

Mr. Chairman and Committee members, it is a pleasure to appear today before the Committee on Homeland Security. I am COL Terry J. Ebbert, USMC (Ret) and currently serve as the director of Homeland Security for the City of New Orleans. I have the responsibility for the Police Department, Fire Department, Office of Emergency Preparedness and during emergencies Emergency Medical Services (EMS). My tenure predates Katrina and includes nearly two years of recovery since the storm. Your discussion today on maintaining common operating picture at every level of government during emergency response is clearly vital, as situational awareness is the foundation of success in responding to any major disaster.

The failures of having accurate situational awareness had a negative impact on initial response to Katrina. Its shortfalls have been well documented so there is little value in returning to the days of late August 2005. My thoughts are to the improvements made and the challenges still facing all of us who have the responsibility to respond to major emergencies.

The topic areas important to Situational Awareness are:

1. Communications
2. Mission/Plans
3. Logistics
4. Command, Control and Coordination

The foundation of multiple layered situational awareness is good communication. This encompasses personal face-to-face, voice and data. One of the difficult issues of poor communications during Katrina has been addressed in Southeast Louisiana with the operational testing of our new Region 1 Interoperability Radio System. We are one of the only major urban areas with a shared radio system. We are able to talk across six parishes with over 40 local, state and federal agencies on one shared system. No agency owns the system and it is managed by a governing board made up of one member from each of the parishes and one state representation.

I want to single out Secretary Chertoff for his grant and contract technical support. Without his support and FEMA loaned radios, this system would never have been developed. We truly have one of the finest systems in the nation and it has already improved our Situational Awareness on daily issues, major events and emergency exercises. This new tool along with additional federal, state and FCC backup has ensured we will be able to communicate in a future crisis.

Formal local, state and federal emergency plans form an important leg in our ability to maintain a common operating picture during emergencies. If everyone understands each other's mission, and how they intend to carry it out, constant conversation is not required. All of our plans at every level have improved over the last three years. Technical assistance through Department of Homeland Security contractors has been a tremendous assistance because these contractors understand the requirements of all levels of government. Areas, which need continued improvement, are:

- Understanding of "Capabilities Based Planning"
- Need for increased emphasis on Mission (Risk Management) vs. Compliance (Risk Avoidance) in planning for initial response

The third leg of obtaining a common operating picture is the understanding that emergency response is a “Logistics War”. We will win or lose our ability to save lives, stabilize infrastructure, and provide security based upon our ability to manage people and material. We have no national Logistics system, which ties the local, state and federal agencies together. It is a matter of concern that this nation has not developed such a system. If we created such a capability, every one at every level would have at their fingertips, a complete status of all logistics. This information is the vital situational awareness upon which emergency managers must have to make decisions if we are to prevent failure, during the next major emergency response. We have a military logistics system and we must develop a counterpart for universal use in civilian response.

Command and Control up the chain of command remains a hazy subject for those of us at the local level. We have expended major resources to ensure that we stay current with the National Incident Management System (NIMS). This has assisted greatly in improving our command coordination at every level. It is a sound foundation that has already produced a much improved staff functioning relationship. I believe we still have a shortfall in cases of catastrophic incidents. We utilize incident command, unified command, area command, but when we get to the senior level (Joint Field Office) staff, it shifts to a coordination agency. In major disasters, the mission requirement is greater than the capability. I don’t believe that such a situation can be “coordinated”, someone has to have the power to “direct”. Someone has to be in charge.

In closing, I would like to state the Department of Homeland Security has continued to support Southeast Louisiana and we are improving in every capacity. I do think we must continue to work together to solve the critical issues addressed earlier. We are a great country with the intellectual and material capacity to provide for the safety and security of our citizens. Thank you very much for the honor and opportunity to address this committee.