was that the HSOC and IIMG reported through two separate chains of command. This resulted in a disjointed information flow and other problems relating to situational awareness and incident management. These challenges have since been remedied with organizational improvements, standardized processes and procedures, interagency coordination at several levels, and aggressive training and exercising.

There are many other examples where DHS and other Federal efforts had friction during Katrina. The House, Senate, White House, GAO, DHS and other entities have thoroughly reviewed the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina and chronicled every step of the process from pre-landfall to response and recovery efforts. I think the reports and their recommendations speak for themselves and provide a needed analysis of the Federal, State and local response to this massive natural disaster. DHS took these efforts seriously and implemented many of the recommendations. For example, OPS is in the process of fully implementing the seven applicable White House Katrina lessons learned report recommendations summarized below.

- Establish the National Operations Center (NOC)
- Establish National Information and Knowledge Management System
- Establish a National Reporting System
- Establish a National Information Requirements and a National Information Reporting Chain
- Establish and Maintain a Deployable Communications Capability
- Develop and Resource a Federal Planning and Execution System
- Establish a Permanent Planning/Operations Staff within the NOC

These recommendations have greatly enhanced operations and other areas of the Department, as well as improved the overall capability of the Federal Government to respond to and recover from significant incidents.

## **“Today”**

Over the past year, we have further improved upon the above recommendations with lessons learned from real world events and exercises. Below, I will provide additional information on each of the following key OPS efforts.

- The NOC
- The Common Operating Picture (COP)
- Department Situational Awareness Team (DSAT)
- The Incident Management Planning Team (IMPT) and the National Planning and Execution System (NPES)
- DHS Crisis Action Process (CAP)
- OPS Mission Blueprint
- Coordination with Other Federal Partners
- Notifications
- Training and Exercises

### **National Operations Center and the Common Operating Picture**

OPS has made significant advancements in many operational matters that directly facilitate the Secretary’s execution of the Homeland Security Act, Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD)-5, and HSPD-8 responsibilities. To enable us to more efficiently coordinate the offices within the Department and connect them with our interagency partners, we established the NOC and are implementing the COP.

The NOC was officially established on May 25, 2006 with the approval of the National Response Plan (NRP) Notice of Change. The NOC is comprised of five elements: (1) the NOC Watch, which integrates the functions and personnel of the former multi-agency HSOC; (2) NOC Intelligence and Analysis, which incorporated the Office of Intelligence & Analysis (I&A) intelligence watch and warning element; (3) FEMA’s National Response Coordination Center (NRCC); (4) the Office of Infrastructure Protection’s National Infrastructure Coordination Center (NICC); and (5) the NOC Planning Element (IMPT), that institutionalizes interagency deliberate and crisis action planning processes.

The NOC, in collaboration with the Office of Intelligence & Analysis, fuses all-source information to quickly determine if a threat or event contains a nexus to terrorism. The NOC functions as a national fusion center that synthesizes reporting from State and Local Fusion Centers, law enforcement, critical infrastructure, national level intelligence, emergency response, and private sector organizations. The NOC disseminates homeland security information to senior federal officials, appropriate intelligence and law enforcement agencies, and to other homeland security partners. The NOC serves as the primary focal point for the Secretary and senior administration officials to receive domestic situational awareness relating to natural and man-made disasters, acts of terrorism, and incident management within the United States.

The COP is the principal situational awareness tool within the NOC and is the cornerstone of the National Reporting System. This real-time, web-based tool ties together key homeland security partners primarily at the Federal, State, and Joint Field Office (JFO) levels. The COP was the direct result of the Department's internal reviews following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the White House Katrina lessons learned report. It was initially available for the 2006 Hurricane season and has the following features:

- Is accessible through the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN)
- Provides Federal departments and agencies with the capability to share critical information
- Establishes an inter-agency common operating database
- Develops a shared interagency understanding of the situation
- Provides information integrity for reporting requirements
- Facilitates timely decision making

The COP includes functional screens that address the National and International Situation Summaries, executive actions, requests for information, responder status, chronology of events, critical infrastructure, mapping products, media reports, streaming video from the incident site, the latest incident updates, metrics, and other HSIN information.

As part of our incremental approach, we are advancing the COP capabilities from natural disasters to all hazards and all threats. Our "next steps" are intended to further enhance the COP capabilities from exclusively an unclassified, hurricanes/natural disaster centric tool to include a classified, all-hazards capability. We are currently focusing on the "worst case" scenarios for nuclear/radiological incidents and will use national exercises and real world events to validate and continue its overall development.

