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Introduction

It is good to be home. It's remarkable to realize that a few years ago I was Chief here in Miami-Dade and only knew many of you through my work with the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

Today I am the Administrator of a New FEMA with expanded resources and expanded responsibilities. This is not the FEMA of just a year ago. It is stronger, faster, better than it was before.

This is due in large part to the hard work of the many dedicated and talented people at FEMA.

As the great coach Vince Lombardi said, "The dictionary is the only place that success comes before work. Hard work is the price we must pay for success."

I am especially proud of the men and women who work at FEMA. They have put their hearts and souls into rebuilding an organization that is fast becoming the Nation's Preeminent Emergency Management and Preparedness Agency.

I'd like to talk to you today about what we have done to build this New FEMA, and how the reforms we have instituted impact the UASI community.

Strengthening FEMA's Capabilities

2005 was an eye-opener for us all. It has also been a catalyst for change, improvement and reform across the Department of Homeland Security and at FEMA specifically.

To begin with, FEMA made some immediate changes and invested heavily to improve our capability to better prepare for and respond to disasters.

First: Communications and disaster operations.

We've made major technological and systematic improvements to provide us with better, on-the-ground, real-time communications. FEMA has developed systems to get information out to the public faster and with greater redundancies. We are working aggressively at the HQ and Regional level to improve communications with tribal, state and local leaders now. This includes the many new stakeholders such as the law enforcement community. We have developed significantly more pre-scripted mission assignments that allow us to leverage the capabilities of our federal partners in responding to incidents.

Second: Disaster assistance and reducing the potential for waste, fraud and abuse.

FEMA can now register up to 200,000 disaster victims and has the capacity to inspect up to 20,000 homes per day.

But, we can't provide assistance if victims are not registered in our system. So, we have mobile registration units available if necessary to go where victims are if they can't get to a phone, to an internet connection, or to a temporary shelter.

We also have implemented numerous reforms using new technologies and vendors to help verify the identity of applicants and confirm their eligibility as residents in disaster areas. Today, if you say your house was damaged in an event, we can actually confirm that you lived there.

Third: Logistics.

For aid to be effective, we must be able to get what you need, where you need it, when you need it. With additional stockpiles in place, better supply line management systems, and near real-time tracking of trucks on the road, we are ready to answer the call to deliver the supplies that the states request.

And Fourth: Operational planning and continuity.

When I took over, FEMA had no organizational planners. Since then, we have hired operational planners to build this core competency. Governments must be ready to provide essential functions and services to its citizens during times of crisis. FEMA plays a central role in the planning and preparation of insuring the continuity of operations during a national disaster—especially through our increasingly robust training programs and exercises.

None of this would be possible without the new leaders we have at FEMA – both at HQ and in the regions, where the rubber really meets the road.

We have been fortunate to recruit some extremely qualified people throughout the agency. In fact, last week I swore in our tenth, full-time Regional Administrator. This is the first time in recent memory that all 10 of these posts have been filled.

We did not just plug anyone into these jobs. Each of these leaders has decades of experience in emergency management, are leaders in the field and bring strong leadership and credibility to their job.

These men and women are the foundation on which we are building the New FEMA.

Which brings us to the issue I was asked to address today and which is directly on the mind of those responsible for implementing and supporting UASI plans – how is the New FEMA organized and how will the move of key components from DHS to FEMA impact the UASI community?

Reorganization

Last fall, Congress passed the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act to authorize and require further reform at FEMA.

DHS and FEMA took this as an opportunity to review our operations and organization. We have not done the bare minimum the law requires. Instead, we have developed a robust organizational structure that will be better equipped to serve the American people.

Under the new structure, which went into effect April 1, FEMA will have a strengthened presence within DHS. Many of the functions necessary to prepare for, respond to and recover from a disaster will be better aligned directly within the agency.

FEMA will be headed by an Administrator, two Deputy Administrators and a number of key Assistant Administrators. I am honored that President Bush and Secretary Chertoff have asked me to continue to serve as the new Administrator.

The structure takes advantage of this opportunity to improve our operations and business processes. We do not just have a Deputy for “Old FEMA” and one for the new pieces. If we had just taken Preparedness and dropped it into the existing structure at FEMA, it would not have worked.

Of interest to many of you in the room, the new structure includes many of the grant programs for first responders. We know how important these programs are, and we are dedicated to making sure they continue to serve all emergency management and first responder communities across the nation.

We are truly realigning our functions where it makes sense. Some of the existing FEMA offices will fall under a new Preparedness Directorate while others will report to the Chief Operating Officer. And a few of the offices will report directly to me.

