

David Paulison
Administrator, FEMA
National Hurricane Conference
Orlando, FL
April 2, 2008

Introduction

Thank you. It is a pleasure being here with you and it is always nice being home in Florida.

I don't have to tell you that we have been lucky the past two hurricane seasons. While Dean and Erin among others were serious storms that did serious damage, we have not faced the major landfalls that most predicted. We can't rely on luck every year. Another major hurricane might be just months away.

Yet one of the things I am most proud of, within FEMA and with many of you in this room, is that we haven't just been sitting around waiting for the next hurricane, we have spent the time getting better at what we do. We have spent the time getting better at what we do...together.

I am happy to say that teamwork and commitment has been evident over the past year, and that FEMA remains dedicated to working with you as an "engaged partner" as we face the 2008 Hurricane Season together. Over the past year, we have all worked hard to stand together and as I stand here today, I know we are better prepared to work as one when that next hurricane comes ashore.

Improved Disaster Operations

So what exactly have we been doing? A lot.

We have used our time over the past two years to expand our capabilities for responding to disasters, and hurricanes in particular.

Greater emphasis has been placed on Pre-Scripted Mission Assignments that help us to facilitate rapid response, as well as to standardize development of mission assignments prior to and during disaster operations. In 2006, FEMA started with 44 Pre-Scripted Mission Assignments with 2 Federal agencies. Today that number is 223 with 31 agencies. As you can see, the federal government is standing together to support you.

On the ground, we are stronger with our new Incident Management Assistance Teams – or IMATs. Each IMAT is composed of 15 professionals, specially trained and designated to be the first federal responders on the ground. They will be ready support the state within 12-hours, coordinate federal activities and provide initial situational awareness. Two regional and one national IMAT will be fully operational for this hurricane season.

Our new Logistics Management Directorate is working closely to develop a supply chain that is in sync with the private sector. Just last week they hosted the first ever National Logistics Coordinator Forum that included government, non-profit organizations and private sector participants in the discussion. Already we can better track our resources and thus improve our coordination. We also have contracts and inter-agency agreements that will improve our capabilities in providing supplies and services, base camp support, evacuations and transportation.

We started a Loaned Executive Program and brought in a global supply chain solutions expert from UPS. I see tremendous learning opportunities in the program and we are just starting to see its true potential. Last week's forum was also an opportunity to learn from the private sector about their best practices. We also have a new Private Sector Office help us engage with the community on a regular basis. We should not be reinventing the wheel at FEMA.

With these improved relations with the private sector, I was amused to see a report recently that criticized the federal government because local businesses provided supplies to disaster areas in their communities faster than government did. That's exactly what should be happening...and what we are supporting. The private sector is part of the solution.

Our operations capabilities are improving every day. But it doesn't stop there. We are also all involved on the ground as people rebuild.

FEMA now has 60 Mobile Disaster Recovery Centers that can be deployed on-site at a disaster and help people get the support they need. FEMA continues to work with federal, state, and voluntary partners to build a robust system for evacuation, sheltering and housing, including our collaboration with the American Red Cross to implement the National Shelter System. We've established a National Emergency Family Registry and Locator System and a National Emergency Child Locator Center to help those displaced find their loved ones. We have a new policy to help those with pets. And we are focused on streamlining and improving the housing and individual assistance programs.

Let me just note here that despite the problems with formaldehyde, we will use mobile homes if necessary to provide emergency housing. The safety and well being of those we serve is always our primary concern. When we bought these units off the lots from

dealers across the country, we were acting in good faith to provide assistance to hundreds of thousands of displaced Americans – the largest emergency housing mission in our nation’s history. Today, with the advice of the experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, we have determined that small, temporary travel trailers generally have too high a level of formaldehyde for us to comfortably use in the future. However, we are testing the larger mobile homes in our inventory that are designed for long-term use and will deploy safe units when necessary. We are already using them in Oregon, Arkansas and Tennessee. Of course, local resources, including rental units, will always be our first choice, but we do have this tool in our inventory if it’s needed.

We’ve also made it easier for the American people to stand with their neighbors by facilitating their generosity through the Aidmatrix system – which directs donations made nationally to where they can do the most good on the ground. We also have the Citizen Corps Program with over 2300 state and local Citizen Corps Councils that bring government and community leaders together to involve all sectors of the community in all-hazards preparedness planning, mitigation, response and recovery. I encourage you all to work with these Councils so that alerts and warning systems, evacuation and shelter plans are developed and promoted with strong community participation.

