

R. David Paulison, FEMA Director
National Press Club
Washington, DC
Thursday, November 30, 2006

I'd like to thank all of you for taking time from your busy schedules to allow me to talk about one of my favorite subjects—the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

FEMA has been in the news a lot during the past year. And while the coverage has not always been positive, it certainly reflects just how important this agency is to America. FEMA is very special to me—not because I am privileged to lead such a fine organization—but more important, because I get to work with people who are devoted to helping others.

I believe many Americans have little awareness of: FEMA's size, which is about the size of many high schools—or 2500 full time employees; FEMA's mission, which is to help America mitigate against, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters; FEMA's reliance upon partners—be it the States, the Department of Defense, or others in the federal, state or private sector—to accomplish nearly all that we do, and Citizens' personal roles and responsibilities, along with state and local jurisdictions, in the emergency management process.

Now, part of this is our fault. We in FEMA simply haven't done as good a job as we should explaining our roles and responsibilities, managing expectations and communicating the urgent need for personal preparedness. Although FEMA can—and will do a better job of framing our respective roles and responsibilities within an emergency management context, I want to make it crystal clear that every American has a part to play in achieving national preparedness. Any American who fails to prepare for potential disasters not only places the lives of their loved ones in jeopardy, he or she also may put the lives of first responders at risk and contribute to a more difficult response. The extent to which any one of us is victimized by disaster is determined, at least in part, by how well—or how poorly—we personally prepare ourselves and our loved ones for disaster.

So, what does personal preparation mean? This means having a plan, understanding that plan, and exercising that plan. It also means having adequate homeowners and flood insurance to recover after disasters strike. America must continue to develop a culture of preparedness.

Did you know that on any given day: FEMA assists more than 2,000 disaster victims; and this is in addition to providing housing assistance in the form of temporary lodging or rental assistance for some 600,000 families displaced by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma? FEMA provides approximately \$8.7 million to communities ravaged by

disasters to help them rebuild and provide critical public services? FEMA and its partners in the insurance industry process approximately \$43.5 million in flood insurance payments? FEMA provides \$1.2 million in mitigation grants to help communities become safer and more resistant to future disasters? FEMA stockpiles enough provisions to feed approximately 1 million people for a week? FEMA employees have quietly, without fanfare, gone about the business of helping millions of people affected by disasters.

Since the summer of 2005, more than 3 million disaster victims have registered for assistance from FEMA. We've inspected more than 2.4 million homes. We've provided housing assistance to 1.4 million individuals and families. We've provided the resources to rebuild schools and bridges, police and fire stations, and courthouses.

I'll readily admit that while it hasn't always gone smoothly, the FEMA team has helped literally millions of our fellow citizens. I'm very proud of the work this agency has done.

I have several goals today. First is to share with you my vision for FEMA, and share with you where we are going in building the New FEMA. Second, share with you what we have learned in the past year. Third, challenge the traditional emergency management paradigm. And finally discuss some of the obstacles we face as we pursue this vision. And, one final point...today is the last day of the Atlantic hurricane season, and we at FEMA are thankful for having had such a quiet season because it has given us a chance to make some significant improvements to how we will respond to future disasters.

For the past year, many have focused on FEMA's mistakes during Katrina. To an extent, this has been valuable and we have learned many lessons. In a moment, I'll talk about some of those. But as the Director of FEMA, it is my responsibility to look forward. To set a vision for FEMA. To lead FEMA to meet that vision.

First, our FEMA Vision and What We've Learned over the Past Year. I want FEMA to be the preeminent emergency management agency for the Nation. Why? Because FEMA must regain the confidence of the American people and set the standard for best practices in emergency management.

How are we setting about accomplishing this? For the past year, we have concentrated on improving our operational core competencies, in such areas as Incident Management, Operational Planning, Disaster Logistics, Emergency Communications, Customer Service to disaster victims, and Public Communication. The 2005 Hurricane Season challenged this nation and FEMA as never before. It was a wake-up call for all of us.

We learned significant lessons in 2005. Communication—information sharing—was probably the single largest failure at the local, state and federal level. Logistics—knowing where supplies are and having the ability to deliver them to the right place, at the right time, and in the right quantity. Disaster assistance to victims—getting identities

verified and registered to expedite the delivery of aid. We've taken significant steps to address these problems.

