

Remarks of David Paulison
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National Conference on Community Preparedness
“Partnerships and Collaboration Through Citizen Corps”

Alexandria, VA
June 11, 2007

Thank you all for being here. As I have traveled the country speaking of what FEMA has done to improve our organization, I have also been stressing the critical role that personal preparedness has in responding to any disaster.

We have many dramatic examples of the importance of citizen preparedness. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, in particular, illustrated the fact that, the more the public is engaged in emergency planning, preparedness, and response—particularly through social networks like places of worship, professional associations, business groups, and neighborhood associations—the more prepared and resilient our communities are when an incident occurs.

The public must be part of local planning, training, and exercising so that they will know what to do when the “real thing” happens. The American people are the ultimate stakeholders in the homeland security mission and must be an integral component of national preparedness efforts.

Sadly, too few of our fellow Americans are getting the message. A recent poll found less than half had made any preparations for the Hurricane season, such as storing water, food, batteries, medicines and other supplies so that they can survive until help can arrive. This was even true in coastal states and in the areas that were hit by Hurricane Katrina just two years ago. We must get out the message that personal preparedness is a necessity, not a luxury.

That is why I am so pleased to see you here today. You represent communities across the country and around the world. Your attendance shows that you appreciate the importance of partnerships and collaboration when preparing your communities for any event, natural or man-made.

This conference is dedicated to providing you with additional tools and skills as you develop your plans to for community preparedness. FEMA is proud to be a part of the discussion.

DHS and FEMA are committed to integrating citizen preparedness and participation in all national preparedness guidance. Citizen preparedness and participation are included as integral elements of key guidance documents, including the National Preparedness Goal and its Target Capability List, State and Urban Homeland Security Strategies, Homeland Security Grant Program Guidance, and the National Response Plan.

Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8 (called H S P D 8) specifically directs the us to work with other Federal departments and agencies, as well as State and local governments, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations, to encourage active citizen participation and involvement in preparedness efforts. This directive led to the development of the Interim National Preparedness Goal and its National Preparedness Priorities, including a National Priority specifically directed at strengthening planning and citizen preparedness.

Citizen Preparedness and Participation is one of the target capabilities, and is identified as a “common capability” that cuts across all four mission areas: prevent, protect, respond, and recover. The capability is defined as ensuring that “...every one in America is fully aware, trained, and practiced on how to prevent, protect/mitigate, prepare for, and respond to all threats and hazards. This requires a role for citizens in exercises, ongoing volunteer programs, and surge capacity response.”

At FEMA, we are leaning further forward to deliver more effective disaster assistance to individuals and communities impacted by a disaster. You can see the results in our response this year to Florida, Georgia, Alabama and Kansas tornadoes and the Nor’easter that affected States across the Mid-Atlantic and New England.

In each of these cases, FEMA was an engaged partner with the tribal, state and local governments immediately. We deployed operational and technical experts, rolled logistics and communications capabilities – even before a disaster declaration – and coordinated with the Governor to facilitate a Presidential disaster declaration. It was also FEMA that supported and helped to facilitate an effective Unified Command amongst the many Federal, tribal, state and local partners involved in the responses. We call this: “engaged partnership.”

It is this philosophy that will guide our actions as we face disasters this year and into the future.

Local governments will always be the first to respond. But FEMA has an important role to play. The old paradigm of waiting for state and local governments to be overwhelmed before providing federal assistance does not work. Under “engaged partnership,” FEMA has strengthened our relationships with key state, county and local partners. A “one size fits all” approach to emergency management will not work. FEMA is helping each State analyze their strengths and weaknesses. Thus, our planning is more informed and we can better anticipate specific needs and move quickly to support you in times of need.

In addition, I am pleased to take this opportunity to announce that this April we signed the Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperative Agreement extending and strengthening the Emergency Management Assistance Compact known as EMAC.

EMAC is a national interstate mutual aid agreement that allows all 50 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to share resources across state lines during emergencies. EMAC is administered by the National Emergency Management Association, who provides the day to day support and technical backbone for EMAC education and operations. During emergencies, NEMA staff work with EMAC member states to ensure that a smooth relay of information passes through the EMAC system to coordinate relief efforts.

