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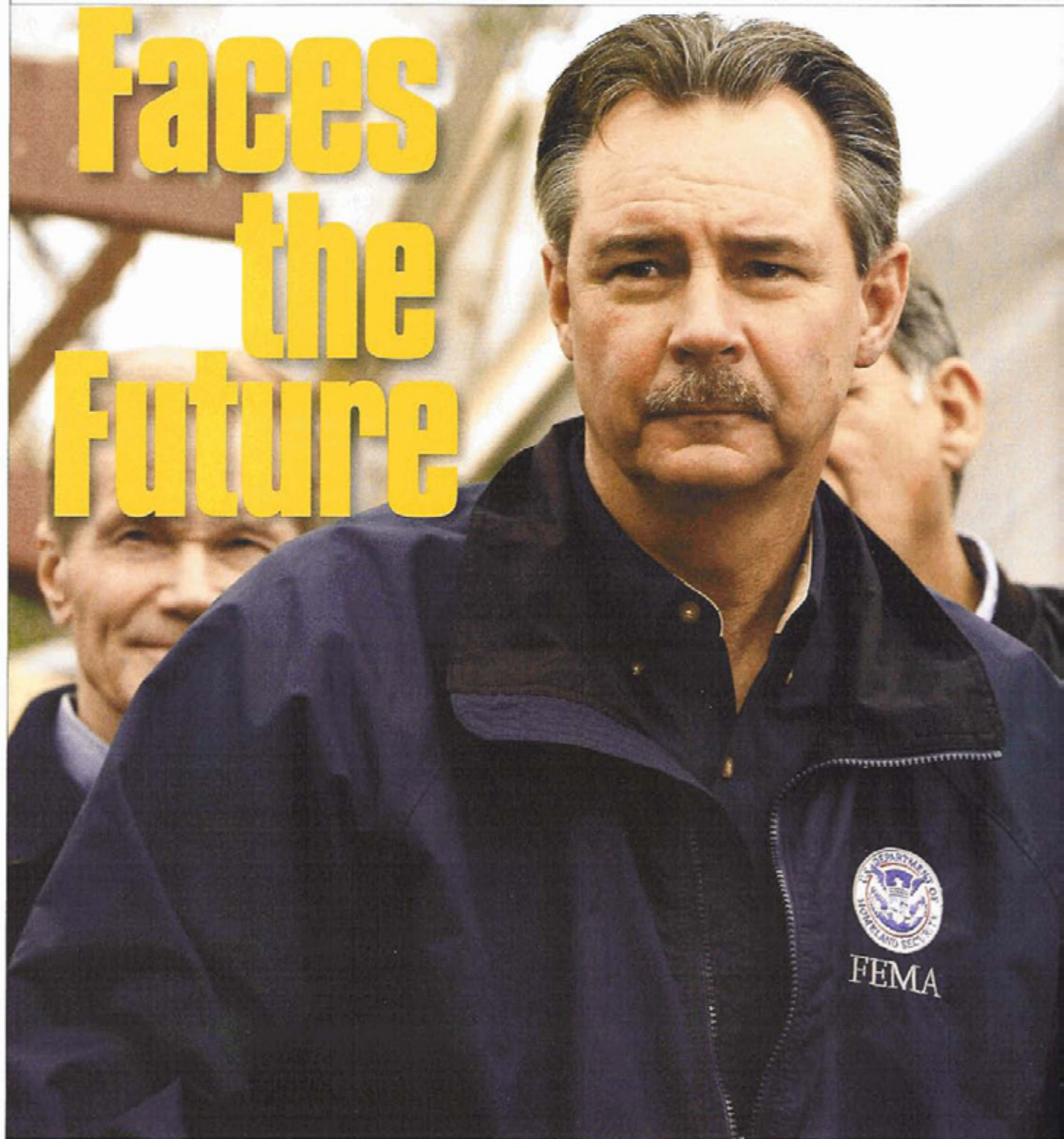