In the area of Communications and Situational Awareness, one of the clearest lessons was the fact that a unified command is essential in responding to disasters. Real time information sharing is occurring at all levels including local, state and federal. Everyone is being kept informed through a Common Operational Picture. Federal Incident Response Support Teams—or FIRST Teams—are at the ready to deploy and provide situational awareness of disasters. Advances in technology are being utilized -- Satellite imagery, upgraded radios and frequency management are the new standard. All these actions are being planned in advance – so that the agency is ready on Day One for any disaster.

We're also strengthening our Logistics management capabilities—ensuring that we know where supplies are at all times and have the ability to deliver them to the right place, at the right time, and in the right quantity. Pre-stage commodities such as food, water, tarps and generators have been distributed to vulnerable areas. FEMA has implemented Phase One of the Total Asset Visibility program in the hurricane-prone Gulf States, by procuring and installing 20,000 GPS units giving us the capacity to track commodities and ensure they are going to the right place. A strategic partnership with Defense Logistics Agency is leveraging other capabilities and assets. Pre-scripted Mission Assignments and Contingency contracts are in place. Interagency Agreements and Memoranda of Understandings have been set up with other federal partners, the private sector and voluntary agencies to avoid delays in providing needed services to affected communities. And we've established a debris removal contractor registry so that local businesses are ready to help with the cleanup effort right away.

We're also demonstrating improved Customer Service to disaster victims—getting victims registered and identities verified to expedite the delivery of aid. Key developments include: Increased registration capability to 200,000 a day online, in shelters and now with mobile units; Increased home inspection capacity of 20,000 a day; Activated a contract to assist in identity verification in future disasters; and Tightened processes to speed up delivery of needed aid while simultaneously reducing waste, fraud and abuse.

We are also beginning to concentrate efforts on improving our business processes to create more robust systems, and to develop best-in-class capabilities, we have begun a series of agency-wide organizational assessments in areas that range from **human resources** and **logistics** to **budgeting**, **communications**, **financial management**, **procurement** and **data systems management**. The findings from these assessments will provide a solid baseline of where we are today, and a clear direction of the actions we will need to take to reach our vision. We are developing a results-oriented culture that is focused on delivering best-in-class service

FEMA Priorities and Building the New FEMA. FEMA is responding to the challenge confronting us with New leadership. We've built a strong team of leaders at FEMA Headquarters with decades of emergency management experience. Key leadership positions in our Regional and Field Offices have been staffed with highly qualified, experienced and capable people. For the first time in memory, FEMA will have full time, experienced Regional Directors in all ten regions—we're are in the process of filling the last vacancy. And, we are making concerted efforts to strengthen the Regions, because that is where the rubber meets the road. We are building stronger partnerships by working closely with our Departmental partners, such as the BTS, ICE, TSA, the Coast Guard and the Secret Service, in building an integrated team. Coordinating with our Federal partners at DoD, Northcom, HHS, DoT and the National Guard to clarify disaster roles and assign responsibilities before a disaster strikes. Strengthening our links with our State and local partners because they are the first lines of response. Regularly meeting with governors and state and local emergency managers to resolve issues and clarify roles in advance of a disaster.

The FY2007 DHS Appropriations Bill presents both opportunity and responsibility for FEMA. It Challenges us to improve our core capabilities and strengthen our Regions; Expands our mission to include preparedness and protection along with our traditional missions of mitigation, response and recovery; Directs us to widen our response beyond natural disasters to include terrorist acts and other man-made events; Requires us to engage new constituencies such as the law enforcement community; Establishes a national emergency management system; and Seeks to implement a national preparedness system.

The call for transformation is broad and expectations are high. The Nation needs a stronger and more capable FEMA. We hear this from the White House, the Secretary, the Congress, the States, the American people, and our team mates. We are working closely with the DHS to efficiently and to effectively integrate the elements of the Appropriations Bill. We have received tremendous support from the President, the Secretary and OMB. To this end, we are consulting with our existing and new stakeholders—such as the law enforcement community—to insure we thoughtfully consider their concerns and establish a responsive, customer-focused organization. We truly are putting together a “New FEMA.” Look for additional information on this in the coming weeks.

