

Oral Statement of R. David Paulison
Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency
Before the
House Committee on Homeland Security
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Good morning Chairman Thompson and Members of the Committee.

I welcome the opportunity to appear before you to discuss FEMA's readiness for the 2007 Hurricane Season.

We have made steady progress to improve our preparedness posture for the 2007 Hurricane Season.

The New FEMA is 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, and Alabama tornadoes, the Nor'easter that affected States across the Mid-Atlantic and New England, and just last week in Greensburg, Kansas.

In each of these cases, FEMA was an engaged partner with the State immediately, 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, State and local partners involved in the responses. We call this: “engaged partnership.”

Our response to these diverse and numerous events across the breadth of this great country are evidence of the New FEMA's readiness for the 17 storms currently predicted to form during the 2007 Hurricane Season.

With the first named storm of the season – Andrea – already behind us, let's look at our advanced preparation, our plans for operations during a storm, and our improved ability to help with the long-term recovery.

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 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 quickly move to support each State.

A visible demonstration of improved Federal capabilities is our playbook of pre-scripted mission assignments. It contains plans for a range of Federal support that may be requested in a disaster, and lays out the inter-agency coordination needed to ensure it gets there. This support ranges from heavy helicopters from DOD, to generators from the Army Corps of Engineers, to Disaster Medical Assistance Teams from HHS and Emergency Road Clearing Teams from the U.S. Forest Service. Don't believe stories that say FEMA and the federal government do not have plans in place. We do—and they are getting better.

With these preparations underway, FEMA will be ready to act. We have pre-arranged contracts, an improving logistics system, and other elements already in place to expedite our response. FEMA can surge its own teams and assets into an area in anticipation of an approaching storm.

This forward leaning New FEMA is evident in our response to the tornado that devastated Greensburg. In the first 72 hours, FEMA coordinated the efforts of numerous Federal agencies. FEMA had our Urban Search & Rescue team on the ground the same day Kansas asked for its support. By the way, the Kansas National Guard led by General Ted Bunting, and working with the mayor and city administrator, did an outstanding job of responding. Supplies were rolling within hours. Mobile support vehicles moved in early. I am proud of the response by our team of Federal, State and local partners in responding to this tragedy.

Now, once a storm is past, FEMA is also better prepared to help with the recovery. FEMA's Disaster Assistance Directorate has expanded its capabilities to provide mass care, shelter, debris removal, victim registration – including enhanced protections against waste, fraud and abuse – and coordination among the government and private sector entities all moving to provide assistance.

One recent example is FEMA's response to the storms and flooding that hit the Northeast earlier this spring. FEMA had staff on the ground before the rains stopped – evaluating damage and registering victims. Mobile assistance centers were available in the immediate wake of the storm. The first individual financial aid was actually delivered less than 24 hours after the President signed the first disaster declaration. This fast, efficient, multi-state response shows the type of action you can expect from FEMA during this year's Hurricane Season.

In conclusion, we have made real progress at FEMA and are much better prepared for the 2007 Hurricane Season. 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 State and local governments,
- Has facilitated and supplied an effective Unified Command across all levels of government,
- Has engaged with hurricane-prone states to gain a better understanding of their vulnerabilities,
- Has improved logistics and communications capabilities to improve response, and
- Has enhanced Disaster Assistance capabilities for recovery efforts.

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 to fulfilling our vision to become the nation’s preeminent emergency management and preparedness agency.

I am especially proud of the men and women who work at FEMA. They have put their hearts and souls into rebuilding this agency.

Thank you for your continued support and the opportunity to discuss how FEMA is preparing for the 2007 Hurricane Season.