

**David Paulison**  
**Administrator, FEMA**  
National Defense Industry Association  
Crystal City, VA  
Thursday, September 6, 2007

**Introduction**

Thank you for inviting me to meet with you and to discuss the “Future of Preparedness” with you today. This week we kicked off National Preparedness Month across the nation and it is altogether fitting that NDIA’s conference occur at this time.

The future of preparedness includes internal reforms at FEMA, which I will discuss today. But the true success will come from building a culture of preparedness across all of America that involves all of our federal, state and local partners both in and outside of government.

Stronger relationships with the private sector are an important part of building this culture, and it is this why I am so pleased to join you today.

This is not the FEMA of just a year ago. It is stronger, faster, better than it was before.

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.

Today, I’d like to focus on the New FEMA and our role in building a national culture of preparedness.

**The New FEMA: “Engaged Partnership”**

To begin with, let me take a moment to explain the philosophy of the New FEMA. We are dedicated to working hand-in-hand with our tribal, state and local partners. In the past year we have made steady progress to improve our preparedness posture at FEMA, too, so that we will be ready to work with you and your teams when disaster strikes. Whether it is a hurricane, tornado, flood, earthquake, or even a man-made event, FEMA is better prepared to respond this year than ever before.

The National Preparedness Goal says it all: we will be “A Nation Prepared with coordinated capabilities to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from all hazards in a way that balances risk with resources.”

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 tornadoes, storms, floods and this summer’s Hurricanes – especially Hurricane Dean.

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

It is this philosophy that will guide our actions as we face disasters this year and into the future.

Let me reassure you, we know that the first response will always be a local one. But FEMA has an important role to play. The old paradigm of waiting for state and local resources to be overwhelmed before providing federal assistance does not work. Under “engaged partnership,” FEMA has strengthened our relationships with key state, county and local partners. A “one size fits all” approach to emergency management will not work.

FEMA’s own operations have improved as we put in place pre-scripted mission assignments, pre-arranged contracts, and stronger, more nimble plans. Don’t be fooled by press stories that FEMA has no plans in place. We do. And they are getting stronger. We still have a lot of work to do, but we are moving in the right direction.

### **New FEMA: Strengthened 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 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. In 2006, we made the short term investments we needed to be ready to respond. With the benefit of a relatively calm storm season in 2006, we have put into place stronger and more flexible logistics systems. With strategic stockpiles in position, 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.

Fourth: Operational planning and continuity.

When I took over, FEMA had no full-time operational planners. Since then, we have hired experienced professionals to improve 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.

Today, FEMA has strong plans in place for responding to a disaster. These plans are constantly being revised and updated and we appreciate the input many of you have provided as we work to improve them for the future. But the fact is, these plans are more robust today than they were just a couple of years ago.

And Fifth: Leadership:

None of these many reforms would be possible without the new leaders we have at FEMA – both at HQ and in the regions. I am pleased that you will be hearing next from Eric Smith, Corey Gruber and Glenn Cannon today. They are emblematic of the experienced leadership we have both retained and recruited.

We did not just plug anyone into these leadership roles. Each has decades of experience in emergency management, is a leader in the field and bring strong leadership and credibility to their job. Look at your next panel: Eric came to us from DLA – the center of logistics expertise in this country. Glenn started in local emergency management in Pennsylvania before joining us and knows these issues from the ground up. Corey is a retired Army officer who has been with the Preparedness Directorate in its many forms since 2001.

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

What does this mean for the future of preparedness?

**The Future of Preparedness**

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, FEMA will have a strengthened presence within DHS. Many of the functions necessary to prepare for, mitigate against, respond to and recover from a disaster will be better aligned directly within the agency.

We are striving to include preparedness into every element of FEMA. We do not want it separate and sitting to one side. Each of our directorates is including elements of preparedness into our work and our Regions – where the rubber really meets the road – have embraced this renewed element within FEMA.

One excellent example of this new paradigm is that our regions will soon be hiring their own Federal Preparedness Coordinators. The coordinator's primary role will be to improve the region's all-hazard preparedness posture by strengthening links within FEMA, DHS, the federal government, and among its regional partners. One of the

individual's many responsibilities will be to develop plans and courses of action based on risk and capabilities assessments to enhance the region's readiness to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from all hazards.

In the future, we will also prepare based on actual data and identified needs.

One major initiative that is at the core of FEMA's preparations for hurricane season is our Gap Analysis tool. Since March, the agency has been working closely with 11 hurricane-prone states and territories, using a consistent set of measures and tools to evaluate strengths and vulnerabilities. The focus of the assessments is on debris, interim housing, sheltering, evacuation, commodity distribution, medical, communication and fuel. In future years we hope to expand this program and do an analysis in every state.

Partnerships have been crucial throughout this initiative. We deployed task forces specifically to four of our states, and partnered with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to handle the medical portions of the Gap Analysis and to identify and resolve special medical needs. We expect this information to assist us in identifying vulnerable facilities and populations, ensuring shelters and staging areas are in safe locations in all states.

Under "engaged partnerships," we are learning to anticipate the need and to fill it quickly. Over the months since the start of the assessments, our relationships with state agencies (beyond the emergency management agencies) have strengthened tremendously, resulting in greater traction in identifying capabilities and shortfalls.

There are also serious efforts to engage the public in the culture of preparedness. DHS and FEMA administer three main initiatives to achieve this goal—the *Ready* Campaign, FEMA's community preparedness informational materials and Citizen Corps with its thousands of Citizen Corps Councils. All are contributing to building this critical culture.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, FEMA is well prepared to respond to major disasters of any kind. Real progress has been made in strengthening the regions, and as a result, we:

- Are better aligned and focused on helping the communities prepare before an event strikes.
- Have stronger operational systems and plans in place to improve response and coordination.
- Are working to find new ways to help communities recover and rebuild after an event strikes.

- Are committed to working hand-in-hand with our partners at every level of government as well as those in the nonprofit and private sectors.
- Are dedicated to fostering a culture of personal preparedness.

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

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