

**Opening Statement of  
Senator Susan M. Collins  
Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security and  
Governmental Affairs**

**Preparing for a Catastrophe: The Hurricane Pam Exercise**

**January 24, 2006**

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**Today, the Committee continues our investigation into the preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina.**

**Over the last four months, we have conducted ten hearings on major aspects of the causes and management of this disaster, including a field visit exactly a week ago to the Mississippi Gulf Coast and New Orleans. Our staff has conducted more than two hundred interviews, and has reviewed more than 300,000 pages of documents.**

**Now we are about to enter the final phase of our work. Hurricane Katrina proved to be one of the deadliest, and**

**certainly the most costly, natural disaster in America's history.**

**If our nation cannot give a good account of our ability to manage such a predicted, known, and trackable event as a hurricane, we must truly question our preparedness for dealing with a stealthier, more sinister terrorist attack.**

**Therefore, based on all we have learned from our previous hearings, interviews, and document review, the Committee will undertake over the next three weeks a series of hearings to cover the most troubling aspects of the response to Katrina, as a prelude to drafting our final report.**

**The focus of today's hearing is the simulation called "Hurricane Pam," a federally funded exercise to plan for a catastrophic hurricane in Southeast Louisiana. We will examine both the lessons learned and the lessons that, with such terrible consequences, went unlearned.**

**This hearing is intended to shed light on the following issues:**

**How did Hurricane Pam come about? Who took the initiative to promote it, and what does its history say about the state of emergency preparedness in Louisiana prior to Katrina?**

**What roadblocks had to be overcome to get federal funding for the exercise, in both President Clinton's and President Bush's administrations? Do these roadblocks raise concerns about government priorities in improving emergency preparedness?**

**What was the scope of Hurricane Pam, including assumptions about the specific planning scenarios? How did**

**pre-storm evacuation come to be largely excluded from the scope?**

**Did Hurricane Pam create the impression within FEMA that Louisiana had evacuation under control?**

**Why was the plan not completed? How did the failure to complete the plan affect its usefulness in Katrina?**

**What aspects of the draft Pam plan were used in responding to Katrina? What aspects could have been used but were not?**

**The Hurricane Pam exercise was conducted in Louisiana by FEMA from July 16<sup>th</sup> through the 23<sup>rd</sup> of 2004. It brought together as many as 300 local, state, and federal emergency-response officials.**

**This fictional storm was designed as a slow-moving Category 3 hurricane that had sustained winds of 120 miles per hour at landfall. It caused as much as 10 to 20 feet of flooding throughout most of New Orleans and surrounding parishes as the result of heavy rain and a storm surge that overtopped the levee system.**

**Pam's mock damage spread over 13 Louisiana parishes, and was extensive. In the scenario, utilities were knocked out, and chemical plants were flooded. About 200 miles of road lay under at least 10 feet of water, and more than a half-million buildings were destroyed. The human cost was staggering: more than a million people evacuated, 175,000 were injured, 200,000 became sick, and as many as 60,000 lives were lost. As a dry run for the real thing, Pam should have been a wake-up call that could not be ignored.**

**Instead, it is apparent that a more appropriate name for Pam would have been Cassandra – the mythical prophet who warned of disasters but whom no one believed. In many ways, the hypothetical problems identified in Pam predict with eerie accuracy the all-too real problems of Katrina: overcrowded shelters undersupplied with food, water, and other essentials; blocked highways with thousands of people trapped in flooded areas; hospitals swamped with victims and running out of fuel for their emergency generators. The list goes on.**

**The history of the Pam exercise dates to 1998, when New Orleans experienced a near miss by Hurricane Georges. In the fall of 1999, local, state, and federal officials met to discuss their concerns about the adequacy of plans to respond to a direct hit on the city. The State of Louisiana followed up with**

**a written request to FEMA in August of 2000 for a planning exercise.**

**Delay followed delay. Then FEMA reduced the funding allocation, so that the scope of the exercise had to be scaled back. In reaction, the State agency chose to exclude the critical issue of pre-landfall evacuation and the possibility that the levees could be breached, rather than merely overtopped.**

**The Pam exercise that finally commenced in July 2004 was supposed to be the just the first part of an ongoing process. A follow-up session scheduled for September of 2004 was postponed, and critical workshops were not reconvened until late July of 2005, with the result being that no additional planning documents were generated before they were so urgently needed. Instead, Pam became Katrina, the simulation**

**became reality, and optimism became the awful truth: we were not prepared.**

**There are instances in which the Pam exercise did improve the response to Katrina. The Louisiana National Guard incorporated lessons regarding the staging and distribution of such essential commodities as food, water, and ice; and the state Department of Health and Hospitals adopted concepts developed in Pam on how to evaluate individuals saved through search and rescue efforts.**

**Exercise Pam was productive in that it brought planners together, and it generated ideas and draft plans for future emergencies. On the other hand, Katrina made clear that too few of those issues were ever addressed, and too many plans were not fully implemented or even understood.**



**Our witnesses today represent a wide range of entities involved in the Hurricane Pam exercise. I am very interested in hearing their views on the questions I raised earlier.**

**An evaluation of this simulation is important for two reasons. First, the stated purpose of the Hurricane Pam exercise was not fulfilled when it counted, with catastrophic consequences. Second, throughout the country, local, state, and federal emergency-response agencies engage in a great many training exercises, at considerable expense, in anticipation of a wide range of natural and man-made disasters. We must use the experience of Pam and Katrina to close the gap between planning and execution so that we are better prepared the next time simulation becomes reality.**