

**DOMESTIC POLICY SUBCOMMITTEE
OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMITTEE
MONDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2007
9:00 A. M.**

STATEMENT OF

NANCY WARD
REGION IX ADMINISTRATOR

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Good morning Chairman Kucinich, Ranking Member Issa and other members of the Subcommittee. My name is Nancy Ward and I am the Regional Administrator for the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency's Region IX office. I have served as Regional Administrator for the FEMA Region IX office since October 2006. Prior to my selection as the Regional Administrator, I served as the Director of Response and Recovery for the Region IX Office for the previous seven years.

Before coming to FEMA, I spent more than 20 years in emergency management with the State of California, including six years as chief of the State's disaster assistance programs. In this

capacity, I oversaw the implementation of all disaster recovery activities statewide, including recovery activities following the devastating Northridge earthquake of 1994 and the statewide floods of 1995, '97 and '98.

FEMA Region IX includes the states of Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, and American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Guam.

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 2005 Hurricane Season served as a catalyst for change and reform within FEMA and for our parent agency, the Department of Homeland Security. FEMA is a far more agile, responsive, and pro-active partner with our States and local jurisdictions than we were just one year ago. We are proactively working to ensure Federal assistance is delivered as quickly and seamlessly as possible in coordination with state and local efforts. These changes were evident in the most recent response to the California Wildfires. Through cooperation and pre-event engagement with State and local governments, pre-positioning needed commodities, anticipating State's needs, deploying skilled emergency management personnel who can make swift decisions and provide situational awareness, and effectively implementing our disaster assistance programs, FEMA is taking lessons learned and turning them into best practices that will continue to be effectively used across the nation as we move forward.

Under pre-existing extensive interagency and intergovernmental agreements that provide standardized support to intergovernmental and interagency dispatch and coordination offices within the wildland fire organization—including the USDA Forest Service, the Department of the Interior, and Cal Fire—the federal government assists states with wildland firefighters, firefighting equipment, resources management, communications, and incident command management. This process provided the vast majority of Federal resources, including over 4,000 wildland firefighters and hundred of engines and aircraft, that were deployed in response to the State’s request for assistance in preparing for and responding to the southern California wildfires. When these wildfires began, the federal government also moved quickly to support the Governor’s additional requests for assistance. Prior to the President’s major disaster declaration, FEMA issued eight Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAG). FMAGs provide assistance to the State to mitigate, manage, and control fires that threaten such destruction as would constitute a major disaster. Some of the costs these grants cover include costs for equipment and supplies; emergency protective measures (evacuations and sheltering, police barricading and traffic control, arson investigation); pre-positioning of resources; and safety items for firefighter health and safety. In addition, within one hour of receiving Governor Schwarzenegger’s request on October 23, the President issued an emergency declaration for life saving activities to support the State and local authorities in fighting the fires. On the following day, the President issued a major disaster declaration, providing a broader range of assistance under the Stafford Act.

Effective Disaster Operations Management

In my opinion, the Federal coordination of the California Wildfire response has been unprecedented in the level of collaboration and cooperation between all partners – Federal, State, local, and voluntary organizations. On Sunday, October 21st, I personally visited the State’s Operations Center along with other FEMA staff to assist in initiating joint operations. At that time, FEMA simultaneously activated both the Regional Response Coordination Center in Oakland, California, and the National Response Coordination Center in Washington D.C. By Tuesday, October 23rd, FEMA was hosting daily video teleconference calls with Federal and State interagency partners and the American Red Cross. As I just mentioned, by Wednesday, October 24th, the President had issued a major disaster declaration for seven Southern California counties, and designated Mike Hall as the Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) to oversee the disaster operations on the ground. Less than 24 hours after the declaration, an integrated Joint Field Office (JFO) was established with a Federal response team on-site and many more personnel en route.

In the initial days of the disaster, FEMA’s JFO had a staffing level of over 900 personnel, representing 28 Federal agencies and departments, all unified under the Incident Command System (ICS) structure. At the height of the wildfires, thousands of fire personnel were in Southern California. Fortunately, there were no firefighter fatalities.

During the California Wildfires, FEMA deployed teams to identify immediate housing mission needs and options for housing assistance for wildfire evacuees in California. These teams are made up of subject matter experts including Individual Assistance specialists, engineers, direct housing specialists and direct replacement assistance coordinators. The rapid response housing

assistance team is a new approach to temporary housing that stems from lessons learned in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Working for the JFO and the State and local government, the teams analyze evacuee housing requirements and match these requirements to available resources, including for those evacuees with disabilities or other special needs. This proactive approach better matches Federal resources to specific evacuee requirements saving time, resources and taxpayer dollars. The teams also identify and provide technical assistance to transition evacuees from shelters to interim and permanent housing as quickly as possible.