Each improvement has already made a difference. I saw them in California when the wildfires displaced thousands, and I saw them just last week in the flooded plains of the Midwest. In each case, FEMA personnel were on the ground, earlier than ever, standing with those in need, and helping them to get back on their feet.

In fact, since March of 2003, FEMA has responded to 402 major disaster and emergency declarations that included floods, tornadoes, winter and tropical storms, landslides and mudslides, earthquakes, droughts, typhoons and hurricanes. In responding to these, FEMA has provided direct material and financial assistance to well over three and a half million individuals across the nation. We should all be proud of this effort. I am.

Before Disaster Strikes: Planning and Preparedness

Our response will only be as good as our planning and preparedness.

Looking to the focus of this conference, FEMA is coordinating closely with our partners to develop the 2008 National Hurricane Season Contingency Plan in accordance with the National Preparedness Guidelines issued last fall.

Our plans incorporate our Gap Analysis reviews. Last year we rolled out this tool to identify what was needed where. FEMA worked closely with states in hurricane-prone areas to determine what we would need to respond to a Category 3 Hurricane. We used a consistent set of measures and tools to evaluate strengths and vulnerabilities in seven

critical areas: debris removal, commodity distribution, evacuation, sheltering, interim housing, medical needs and fuel capacity along evacuation routes.

There is no doubt that the 2007 Gap Analysis efforts prepared us to better support the States during Hurricane Dean and Tropical Storm Erin.

In another examples of planning making a difference for us all, FEMA's Risk Analysis Division is using the Flood Map Modernization to focus on filling flood hazard data needs and expanding and improving utility and accessibility of the flood hazard and risk data.

Yet another area of improvement: when I joined FEMA, we had few full-time operational planners. Today we have hired and continue to hire operational planners at the FEMA Headquarters and Regional levels to improve our ability to perform sophisticated operational analyses, analyze trends and plan for the response to ongoing and future events.

All of these efforts are being done in conjunction with the National Response Framework. Training is critical to the implementation of the NRF in the NIMS environment. While the NRF provides the Framework for response, it clearly must be understood and rehearsed through exercises by Federal components; Tribal, State, and local governments; and private sector as well as nongovernmental organizations. All stakeholders need to know how the Nation's response structure works and their roles and responsibilities.

I'd like to note here that we are not just getting ready for a standard Hurricane Season. FEMA has initiated a proactive, forward leaning, geo-specific Catastrophic Disaster Planning Initiative designed to ensure that FEMA and its partners plan and prepare for an appropriate, timely, and efficient response to a truly catastrophic disaster.

As part of the Initiative, we are partnering with the State of Florida to address a Category 5 Hurricane that could potentially place most of the southern portion of the State under water for 30 days and impact as many as 7 million people. In addition to the Florida project, there are planning projects for earthquakes along the New Madrid Seismic Zone and in California.

Looking To The Future: Transition

When Hurricane Season concludes, we will not have our normal moment for review and reflection. This year we will need to maintain our readiness while undergoing a transition of Administrations.

We are developing a robust transition plan for the change in Administration next January. The initial focus has been on filling the career deputy slots with experienced and qualified people who will be ready to “hold down the fort” until the next President chooses their leadership team for FEMA. I have named one of our career Regional Administrators, Nancy Ward, to serve as our Senior Career Transition Officer to help facilitate the transition for FEMA senior leadership and potentially serve as Acting Administrator in the event that no Administrator exists.

We are also working across FEMA’s components and Regions to develop simple, useful, and uniform means to transfer knowledge, experiences, and lessons learned to the new leadership. We will provide actionable guidance on the workings of critical functions such as the disaster declaration process, activation of the NRCC, grant processes and other activities that our stakeholders depend upon. We will not leave you standing alone during this transition.

Conclusion

No one really knows what this hurricane season will bring. But we have to assume that we won’t be lucky and that we will indeed have to respond to one if not more storms. I think we are ready.

So I want to end today by just saying thank you. Thank you for facing the challenge and for finding solutions...for offering ideas...and for your honest assessments which has forced all of us to look at ourselves with a more critical eye. That’s never easy to do. But it is essential to being successful. I am confident that together we will be successful. We have to be. The American public expects it.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.