

STATEMENT OF

DAVID GARRATT
ACTING DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**“Disaster Response:
Is FEMA Up To the
Challenge?”**

Thursday, February 26, 2009

“Disaster Response: Is FEMA Up To the Challenge?”

Good Morning Chairman Price, Ranking Member Rogers, and other distinguished members of the Subcommittee. It is a privilege to appear before you today on behalf of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). As always, we appreciate your interest in and continued support of emergency management, specifically FEMA’s response and recovery efforts in the wake of disaster events.

Recognizing the compelling need to improve the Nation’s ability to respond to major disasters and, in particular, those of catastrophic magnitude, FEMA has worked diligently with our federal, state and local partners and the voluntary agency community to establish stronger partnerships, a much higher level of preparedness, and improved levels of coordination. We have also reinforced the critical and enduring need for personal preparedness, to encourage individuals to adequately prepare themselves for disaster events, recognizing that better individual preparedness translates into better community preparedness and situational resilience. At the same time, we continue to work with our partners to develop a more sophisticated culture of preparedness across America.

Improved capability and performance does not just happen. It is the product of experienced leaders, necessary investments in resources, engaged and supportive partnerships at every level of government and with the private and non-profit sectors, and the dedicated efforts of thousands of emergency management professionals across the country. It is also the product of a very clear vision for and a commitment to making FEMA the Nation’s preeminent Emergency Management and Preparedness Agency. In support of that vision, our agency will continue to focus on partnerships across federal departments and agencies, with states and local communities, with non-governmental and volunteer agencies, with the private sector, and with individual citizens – all to ensure a more effective national response through cooperation and collaboration.

I’d like to discuss some of the progress we’ve made.

In 2008 FEMA released the National Response Framework, which provides a clear picture of the resources and assets available through the Federal Government and clarifies the agencies and programs that are brought to bear in disaster response and their role in support of state and local officials. After the 2005 hurricane season, there were calls to reform FEMA, and FEMA responded, retooling our response capabilities, housing efforts, and logistics partnerships to ensure that we are better able to meet the emergency needs of individuals and communities affected by disasters.

FEMA has worked with vulnerable states to identify gaps, and areas where they will most need support, recognizing that one size does not fit all and any response will be tailored to an individual state’s needs. Additionally, we have developed teams that actively exercise and interface with states and local government in advance of disaster events and stand ready to be deployed to the disaster area, arriving on the ground within hours of a storm or other disaster striking. These teams provide real-time situational awareness and visibility on issues and a point of contact for state officials to communicate their need for resources to FEMA.

FEMA has significantly improved its ability to deliver assistance. Through alliances with logistics partners across the federal family and with the private sector, we have clarified guidance to states on emergency life sustaining needs and strengthened our ability to better manage the logistics pipeline to insure needed supplies and resources arrive at a disaster site more quickly and efficiently.

On the disaster application front, FEMA has collaborated with a number of Federal partners on a number of accomplishments. We've simplified and unified the application process for disaster survivors, and we've expanded our capability to register those in need of aid, to include providing mobile registration centers that can be on hand to help those without access to phones or computers, while also strengthening our ability to detect and limit fraud and abuse of the assistance programs. FEMA continues to work with federal, state and voluntary partners to build a robust system for evacuation, sheltering and housing, including our collaboration with the American Red Cross to implement the National Shelter System, and will be aggressively pursuing development of a National Mass Evacuation Tracking System. FEMA has also established a National Emergency Family Registry and Locator System and a National Emergency Child Locator Center, to help those displaced find their loved ones.

In every disaster event, we proactively engage and coordinate with the affected states and local jurisdictions and work hard to ensure that federal assistance is delivered as quickly and as seamlessly as possible. As we move forward, we continue to work to fine tune our operational capabilities and incorporate feedback from all of our stakeholders to ensure that we have a strong working relationship with all states. These improvements can be seen in FEMA's response activities, acquisitions management, staffing, recovery activities, as well as our logistics management.

Response: Life Saving and Life Sustaining Measures

Immediately following a major disaster or emergency that overwhelms communities and states, FEMA coordinates and provides the core federal disaster response capability needed to save lives, reduce suffering and protect property.

The responses to the many disasters we have faced over the past couple of years have provided us an opportunity to implement and evaluate many of FEMA's new and enhanced operational capabilities. Upgrades to our national and regional operations centers have increased our operational capability by providing seamless connectivity with other federal departments and agencies and state governments. This has facilitated our abilities to develop situational awareness and a common operating picture, enabling immediate decision-making. The upgrades to the National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) at FEMA headquarters have given us new and improved abilities to coordinate and exchange information.

For example, during disaster response operations, FEMA holds regular and ongoing video teleconferences (VTCs) to synchronize response efforts between federal responders, states affected by and supporting those affected by disasters, the Joint Field Offices (JFO), and the

Regional Response Coordination Centers (RRCC). More than 30 organizations participate by video and often more than 50 participate by audio in daily, national VTCs. This includes substantial and direct involvement of DHS components and other interagency partners. For example, the U.S. Forest Service provided periodic fire weather reports during VTCs convened to respond to California wildfires. This was a first for FEMA and proved to be invaluable in supporting wildfire response efforts. Through improved coordination with our partners, facilitated by the NRCC, we have also done a better job leveraging existing capabilities and reaching faster consensus on important issues.