Another important aspect of field office management is the successful collaboration between the State and Federal governments in the development of a Unified State/Federal Recovery Strategy, to guide the recovery activities to address the immediate and long-term needs of individuals, businesses and communities. FEMA and the State recognized early on that the success of the operation would require a strategy that outlined the emphasis areas that would characterize the joint response and recovery efforts. On October 31, 2007, FEMA and the State of California implemented this strategy as the overarching plan guiding our recovery approach. The State of California was extremely committed to ensuring that State personnel were co-located with FEMA in the JFO so that decision-making was collaborative and swift and the response and recovery efforts moved forward.

Pre-Positioned Disaster Resource and Commodities

Even before the Governor requested a major disaster declaration, FEMA began alerting our national response teams and pre-staging resources and commodities at March Air Force Base, the pre-designated Federal staging area in Southern California. FEMA coordinated the staging of

more than 79,000 liters of water, 24,000 cots, and 42,000 meals-ready-to-eat in response to the State's request. We also oversaw the deployment of 42,000 blankets and other essential items to support sheltering efforts. FEMA's Joint Field Office issued 92 Mission Assignments, totaling \$40.8 million, for direct federal assistance from our partner Federal agencies. FEMA also deployed a National Emergency Response Team, a Federal Incident Response Team, and communications personnel and equipment from its Mobile Emergency Response Support (MERS) detachment, and a Defense Coordination Element. FEMA also worked with the Department of Health and Human Services to deploy two Disaster Medical Assistance Teams, and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) for a USCG Deployable Operations Group. Through coordination and oversight of the resources provided by the Federal government and voluntary agencies, FEMA was able to ensure distribution of the right assets and commodities, to the right place, at the right time.

Interoperable Communications: Linking First Responders

The events of September 11, 2001, have resulted in greater public and governmental focus on the role of first responders and their capacity to respond to emergencies, including those resulting from terrorist incidents. Effective and efficient emergency response requires coordination, communication, and sharing of information among numerous public safety agencies. Because of damage caused by the event, utilities are often down for days, making interoperability between law enforcement, firefighter, emergency medical service, and other emergency response impossible over traditional equipment and systems. This disruption to service means that personnel cannot communicate with each other during routine operations let alone major emergencies.

In response to the California Wildfires, FEMA deployed Mobile Emergency Response Support (MERS) vehicles to the Joint Field Office (JFO) in Pasadena to support operations and link the State together with FEMA Headquarters and the Region IX Response Coordination Centers. The primary function of MERS is to provide mobile telecommunications, logistics, operational support, and power generation required for the on-site management of disaster response activities.

For this disaster, on-board satellite, power generation and communications equipment provided self-sufficient operational capability. In addition, a Land Mobile Radio network was deployed to support first responders and assessment personnel. In areas that were outside radio coverage, satellite phones were issued to first-responders and emergency management personnel to ensure that communications and safety requirements were met.

FEMA also deployed a MERS Incident Response Vehicle, which carries technology that allows radios used by various responders to communicate together despite their use of different brands and different frequencies. This capability would not have been possible without MERS.

Cooperation between Federal, State and Local Governments

Our experience preparing for and responding to the recent wildfires demonstrates the strong working relationship that exists between FEMA and the State of California. Overall, the Federal response to the recent wildfires was organized and effective. In advance of the fire season, experts predicted that the dry weather conditions and heavy fuel loads would affect the severity of the fires. At the first reports of fire activity, FEMA reached out to the State and local

governments and other Federal departments and agencies to begin a dialogue that has been maintained.

Even as local, State and Federal firefighters continued their efforts to contain and extinguish the fires, the State and Federal governments worked together to formulate and implement a joint strategy to address the immediate and long-term needs of individuals, businesses and communities. This recovery strategy involves the same level of cooperation, determination, innovation, creativity and persistence which characterized the response effort. To ensure the recovery effort stays on target, both the State and local authorities and FEMA have committed to anticipating problems and sharing information before challenges become obstacles to recovery.

Key elements of this State/Federal strategy include: a Housing Task Force to support local governments by identifying short- and long-term housing options and actions that can be taken to help displaced residents find transitional housing; a Debris Management Task Force to help local governments expedite the safe, thorough and timely removal of disaster-related debris; a Multi-Agency Support Group to support local governments by addressing, in an environmentally sensitive manner, flooding, erosion and debris flow concerns; and a Tribal Task Force to help affected tribes locate supplemental resources, including personal and public financial assistance.

These task forces have been formed to help life return to normal for the people of Southern California as quickly as possible. The State of California and FEMA are also committed to working with local government and private sector representatives by providing open and transparent communication and examining all authorities, capabilities, and capacities that can be brought to bear to resolve issues. One of the greatest challenges presented by the scope and scale

of catastrophic disasters is the ability to house displaced evacuees. As another area where greater collaboration between Federal and State partners can be seen, a Joint Housing Task Force (JHTF) was convened. The JHTF comprises officials from the California Office of Emergency Services, FEMA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the American Red Cross, the U.S. Small Business Administration, the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. the Department of Interior (DOI), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Collectively, these agencies have worked with State and local officials to develop and implement a comprehensive housing plan that includes identifying the most heavily impacted areas, implementing on-the-spot registration of shelter populations, analyzing shelter and mass care operations, transitioning applicants to temporary housing, providing individual case management for applicants with major damage to their primary residences, identifying available rental resources, assessing and assisting special needs populations, and working with local voluntary agencies to identify additional assistance resources. The Task Force's efforts are ongoing, but it recently implemented a comprehensive housing plan which utilizes all available expertise and resources from the Federal, State, and local levels to ensure that assistance efforts are maximized to meet the disaster housing needs of all eligible applicants.