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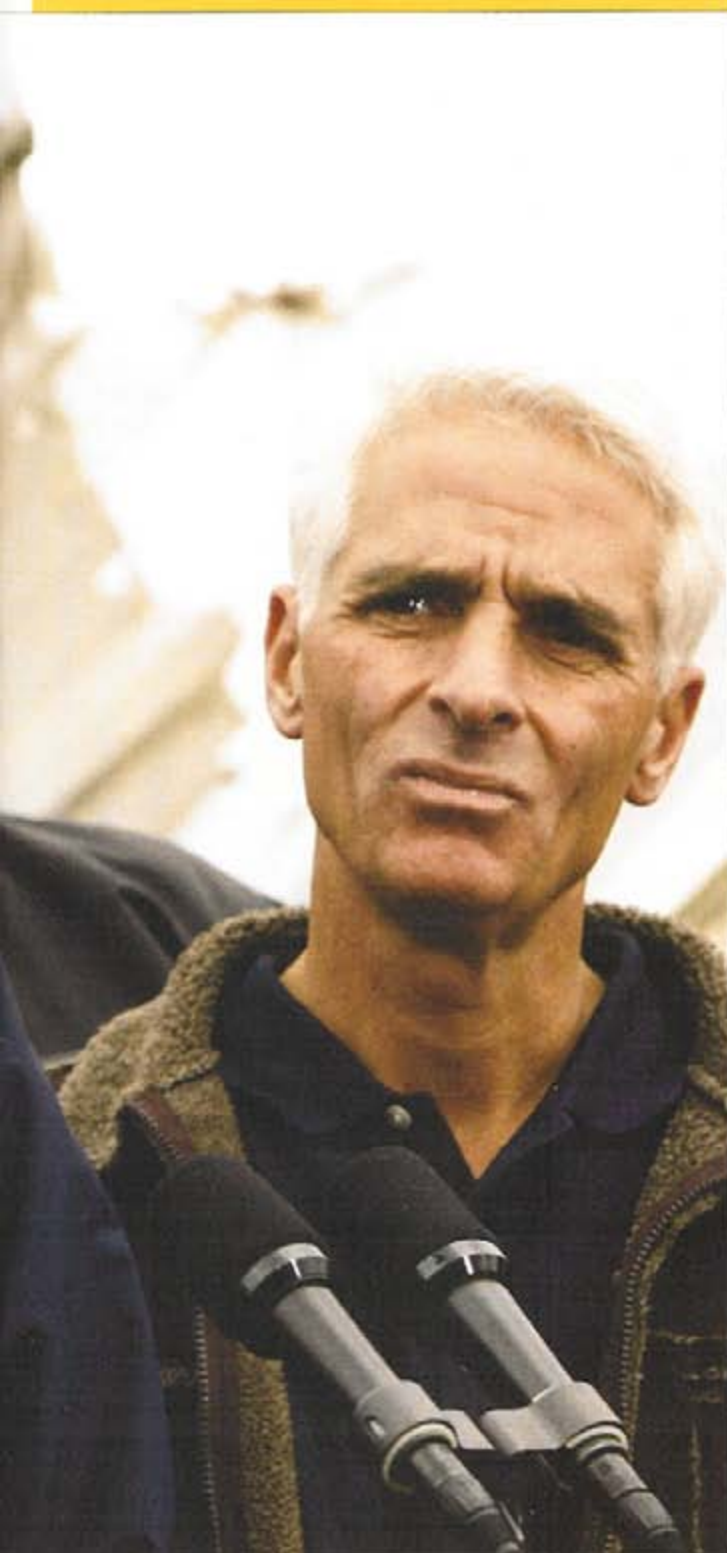
The New FEMA

**Faces
the
Future**



As the nation heads into its second post-Katrina hurricane season, federal authorities are hoping that a newly beefed up and reinforced FEMA will be able to handle whatever Mother Nature throws at it.

