

Preparing for a Catastrophe: The Hurricane Pam Exercise

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Good Morning Madame Chairman and Members of the Committee. I am Wayne Fairley, Response Operations Branch Chief for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region VI in Denton, Texas. I am presently deployed in response to Hurricane Katrina and I am serving as the Operations Section Chief for the FEMA Joint Field Office in Baton Rouge, LA. I have been with FEMA since 1984 and have been associated with over ninety disasters in these past twenty-two years.

I am honored to appear before you today to talk about “Preparing for a Catastrophe: The Hurricane Pam Exercise” and to follow up on the discussions I have had with your staff on this over the past several weeks as well as answer any questions that you may have. The views expressed in my testimony are my own, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Homeland Security.

To start off I believe it is best to provide a little historical background on the Hurricane Pam Exercise. As I recall FEMA’s goal, based on the 2003 Catastrophic Planning Initiative, was to identify areas of the country that could be vulnerable to catastrophic disasters and, in cooperation with the relevant State and local governments, to:

- Examine projected damages and effects associated with a catastrophic disaster
- Confirm current disaster response capabilities

- Identify anticipated response shortfalls, and
- Initiate comprehensive planning strategies to address the shortfalls

Products developed under the “Catastrophic Planning” initiative were envisioned to include incident-specific response plans for pre-selected geographic regions and disasters, planning templates that could be applied to other areas, and new response contingencies.

In late March, 2004, FEMA HQ notified FEMA RVI that the State of Louisiana had been funded for a catastrophic hurricane plan. Thirteen southeastern Louisiana Parishes (including the City of New Orleans) were selected as the initial geographic focus area for FEMA’s “Catastrophic Planning” initiative because of their vulnerability to hurricane disasters. This resulted in the Southeast Louisiana Catastrophic Hurricane Planning Project. This initial concept was to have a draft plan by the end of July, 2004.

The Southeast Louisiana Catastrophic Hurricane Planning Project was designed to bring together responders and decision makers from all levels of government and the American Red Cross to begin analyzing and addressing the overwhelming operational complexities that would be involved in responding to a catastrophic hurricane striking southeast Louisiana. Accepting the fact that only limited funding and time were available, topic specific “planning workshops” using a catastrophic hurricane scenario (Hurricane Pam) to frame the discussions were selected as the best approach for identifying and qualifying the scale of requirements needed to build a plan for responding to a catastrophic hurricane. The results were intended to reveal to the Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (LOHSEP) and FEMA

the shortfalls in existing plans and to begin developing additional plans for catastrophic hurricane response.

Existing plans, strategies, policies, and capabilities were reviewed by LOHSEP before the first workshop. As pre-planning for the first workshop, conducted in July 2004, LOHSEP and Federal representatives identified a list of planning topics, based on those provided by the State of Louisiana, as the most urgent or complex topics needing discussion, including:

- Hurricane Pre-Landfall Issues
- Search and Rescue
- Temporary Medical Care
- Sheltering
- Temporary Housing
- Schools
- Debris

During the first workshop, participants were presented with the catastrophic hypothetical “Hurricane Pam” disaster scenario to frame discussions and then divided into breakout groups by responsibilities and topic for detailed discussions. The breakout groups identified operational concerns in each topical area, addressed issues, and drafted plans for dealing with the identified concerns. To address other urgent subtopics that emerged during the discussions, additional breakout groups were established. The following additional subtopics were discussed:

- Access Control and Reentry
- Billeting of Federal Response Workers

- Distribution of Ice, Water and Power
- Donations Management
- External Affairs
- Hazardous Materials
- Transition from Rescue to Temporary Housing
- Unwatering of Levee Enclosed Areas

It became clear after the first workshop that a series of workshop cycles would be necessary to address the full range of complex response and recovery concerns associated with a catastrophic event. Additional workshops were held in November 2004, July 2005, and August 2005 to provide further input for topics. Topics selected for further discussion during the subsequent workshops included the following:

November 2004 Workshop Topics

- Sheltering
- Temporary Housing
- Temporary Medical Care

July 2005 Workshop Topics

- Transportation, Staging, and Distribution of Critical Resources
- Temporary Housing

August 2005 Workshop Topic

- Temporary Medical Care

The goal of the Southeast Louisiana Catastrophic Hurricane Planning Project was to begin addressing immediate, intermediate, and long-term needs; create plans immediately usable by

planners and responders in the field; and seed the eventual development of a comprehensive and systematic operational plan. The ultimate goal is for the concepts identified in the Southeast Louisiana Catastrophic Hurricane Planning Project to be integrated into a final catastrophic plan. The project did not result in a catastrophic planning document per se, but rather a framework for developing such a plan.

My participation in the process included working with a LOSHEP counterpart as a member of the Steering Committee. That involves project management, workshops design and participation, budgeting, and HQ and contractor interface. At the workshops this included monitoring of workshop sessions, providing FEMA law, regulation, and policy information, dispute resolution, and overall directional guidance in meeting workshop objectives.

Participation included LOHSEP, State Emergency Support Functions (ESF), local Emergency Management staff from the thirteen southeast parishes, FEMA RVI, FEMA HQ, RVI ESFs, other Federal agencies as requested, and private industry partners.

Areas of responsibility were assigned in the workshops according to existing state and Federal laws, regulation, policies, procedures, and plans. No planning effort was made to re-create or modify any existing authorities. Directed or institutional agency authority on any given subject area was only reviewed and used as guidance by the planning session participants; however, participants were able to comment and provide opinions on existing state and Federal laws, regulations, policies, procedures, and plans and the possible need for changes. Two such State Plans included the Louisiana Hurricane Evacuation Plan and the Louisiana Sheltering Plan.

These planning sessions laid the ground work for future detailed subject plans. They identified the primary areas of concern by the local, state and Federal agencies and began the process of identifying who would address these areas and how they would be addressed. These sessions brought together persons responsible for the implementation of emergency management from all levels of government and helped lay a ground work of cooperation that had never existed.

Future intentions were to include continued subject specific sessions. Some topics were to be expanded. Some topics would be added. Some topics would only be maintained with updated data. It was our hope that the plan would not end or become stagnant but would continue to be a fresh and growing plan that included new data and innovative ideas. It was also hoped that the new formed working spirit between the locals, state, Federal and private industry would continue to grow and lead to a concept of “ours” versus yours or mine.

Although the catastrophic planning process has been interrupted by the impacts of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the workshops and planning process – knowledge of inter-jurisdictional relationships and capabilities, identification of issues, and rudimentary concepts for handling the consequences – have been beneficial to hurricane response activities.

I know that this Committee and others are very concerned about what occurred as a result of Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana and I want to assure this committee that all of my fellow employees at FEMA are as well. I want to assist this committee in any way I can in ensuring that what occurred never happens again. I want to thank the Members of the Committee for their past support of FEMA and I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today. I would now be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