### **Department Situational Awareness Team**

DSATs are made up of DHS personnel who provide key situational awareness reporting to incident managers by providing data directly from the scene of the incident. This data can include information from streaming video which can be posted on HSIN, satellite communications, and other tools that provide incident managers vital information in near real-time. This capability supports Federal, State, and Local domestic incident managers and allows our collective emergency response to be coordinated with key homeland security partners such as the Principal Federal Official (PFO).

### **Incident Management Planning Team & National Planning and Execution System**

The White House Katrina lessons learned report identified two specific recommendations to address planning limitations at the national level. The first recommendation called for the creation of a permanent planning body within DHS. DHS addressed this recommendation through the creation of the Incident Management Planning Team (IMPT). The IMPT is an interagency element that develops strategic level contingency plans predicated on the National Planning Scenarios. These contingency plans unify the

interagency prevention, protection, response and recovery actions with respect to an event or threat.

The mission of the IMPT is to provide contingency and crisis-action incident management planning through a collaborative, interagency process in support of the Secretary's unique responsibilities as the principal Federal official for domestic incident management as articulated in HSPD-5, the Homeland Security Act of 2002 and other key homeland security authorities such as the preparedness functions of HSPD-8. It is comprised of two components: (1) a core group of 15 full-time planning representatives from key DHS elements (e.g., TSA, CBP, I&A, FEMA, Coast Guard) as well as other key interagency members (i.e., DOD, DOJ, the FBI, HHS, DOT, DOE, EPA and the American Red Cross); and (2) an "on-call" staff of 38 planners that includes other members from DHS as well as the interagency. The IMPT was established in September 2006 and its members underwent a robust training program to prepare each of them for the planning responsibilities they have been asked to execute.

The IMPT's initial actions have been focused on the development of federal interagency concept plans (CONPLANS) that address each of the 15 National Planning Scenarios. The all-threats and all-hazards scenarios include nuclear, chemical, biological, natural disaster and cyber incidents. Each plan developed by the IMPT identifies the specific actions that individual departments and agencies intend to take in the event a given scenario were to occur. The primary value of the IMPT is to identify the efforts of the entire interagency in one comprehensive document. This planning process serves two distinct purposes: it facilitates the ability of Secretary to fulfill his/her coordination responsibilities under HSPD-5 by providing awareness of the individual capabilities that a specific agency plans to deliver; and it also identifies existing seams and gaps that exist within the interagency planning efforts for a particular scenario.

The second recommendation identified the need for a federal planning process to unify the planning efforts that occur across the interagency. DHS addressed this recommendation through its development of the National Planning and Execution System (NPES) which is a formal curriculum based planning process used by the IMPT to build interagency contingency plans. OPS leadership recognized that the success or failure of the IMPT would hinge largely on its ability to develop a planning process that could coordinate the efforts of this interagency group and facilitate the development of a shared planning culture across the federal government. Prior to NPES, few federal departments and agencies adhered to a formal planning process that organized the operational planning efforts within their respective departments. To achieve this goal, OPS created NPES, which integrates current and emerging interagency planning "best practices," is consistent with the NRP, and adheres to the core concepts and terminology addressed in NIMS.

NPES was converted to a curriculum that was taught to each member of the IMPT. The feedback from this training has been overwhelmingly positive and has resulted in numerous requests by interagency members that this training be offered to others within

their respective departments and agencies. In addition, many State and Local governments have requested copies of the NPES and related training.

DHS has actively engaged in promoting and sharing NPES throughout the interagency to assist in the development of supporting plans. Over the past ten months, the IMPT has trained over 500 interagency planners on the NPES and more training sessions are scheduled. The DHS Office of the Chief Learning Officer (CLO) and the Center for Domestic Preparedness (CDP) are currently working with the IMPT to develop an accredited NPES Program of Instruction. By formalizing the instruction and subsequently offering it at an accredited institution, the NPES training will become available to a greater number of planners in the near future, advancing its adoption throughout the interagency.

### **The DHS Crisis Action Process**

The Crisis Action Process (CAP) is a standard process by which DHS leadership manages a domestic incident response by following a general sequence of events while simultaneously engaging in a continuous cycle of actions. Over the past 6 months, in an effort to bolster preparations for real-world events, a number of refinements have been made to our processes. Two refinements of note are the formalization of the Senior Leadership Group (SLG), which the Director of OPS chairs, and the establishment of the Crisis Action Team (CAT) to manage incidents.

The SLG is comprised of the various DHS Assistant Secretaries that report to the Secretary and other select leaders within DHS. The SLG can be convened by the Secretary at any time and its primary purpose is to facilitate the Secretary's ability to receive input and recommendations from his most experienced leaders during times of crisis. When convened during times of crisis, the Secretary can also issue initial guidance to the SLG members regarding actions he deems appropriate.