As you can see, we are determined to improve communications and coordination across every level of government and with our partners in the private and non-profit sectors.

Don't believe stories that say FEMA and the federal government do not have plans in place. We do—and they are getting better.

There are areas, though, where we could particularly use your assistance – where you can make a difference.

One way you can be of assistance is to help us bring in talented people to FEMA. Encourage qualified people in your community to join FEMA's team. There are a variety of potential opportunities. Temporary employees are needed to be on-call to supplement our operations. Full-time employees who can develop the depth and breadth of skills to build the nation's preeminent emergency management agency are always in demand. And I can tell you a career at FEMA can be extraordinarily rewarding – professionally and personally.

Next, help us make the ideals of this conference a reality. We are working to build a culture of preparedness in America. Everyone has a role to play in preparing for disasters. First responders are just one percent of the population and can be overwhelmed or unable to reach the scene immediately.

Americans must “be prepared” to care for themselves and their loved ones during and immediately following a disaster until other resources are available. Government can and will help those who most in need. But a little bit of preparedness can go a long way to reducing the burden on all of us.

Properly trained and organized volunteers can play a valuable role in providing emergency surge support. You can help with an enormous range of basic duties, helping to stabilize the scene of an incident and freeing up first responders to attend to the most urgent cases. Organized volunteers can help with triage, directing traffic, emergency communications, light search and rescue, call centers, staffing evacuation reception

centers, and countless other necessary duties that can quickly overwhelm traditional local resources when outside help is still far away.

FEMA is reaching out in new ways to promote personal preparedness. One example – and this conference is the proof – are our Citizen Corps Councils.

Serving 75 percent of the population, these Councils provide a ready means to foster participation by community and government leaders, and a way to inform, train, and engage citizens in community preparedness that can support our first responders in an emergency. The Citizen Corps Program has expanded to more than 2,200 Citizen Corps Councils across the country. Additionally it partners with the Community Response Teams, Fire Corps, Medical Reserve Corps, and USA OnWatch programs.

Two quick examples:

Arkansas Seniors Are Prepared, or ASAP, is a collaborative effort between a number of Arkansas agencies, the American Red Cross and FEMA. ASAP provides senior adults in Arkansas with disaster preparedness information so that they may become better prepared to function in an emergency.

In Los Angeles they are developing a Medical Reserve Corps with more than 500 volunteer physicians and nurses and over 100 volunteer chaplains.

Citizen Corps Councils play an important role in harnessing and coordinating volunteer support during all stages of the emergency management cycle.

Citizen Corps Councils should include first responders, emergency managers, voluntary organizations, governments at every level, community leaders, and other public and private sector stakeholders in your community.

I encourage Emergency managers to reach out to their Councils and include them in planning and exercises.

In many states, Citizen Corps Councils and emergency managers have already established strong working relationships. Our goal is to spread this practice across all parts of the country.

In conclusion, I believe we have made real progress at FEMA and across the nation at every level of government.

By leaning further forward to coordinate the federal response, which is more informed through assessments and communications with our partners, we can better serve all Americans.

Today, FEMA:

- Has created “engaged partnerships” with tribal, State and local governments, the private and non-profit sector, and with community based organizations;
- Has supported and helped to facilitate an effective Unified Command amongst the many Federal, tribal, state and local partners;
- Has improved our planning, our disaster operations capabilities and our ability to help communities recover; and
- Is reaching out to community based organizations, the media, and all of our partners to foster a culture of preparedness in America.

Of course, we are not done yet. There is still much work to do.

But if our progress over the past year is any indication, I believe we are on the right track.

I am especially proud of the men and women who work at FEMA. They have put their hearts and souls into rebuilding this agency. I hope you are as proud to work with them on the ground as I am to work with them every day.

Thank you again for the work that all of you do in your communities. Thank you for inviting me to join you this morning. God bless you, and God bless America.