By MICKEY McCARTER, SENIOR WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT



WHEN THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA) CONFRONTS THIS YEAR'S KILLER STORMS, IT WILL DO SO WITH ADDED RESOURCES AND PERSONNEL. HOWEVER, FEMA'S NEW MUSCLE COMES AT THE COST OF THE DIRECTORATE OF PREPAREDNESS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS), WHICH IS NO MORE, AND WHOSE DIRECTOR, GEORGE FORESMAN, RESIGNED ON MARCH 29.

The reorganization was mandated by Congress in the Post-Katrina Emergency Reform Act, part of the Homeland Security Appropriations Act of 2007 (PL 109-295).

FEMA officials have embraced the reorganization while making the case that capabilities from the former Preparedness Directorate boost the agency's overall capacities to deal with all forms of disaster.

FEMA Administrator R. David Paulison, who rose in rank within DHS from director to administrator (equivalent to a deputy secretary) thanks to the Act, wrote a letter to all FEMA employees on March 30, describing the benefits of folding Preparedness elements into FEMA.

"Our new organization reflects the expanded scope of FEMA's responsibilities and supports a more nimble, flexible agency," Paulison wrote. "We must strengthen our coordination with other DHS components and better enable FEMA to coordinate with agencies and departments outside of DHS. This will enhance our capabilities to partner with emergency management and preparedness organizations and the private sector nationwide."

THE BOXES MOVE AGAIN

The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act transferred the US Fire Administration, the Office of Grants and Training, the Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Division, the Radiological Emergency Preparedness Program and the Office of National Capital Region Coordination into FEMA. Many of the federal employees transferring from the Preparedness Directorate found new offices within FEMA's own National Preparedness Directorate, headed by a deputy administrator of FEMA. The directorate includes the Office of Preparedness Doctrine, Planning and Analysis, the Capabilities Division, the Community Preparedness Division, the Technological Hazards Division and the National Integration Center.

Grants Management and the Fire Administration, although they were part of the defunct Preparedness Directorate, now exist as separate offices headed by assistant administrators.

Marko Bourne, FEMA director of policy and program analysis, managed the merger of Preparedness elements into his agency. Bourne asserted that FEMA had to transform after its disastrous performance in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in August 2005—whether Congress ordered the agency to do so or not.

"FEMA [since Katrina] has been undergoing a transformation, regardless of whether or not Preparedness was going to be merging into us," Bourne told *HSToday*. "We have to be a lot more proactive—forward-leaning as it were—to provide assistance quicker, more effectively, and to serve our partners in state and

FEMA Administrator David Paulison, with Florida Gov. Charles Crist, views the devastation from tornadoes that ripped through Lady Lake, Fla. in February. FEMA won praise for its quick response in this disaster and in another tornado-related disaster in Kansas in May.

MUTERS/SHANNON STAPLETON



David Paulison (right) confers with Marco Bourne (left) during their days together at the US Fire Administration. Today, Paulison heads the newly reorganized FEMA and Bourne is director of FEMA policy and program analysis.

local government in a much more expeditious manner, while reforming our business practices so that we have a better handle on what kind of assistance is being provided under what conditions and deal with the issues of waste, fraud and abuse."

Two congressional studies and the White House report of Feb. 23, 2006, titled *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned* (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/reports/katrina-lessons-learned/>), outlined issues FEMA had to address to improve its capacity to respond to events like hurricanes. Many of the factors that boost that capacity come from preparedness, planning, training and exercises, Bourne said, noting that the former Preparedness offices now in FEMA help to reconnect the FEMA response and recovery mission with the preparedness mission.

HURRICANE SEASON

At the center of "the new FEMA" is a change in philosophy rather than a shuffling of offices, Bourne declared. As a "forward-leaning" agency, FEMA intends to boost its pre-positioned assets and anticipate the needs of state and local governments, rather than waiting for them to call up FEMA when an emergency occurs.

In early February, severe tornadoes struck Florida, damaging Sumter, Lake, Volusia and Seminole counties. Local officials praised the rapid assistance they received from FEMA, which Bourne indicated is evidence of the agency's new way of thinking.