The CAT is the main focus of the Crisis Action Process. The CAT is a multi-agency coordination entity comprised of over 60 personnel, many from the interagency IMPT, and is designed to facilitate the Secretary's ability to coordinate interagency operations for threats and incidents in accordance with the responsibilities identified in HSPD-5. The CAT provides the Secretary and the Federal government with an immediate incident management capability and ensures seamless integration of threat monitoring and strategic cross-directorate operational response activities. By incorporating guidance from the Secretary and SLG into its incident management activities, the CAT is able to translate executive level guidance into operational action.

The CAT's incident management activities include, but are not limited to, developing course of action recommendations, conducting national level planning, facilitating access to critical resources, prioritizing incidents and resources, serving as a central point for information collection and evaluation, and coordinating the flow of information and resources for complex and/or multiple incidents.

## **OPS Mission Blueprint Analysis**

OPS conducted a Mission Blueprint Analysis in September 2006. In this Blueprint Analysis, we took a hard look at our policies, processes, procedures, organization and technologies in order to help define the way forward for OPS in order to meet and exceed the Department's capabilities required to fulfill HSPD-5, the Homeland Security Act, and highlighted in the White House Katrina lessons learned review.

The Blueprint analysis was conducted by an outside team that performed a top-down strategic review of the organization, its mission capabilities and perceived future requirements. In addition, the team also employed a bottom-up assessment of existing capabilities and supporting activities. Over 100 individuals within OPS, DHS, and throughout the government were interviewed during the course of the study. This effort provided analysis and recommendations for ensuring OPS more effectively meets its current and emerging integrated mission requirements within DHS and across the larger homeland security community.

## **OPS and NOC Coordination within DHS and with Other Federal Partners**

The NOC from its inception adopted an interagency approach to its business process. The NOC, through the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN) and COP training programs, the PFO and JFO support concepts, the deliberate and crisis action planning processes, and the interagency operation directorate and operation center coordination working group venues, has recognized that operations coordination is very much an interagency enterprise. DHS has engaged in interagency coordination at multiple levels and across the core domestic incident management functions as the composition of the NOC and IMPT demonstrate. Further, the OPS, NOC and COP outreach and training initiatives have been interagency focused every step of the way. These have proven invaluable in building relationships, developing skill sets, identifying and integrating interagency requirements, and gaining interagency understanding of the NOC's capabilities and the role the NOC plays in order to help prevent, deter, protect, respond and recover from terrorists threats/attacks or threats from other man-made or natural disasters.

Also, in order to enhance integration and coordination, we established the Daily NOC Elements Conference Call. This conference call provides the NOC Element Directors, Operation Centers (Senior Duty Officers), and staff members a daily forum to highlight operational matters, address process issues, and conduct coordination as appropriate.

Another OPS led effort to enhance DHS and federal operations is DHS's Operations Coordination Group (OCG). This forum provides inter and intra departmental information sharing at the "strategic operations officer" level and includes representatives from DOD's Joint Director of Military Support, NORTHCOM Joint Staff J-3, National Guard Bureau J-3, FEMA, ICE, CBP, USCG, TSA, USSS, and CIS (additional members can be added at the discretion of the Group). This homeland security body enhances information flow and ensures that issues regarding planning, training, exercises, and

incident management are properly coordinated in a timely manner. This semi-formal process with established agency and department representation helps foster needed interactions and feedback from peers on operational matters.

Likewise and under the umbrella of the OCG, the NOC led the effort to establish the DHS Operations Centers Working Group. The purpose of this group is to establish an Operations Centers venue to share information, address major issues, integrate efforts, enhance coordination, build relationships, and increase overall operational effectiveness. While this group is initially comprised of DHS OPS Centers, the intent is to expand the group into an interagency forum.

The partnership between the NOC and FBI is growing at a steady pace. For example, the NOC provides Patriot Reports to the FBI which have been useful in developing case leads. These reports often contain unique information provided to the NOC by private citizens. In addition, the FBI has addressed technology issues that inhibited access to their Secret level pre-case data system, Guardian, allowing full use to the NOC. The Program Manager for the developing unclassified version of the system, known as eGuardian, has worked closely to facilitate NOC access and use of that system when it comes on line, including the designation of the NOC as one of the pilot sites.

DOD's NORTHCOM, or Northern Command, has developed as a clear mission partner with DHS and the NOC is the common point of entry between the two organizations. NORTHCOM leadership has visited the NOC, and vice versa, and information sharing is routine—each entity displays the other's common operating picture. DOD is becoming increasingly integrated into the NOC COP during an incident providing the best form of information sharing as early as possible. In addition, OPS has detailed a member of the Senior Executive Service to be the Department's representative at NORTHCOM and NORTHCOM has provided a senior representative to DHS.