Our efforts are paying dividends and I will use FEMA's response to the short-lived Hurricane Ernesto, which approached Florida this past September and headed North along the Eastern seaboard, as a case-in-point. There was Better Coordination with States. I personally contacted governors of states in the storm's path. FEMA State Liaisons were deployed to State Emergency Operations Centers to facilitate coordination between State and Feds. Principal Federal Officials had met with States prior to the storm for better familiarity and to clarify respective roles. Video conference calls with States were focused and included the right representatives.

FEMA tested new systems and processes. The new National Response Coordination Center at FEMA was up and functional. Video Teleconferences included U.S. Northern Command and National Guard Bureau. Mobile Registration Intake Centers were exercised. Logistics supply system and Total Asset Visibility programs were tested.

The Shared Responsibility of Emergency Management – a New Paradigm. Now I'd like to talk about how we at FEMA and all of our counterparts around the country need to work better together when we're facing disasters. It's well established that all disasters are local; however, Katrina made it very clear that we need to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters as partners, standing side by side, so if there's a need in the system or a gap to fill we fill it before there's a failure in the emergency management system. The traditional model of waiting for State and local capabilities to be overwhelmed before federal assistance is on the scene of a disaster is no longer sufficient. Responding to all disasters, catastrophic or otherwise, must now be viewed from the perspective of "all for one" and "one for all."

It should be everyone's responsibility to make sure that no one fails. As an agency we are dedicated to being a partner with all of the States and the private sector. And, most importantly, we are a support agency. We are not coming in and taking over.

FEMA will proudly lead the transformation of preparedness and emergency management in the nation. But we need the help of everyone in the emergency management community to do this.

Changing the Culture of FEMA and Some of the Obstacles for FEMA. As an agency, we're in much better shape than last year. But we still have a long way to go. A critical piece of that progress is to ensure a can-do, results-oriented culture at FEMA.

The men and women of FEMA are dedicated, resourceful public servants who work long hours with the single goal of helping their fellow citizens prepare for and recover from disasters. Many of them have worked seven days a week for months on end whether in response to Katrina or to the countless other disasters our nation faces each year. They have made great sacrifices, being away from their families for months at a time to help their fellow citizens. And they've been able to rise above and fight through a lot of negative and sometimes unfair press coverage and sustain their pride and commitment. This "McGuiver-like" approach—for those who remember the television series—has served FEMA well because we've been able figure out how to leverage scarce resources and innovation to get the job done for our disaster victims. This quality has also prevented us from developing a more disciplined, strategic approach to many of our business processes. But we need to build on that willingness to work hard and look for ways to work smarter now and make sure the job gets done right.

I'd like to spend a few minutes speaking about other challenges for FEMA. Following Katrina, there were dozens of reports about what went wrong in response to Hurricane

Katrina and hundreds of constructive recommendations to avoid similar mistakes in future disasters. I bring this up to make a point. Although we can always improve systems and processes, we have a good understanding of what went wrong and why. We are aggressively and diligently working through the myriad constructive recommendations that emerged.

Let us continue the good work developing and implementing positive change for emergency management. We must resist the call for additional investigations unless they are based on new evidence or allegations. Rather than conduct additional studies, inquiries and analyses that look backward to tell us what we already know, we should continue to focus our energy on correcting the problems. Process is important, but results are what we and our counterparts at the state and local level will be judged upon. It will require changing the culture at FEMA by getting people to think more broadly in terms of results. The organizational assessments that I mentioned earlier will be important tools to push us towards smarter, more results-oriented thinking. But there is much to do beyond the confines of one agency. We will also need to learn how to work together better within the larger emergency management community.

As we strengthen FEMA and align with this vision, what can America expect of us? We will instill public confidence that FEMA is an agency that works for all of our citizens. We will capitalize on partnerships among the local, state and federal authorities—because we will bring value. We will manage our assets more efficiently and effectively. We will help the Nation continue to build a culture of preparedness. We will develop international protocols for emergency management, so we can be more effective when we are called upon to help others around the world. And accomplishing all of these, we will be better able to marshal effective national responses to disasters

FEMA's challenges are great, but so is our determination to meet and exceed the expectations of the American public. The men and women that make up FEMA are dedicated to strengthening the Nation's preparedness and our ability to respond and recover from disasters.