Acting as Deputy Administrator of the new Preparedness Directorate is Corey Gruber – who will be speaking to you in detail on this new organization shortly. Corey will soon be joined by Dennis Schrader, who President Bush has announced his intention to nominate to serve as the Deputy Administrator for Preparedness. Dennis previously served as Maryland’s Homeland Security Advisor and has extensive state and local experience as well as a distinguished career in the U.S. Navy. I am proud to welcome Dennis and Corey to FEMA. We are already seeing the improved presence of preparedness across all levels of FEMA’s mission as this team joins us in taking advantage of the move to increase interaction and communications.

Under New FEMA’s umbrella will also be:

- The United States Fire Administration (USFA)
- The Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Division (CSEP)
- The Radiological Emergency Preparedness Program (REPP)
- The Office of National Capital Region Coordination (NCRC)

They will all continue to work with you and your colleagues around the nation. Their move simply solidifies the FEMA family and provides for renewed focus on the all-disasters approach that will be critical at the New FEMA.

With these changes, we recognize that the New FEMA must consult with and hear from New Voices. Under our new structure, we will have:

- A Disability Coordinator;
- A Senior Law Enforcement Advisor;
- A Small State and Rural Advocate;
- and a National Advisory Council.

We know we have an expanded role and expanded responsibilities. We want to hear from all audiences with a stake in preparedness and disaster response and I am reaching out to our partners in other Federal, tribal, State, and local agencies as well as in the non-profit and private sectors. The worst time to build relationships is during a disaster. That is why my senior leaders and I are spending so much time traveling and building the strong lines of open communication today that will be critical when an event occurs in the future.

And this is my next point: we need your input.

A Policy Framework

The National Incident Management System and the National Response Plan are undergoing revision and serve as the critical policy framework to align and update FEMA's policies and our collective emergency management and preparedness efforts.

NIMS was developed so responders from different jurisdictions and disciplines can work together better to respond to natural disasters and emergencies, including acts of terrorism. NIMS benefits include a unified approach to incident management; standard command and management structures; and emphasis on preparedness, mutual aid and resource management.

We've received over 9,000 comments on the NRP, and I hope you will be part of our effort to make it a tool that we can all use.

Finally, What You Can Do To Help.

I'd like you to take this message back to your communities.

For those seeking to make a difference for America, consider joining FEMA's team. Whether it is as a temporary employee in the field, assisting when needed to respond to disasters, or as a full-time employee developing the depth and breadth of skills to be able to contribute in building the nation's preeminent emergency management agency, a career at FEMA can be extraordinarily rewarding and one that makes a difference in the lives of disaster victims.

What else can you do to help our nation prepare for and respond to disaster?

Become fully compliant with the National Incident Management System.

Become a "Center of Excellence" at the local level to help your entire first responder community including support agencies become NIMS compliant. We need those fully comfortable and completely qualified with the system to share this knowledge with others in their community. This is what the UASI conference is all about. Sharing experiences and making everyone better prepared. I know I can count on you to bring these home to your communities and share your education and skills with your colleagues.

And finally, help us build a culture of preparedness in America. Everyone has a role to play in preparing for disasters. Our nation's first responders are just one percent of the population, and in an emergency they may 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. One meaningful way you can get engaged is through your state, local,

tribal, or territorial Citizen Corps Council. Serving 74 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. Just one example of how you can leverage federal resources to make a difference at home: In Texas, Harris County is using a significant amount of its UASI dollars to support a citizen preparedness campaign that will reach 5.8 million citizens.

Conclusion

Today, FEMA:

- Is better aligned and focused on helping America to prepare before an event strikes.
- Has stronger operational systems and plans in place to improve response and coordination.
- Is working to find new ways to help communities recover and rebuild after an event strikes.
- Is committed to working hand-in-hand with our partners at every level of government as well as those in the nonprofit and private sectors.
- Is dedicated to fostering a culture of personal preparedness amongst all Americans – and to helping you get this message out to the public.

Some of FEMA's efforts have been evident in the smaller scale tornado events that have occurred around the country in recent months. From Florida, to Georgia & Tennessee, and across the Great Plains and Southwest, we have seen a more responsive, stronger and more nimble FEMA during these events. We did not just wait for a request to come in. We were forward leaning. We began moving early so that there were no delays between a declaration and action. As you have seen – and will continue to see – the New FEMA is forward leaning and ready to work hand-in-hand during any crisis.

We are not done yet. There is still much work to do.

But if our progress over the past year is any example, I believe we are on the right track to fulfilling our vision to become the nation's preeminent emergency management and preparedness agency.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to continuing to work with you and your teams in the days and years to come. May God bless each and every one of you. And may God continue to bless this great country.