### **Notifications**

Notifications are a critical NOC function and as part of an ongoing review of its processes and procedures, OPS implemented the DHS Operational Phase System on March 1, 2007. The four operational phases under which the NOC now operates are: Steady-State; Phase 1 – Awareness; Phase 2 – Concern; and Phase 3 – Urgent. The new system enables recipients to quickly understand the conditions of the situation for which they receive a notification message, understand the corresponding severity of the event/threat, and provide key information in standardized formats.

### **Training and Exercises**

We have recently established a comprehensive NOC Training Program. The NOC Training Program consists of daily (one per shift) operations drills that enhance the NOC's capability to detect and evaluate events, conduct the proper notifications, develop deliverables, and execute national level reporting responsibilities. The NOC plans to expand its training program to involve DHS and interagency operations centers.



The NOC has come a long way since Katrina. However, just having new tools, programs and processes are not enough. It is vital to participate in exercises and table-top discussions to validate current efforts and to integrate lessons learned. The NOC participates in major exercises and uses these venues to accomplish training and exercise objectives and spearhead operational improvements. In particular, during the month of May 2007, OPS and other DHS components participated in the DOD exercise Ardent Sentry which was designed to test and validate DOD Homeland Defense operations and Defense Support to Civil Authorities (DSCA) operations. Ardent Sentry consisted of numerous scenarios for which OPS had established roles and responsibilities. Two scenarios provided significant OPS participation including a hurricane making landfall in Rhode Island and a 10 kiloton nuclear detonation in Indianapolis, Indiana.

In regards to the hurricane scenario, OPS was able to exercise national information flow and test the ability of the NOC and all its elements to prepare, coordinate and publish situation reports (SITREPS) and executive summaries (EXSUMS) before the 2007 hurricane season. The 10 kiloton explosion allowed for testing the DHS CAP, testing the CAT concept of operations, testing the IMPT's Improvised Nuclear Device Contingency Plan, and developing the classified COP requirements that include secret, law enforcement, and proprietary information. Finally, this was an excellent opportunity to exercise together with NORTHCOM and keep DHS and DOD on track to improve our national incident management capability.

### **Information Flow – Hurricane Example**

To help provide some additional information on how our tools, policies and procedures are brought to bear in an incident, I will illustrate what happens when possible hurricane approaches. If a Tropical Wave, Depression, or Storm is projected or forecasted to impact the United States or a U. S. Territory, the first step the NOC will take is to transition to Phase 1 – Awareness. Upon this transition, the NOC will transmit a DHS notification message, prepare and disseminate a NOC Incident Report, and establish a National Situation Summary on the COP. The NOC will maintain and continually update the COP and also disseminate NOC Update Reports at 0600 and 1800 daily.

When a Hurricane or severe Tropical Storm is projected or forecasted to impact the United States or a U.S. Territory, the NOC will transition to Phase 2 – Concern. Upon this transition, the NOC will conduct the same actions for a Tropical Wave, Depression, or Storm. In addition, EXSUMs will be initiated and disseminated at 0600 and 1800 daily. SITREPs will commence when the Hurricane or severe Tropical Storm is 24 hours from landfall and will be disseminated at 0600 and 1800.

Although the NOC may transition to Phase 3 – Urgent due to the projected severity at landfall of a Hurricane or severe Tropical Storm, no differences exist between Phase 2 or 3 reporting or information requirements. The primary differences that do exist between Phase 2 and 3 involve operational posturing. For example, the Crisis Action Team will most likely be activated during an event that would meet the Phase 3 threshold.

When a tropical event ends or no longer poses a significant threat to the United States or a U.S. Territory, the NOC will transition back to the Steady State Phase and will transmit a close-out DHS notification message and terminate reporting.

### **Conclusion**

Mr. Chairman, please know that DHS is committed to ensuring that all possible steps are being taken to address the various threats and incidents that can endanger our citizens. DHS will continue to work together with all partners across the homeland security spectrum, including Congress, to ensure the best policies, practices, processes, and technologies are integrated into the daily DHS operations framework.

The efforts described earlier, like the COP and the NPES, are now part of the day-to-day operations of DHS, OPS, and the NOC. They allow for better national reporting, situational awareness, information sharing, operations coordination, unity of effort, and mission accomplishment for all-threat and all-hazard events. We will continually enhance our efforts and operational effectiveness by implementing lessons learned during real-world events and exercises.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today and I look forward to answering your questions.