"The way we reacted—certainly to the tornadoes in Florida, Alabama, Georgia and other places—over the last several months is indicative of the new posture that FEMA has and the new way that we are approaching our support to state and locals," he stated. "It has been a model in the past that local government gets overwhelmed and then asks for the state, and then the state gets overwhelmed and asks for federal assistance. Well, waiting for that single point of failure to happen is not always the best way to go, especially in an environment where events are fast moving."

In the case of the Florida tornadoes, FEMA had equipment and people on the ground moving toward the epicenter of the disaster within hours of the storms. Many of the tornadoes struck at 3 a.m. or 4 a.m., and FEMA personnel were in state emergency operations centers and spreading out toward

affected areas to conduct damage assessment by noon that day. FEMA equipment departed from territorial logistics centers and arrived at affected areas within 24 hours of the storms.

FEMA's fast response was enabled by a quick disaster declaration, speeding assistance to Floridians within 36 hours instead of several days.

Tornadoes are one thing, but hurricanes are quite another, Bourne acknowledged.

"Granted, those types of events are fairly isolated in nature and scope, but as an expectations management exercise, this is the direction that we are going in," he stressed. "We are going to be learning as we move forward how to posture ourselves for larger events. But that is the model that we are going to try to follow. Along the way, we are going to learn even better ways to do things."

The National Preparedness Directorate lends greater technical assistance to states, adding planning, training and exercise capabilities to FEMA, in Bourne's view. As he put it: "FEMA has always been known as the hurricane agency, but we've always done far more than that. What we're embracing as part of the culture of the new FEMA, especially now that the Preparedness folks have joined us, is much more proactive, greater planning efforts with our state and local partners ahead of an event; looking at various risk factors that extend beyond just natural hazard risk to include terrorism risk; working much closer with the major cities and communities; working on a day-to-day basis with the states; and building stronger regional offices among our 10 regional offices, which are going to be seeing an increase in responsibility and also in resources to support their efforts in working with state and locals."

MANPOWER ISSUES

Perhaps as best demonstrated by the tumultuous tenure of FEMA Director Michael Brown, who resigned after the agency's failures with Katrina, FEMA is only as effective as its people. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) questioned FEMA's staffing and manpower and the lack of attention to filling key roles in a report of January 2007 titled *FEMA Needs Adequate Data, Plans, and Systems to Effectively Manage Resources for Day-to-Day Operations* (<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07139.pdf>).

FEMA's operations have been hobbled in recent years by the lack of a human capital plan, the report concluded.

"In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, considerable attention was given to the fact that FEMA had been under its authorized staffing level for several years, but FEMA has not developed a strategic workforce plan, and therefore cannot demonstrate that the authorized FTE [full-time equivalent employee] level and positions are appropriate," the GAO found. "FEMA did not have a strategic workforce plan at any time between fiscal years 2001 and 2005 and it did not know until January 2005 how many positions it had or where they were located in the organization."

Upon becoming head of FEMA, Paulison made filling leadership vacancies a top priority and hired qualified administrators to run the 10 FEMA regional offices, which are receiving greater attention as FEMA increases its interaction with states and cities.

Until recently, FEMA had only 2,300 full-time positions, but

the merger with Preparedness gave it another 500.

"It is not a large agency by any stretch of the imagination. We do have a lot of temporary folks that we bring onboard for disaster work," Bourne noted. "Of that 2,300, we have been aggressively filling vacancies that existed both prior to Katrina and certainly after Katrina, to the point where we are more than 90 percent staffed, which is a tremendous number and one of the first times the agency has been in that position. Our goal is to be at 95 percent staffing by hurricane season."

FEMA personnel often work the equivalent of two or three jobs every day, Bourne declared, often stretching its manpower to the limits. Both Congress and the White House have moved to provide more personnel to the agency in fiscal 2007 and fiscal 2008, in addition to the transfer of Preparedness personnel. In 2007, about 250 temporary workers—those primarily employed only during disasters—will become permanent full-time workers. In addition, the White House budget request for FEMA includes another 170 positions, along with \$100 million to fund them.