EMAC – How Did It Work?

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) is the ground up network of local to State to Federal response to events. NIMS has been proven to work and is flexible enough to assure that all events from simple to complex are met with efficiency and success. State-to-State sharing agreements are the formal processes that make the informal relationships possible. They make

sense for several reasons. The relationships and trust that are built through doing business, training, and exercising together is the glue that makes it all work. Regional and State-to-State sharing agreements like the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) allow States to share resources such as expensive high-tech equipment that may only be used seasonally with communities, saving tax-payer resources. In addition to intergovernmental and interagency dispatch and coordination offices within the wildland fire organization, the State of California used both State-to-State mutual aid and EMAC assistance during the recent wildfires. Members of Arizona's Emergency Management Agency served in the State's Plans section during the initial response phase, providing expertise in Incident Action Planning. Staff of the City of New York's Office of Emergency Management staffed the Operations Section helping to maintain contact with the affected areas in Southern California, as well as coordinating efforts in the field with the State's Region Emergency Operations Center.

EMAC also provides for the Federal Government, including the military, to share resources with affected State and Tribal governments. In addition, the States of Oregon, Nevada, and Arizona provided State-to-State mutual aid through provision of National Guard assets, as well as firefighting resources from counties, cities and towns from these neighboring State partners.

Governor Schwarzenegger signed a bill in October 2007, renewing the State's participation in EMAC. This will ensure that resources will go where they are needed, and that the proper agency will be reimbursed when the bills comes due.

United States Fire Administration's Role and Responsibilities

As a support agency, the Department of Homeland Security, specifically, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) United States Fire Administration (USFA) provides subject matter experts and expertise regarding structural, urban, suburban firefighting and fire related activities. The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), located in Boise, Idaho, is the nation's support center for wildland firefighting and is jointly operated by USDA and DOI. In addition to its subject matter expertise, the USFA also provides representation at the NIFC, to assist with the Center's national coordination role. The USFA has no firefighting resources available itself and does not direct firefighting activities. The USFA works with its Federal partners to assist with providing resources only when structures are endangered by impending fire or at the request of the USDA Forest Service, which is designated as the lead agency for Emergency Service Support Function (ESF) 4 (Firefighting).

Within FEMA's National Response and Coordination Center (NRCC), the USFA provides support to the ESF-4 Primary Leader during structural firefighting operations and collaborates with local state fire officials and with the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) to help facilitate movement of structural fire resources and mobilization activities. USFA coordinates through established mechanisms such as ESF-4 and the EMAC system for structural fire resources; makes initial contact with State fire chief associations or individually affected fire departments to ensure actions are organized and coordinated; determines impacts and assessment capability after the incident; determines support needs and provides counsel/recommendations on needs to support communities as well as how to acquire resources and support.

During an incident when structures are endangered, the USFA collaborates with numerous agencies that have firefighting resources. These include, but are not limited to: the USDA-

USFS, the Department of Commerce, the Department of the Interior, the Environmental Protection Agency, and others to coordinate the need for structural firefighting capabilities and resources associated with them.

Currently the USFA, in coordination with the USFS is developing a comprehensive ESF-4 training program for the entire Federal ESF-4 cadre (USDA Forest Service, DOI , and the state wildland fire agencies). The program under development is being conducted jointly by both agencies in a coordinated manner to ensure the preparedness of the Federal ESF-4 team.

This two-three day program, which is under initial development and planning stages, will reflect the changes associated with the post-Hurricane Katrina reforms and the all hazard experience from the most recent California Wildfires. A pilot session and walk through are planned for February 2008.

The USFA continues to assist the Nation's fire service however it can. When it comes to wildfires, such as were experienced in Southern California, the USFA's greatest asset is its ability to work with the Federal Firefighting Working Group to assist in the prompt delivery of firefighting resources to the incident.

Conclusion

Whether man-made or natural -- whenever an incident occurs, DHS and FEMA are committed to establishing a unified command with State and local emergency management offices, deploying

staff, and positioning ourselves as rapidly as possible in response to or in anticipation of disaster events and emergencies. We have seen first hand in the California Wildfire response that we cannot, and should not wait for the State to become overwhelmed prior to offering assistance. By pressing forward in an engaged partnership with our States and local officials, FEMA ensures that resource gaps are filled and the American people get much needed assistance faster. This effort helps us fulfill our mission to reduce the loss of life and property. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.