"There has been a tremendous amount of support to get FEMA where it needs to be in size and capacity and through its financial programs in order to be more effective," Bourne pointed out. "Quite frankly, this implements the recommendations that the Katrina lessons learned report made and that we have found through internal resource studies and business practice studies.

"So FEMA is growing and that's a good thing because it allows us to more effectively utilize our greatest asset, our employees, in a much more effective manner, which ultimately helps the American public," he added.

A BROKEN CYCLE

Not everyone agrees that reorganizing FEMA is particularly helpful to fulfilling the agency's mission. Leo Bosner, president of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Local 4060, believes his agency is so rife with problems that simply reorganizing it doesn't do much good.

"We've had reorganizations before, and we're having another one," Bosner told *HSToday*. "If I go into a restaurant and the food is really bad and I move it around on my plate, it still tastes pretty bad."

Bosner stressed that his comments do not represent any official view within FEMA, but he spoke as head of the local AFGE union representing about 400 non-supervisory employees at FEMA headquarters in Washington, DC. Bosner, who has worked at FEMA since its establishment in 1979, wrote a letter to Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), chair of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee On Economic Development, Public Buildings and Emergency Management, on April 16 to outline a list of grievances with operations at his agency and to advocate its removal from DHS.

"FEMA employees continue to report problems that hamper emergency operations, waste public funds, and hurt employee morale," Bosner wrote in the letter. "As the FEMA Headquarters union president, I have tried several times to raise some of these issues with the FEMA Director, but he has declined to meet with me to discuss them."

Despite his assessment of how poorly FEMA fares these days, Bosner admitted that the return of preparedness elements to FEMA could only be a good move.

"FEMA has fortunately been able to evolve over the years.

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When I first started, people weren't really sure what emergency management was to be defined as, what we would do as an agency, what the threats would be, etc.," Bosner noted.

"But eventually, we evolved into a concept that said: Look, in emergency management there are four steps that go on. One is first of all to try to prevent it; like when you put smoke alarms in your house—mitigation. Second, you do some kind of preparedness in case the mitigation fails. What are you going to do? You train; you have fire drills; that's preparedness. The third thing is after all that, if something happens like the house catches fire, there is response. You call the fire department. Then there's recovery. The insurance company shows up to help you get your house back together. In doing so, you swing back into mitigation: Let's make sure we build the house again and make it as fire-safe as possible. You feed right back into that."

So when DHS pulled the preparedness people out of that loop, they broke a cycle that emergency management professionals had developed to fulfill their mission, Bosner charged. Preparedness professionals looked to response professionals for information they required to do their jobs, and response personnel depended on preparedness for the same.

"When they pulled them out, I thought it was a horrible idea," Bosner stated. "They were breaking this professional cycle, this professional connection with people who should work together to make emergency management work right. They were also taking away a lot of staff that also filled in during major emergencies and disasters. We have enough employees at FEMA for day-to-day work—that's fine. But when a big disaster comes, we have to throw everybody into the battle."

ANALYSIS

Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD) 8, issued by President Bush on Dec. 17, 2003, required agencies to collaborate on the creation of a National Preparedness Goal, "establishing mechanisms for improved delivery of federal preparedness assistance to state and local governments and outlining actions to strengthen preparedness capabilities of federal, state, and local entities."

The directive indicates that "preparedness" translates to the use of plans, procedures and policies, as well as training and equipment, to enable federal, state and local governments to prevent, respond to and recover from large-scale disasters. On March 31, 2005, DHS issued an interim National Preparedness Goal (http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/odp/docs/InterimNationalPreparednessGoal_03-31-05_1.pdf), which introduced the idea that preparedness involves, among other things, a target capabilities list.

DHS defined the list as a set of 36 essential capabilities that various levels of government should develop and maintain to become prepared for terrorist acts and natural disasters. The American Red Cross is one of the organizations that sat at the planning table to finalize the target capabilities list, according to Carol Hall, director of homeland security and federal coordination at the American Red Cross. At press time, Hall anticipated a final list of target capabilities would be released within several weeks of the deadline for this article.

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