FEMA manages multiple disaster response teams and assets that can be rapidly deployed to support state and local response operations including Urban Search and Rescue (US&R), Mobile Emergency Response Support (MERS), Emergency Response Teams (ERT), and Incident Management Assistance Teams (IMAT). Our teams have demonstrated new and improved flexible and scalable response capabilities during the responses to multiple disasters in 2007 and 2008. For example, our teams have deployed to, and redeployed to, as necessary, states, incident scenes and Joint Field Offices. In the response to Hurricane Gustav, nine US&R Task Forces were deployed to support Texas and Louisiana and eight Task Forces were deployed to support Georgia, Florida, Alabama and Mississippi. For Hurricane Ike, nine Task Forces were deployed to Texas and six to Louisiana. The US&R Task Forces supported the states in critical search and rescue operations.

In accordance with the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA), FEMA has developed and deployed IMATs, our next generation rapidly deployable interagency national and regional emergency response “strike” teams that are the first federal presence on scene, serving as liaisons to state and local officials, and providing situational awareness and needs assessments. Two National and four Regional IMATs are operational. FEMA is working toward having three National and ten Regional teams. The National and Regional IMATs were instrumental in providing on-scene situational awareness during the 2008 hurricane responses. All currently existing IMATs were deployed to support the responses in Texas and Louisiana. Critical on-scene command, control and communications support was provided by IMATs for Houma, Louisiana government officials and the Mayor of Galveston, Texas during last year’s hurricanes. US&R Task Forces deployed for hurricane responses and supported Search and Rescue missions -- more than 3,000 rescues in both Louisiana and Texas. The National IMAT-East and Region IV IMAT recently supported the 2009 Inauguration activities.

FEMA has instituted operational planning as a core Agency competency. In 2007, 15 operational planners were hired at FEMA headquarters to provide capability to perform sophisticated operational analyses, analyze trends, and improve planning for response to ongoing and future events. We have hired additional staff to meet HSPD-8, Annex 1 requirements to develop interagency plans for prevention, protection, response and recovery activities related to the National Planning Scenarios and to augment capabilities in the FEMA Regions and Area Offices. With new staff, there is now greater depth and capability to prepare operational plans and conduct crisis action planning to lead and support a national all-hazard emergency management response

FEMA has also greatly improved its evacuation planning capabilities. We have completed a Mass Evacuation Incident Annex to the National Response Framework and a supporting supplement is under development. There has been greater coordination of medical evacuation and assessment of public health and medical community plans. FEMA is more successfully coordinating medical special needs evacuation planning with DOD, HHS, and the states, as evidenced by the large scale medical evacuations from Louisiana and Texas. Through this coordination with our partners, more than 600 pre-arranged ambulances were available to Louisiana for Hurricane Gustav and more than 300 ambulances were made available to support Texas for the Hurricane Ike response. Special DOD aircraft were also deployed to help evacuate critically ill patients.

We have provided more support to the Gulf Coast regional evacuation planning effort, and in the future greater emphasis will be placed on regional evacuation planning for other parts of the country. For Hurricane Gustav, we implemented the Gulf Coast evacuation plan developed over the past two years in coordination with the State of Louisiana and evacuated more than 2 million people in 48 hours to multiple receiving states using multi-modal evacuation sources including air, train, and bus. Approximately 2,025 persons were evacuated from New Orleans to Memphis on three AMTRAK trains. Air evacuation for an additional 6,104 persons was accomplished on 56 flights from New Orleans to Ft. Smith, Arkansas; Knoxville and Nashville, Tennessee; and Louisville, Kentucky.

Another major area of improvement is in Mission Assignments. During response operations, FEMA uses the interagency "Mission Assignment" (MA) process to task and reimburse other Federal Departments and Agencies to provide essential disaster response assistance. Greater emphasis has been placed on the MA process to include development of Pre-Scripted Mission Assignments (PSMAs), a mechanism used to facilitate rapid response. In 2006, FEMA had a total of 44 PSMAs with 2 federal agencies in place for support for Hurricane Season. Since then, FEMA has increased the number of PSMAs in place to 236 with 29 agencies. This support ranges from heavy-lift helicopters from DOD, to generators from the USACE, to Disaster Medical Assistance Teams from HHS, and Emergency Road Clearing Teams from the U.S. Forest Service.

Working with the states to identify the gap between state resources and needs, the 2008 GAP analysis began focusing on all hazards for all states. The Gap Analysis Program was developed using a consistent, national approach to determine asset gaps at the local, state and National levels. The initial focus in 2007 was on eight areas: debris, interim housing, sheltering, evacuation, commodity distribution, medical, communication, and fuel in 18 hurricane-prone States. GAP has now been expanded nationwide to address all-hazards. The All-Hazards Gap Analysis Template is now being applied in all 10 FEMA Regions.

Since the Gap Analysis Program pre-identified state resource shortfalls in each hurricane-prone state, the data and insights provided by the program were critical in enabling a more effective response to last year's hurricane responses on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts. It saved valuable time in responding because FEMA already knew the states' needs.

Based on the National Planning Scenarios, catastrophic planning initiatives are being implemented in Louisiana, the New Madrid Seismic Zone, Florida and California. In Louisiana, the substantial post-Hurricane Katrina planning culminated in one of the largest mass evacuations in history (New Orleans). In Florida in 2008, while preparing for and responding to Tropical Storm Fay and Hurricane Hanna, the State implemented and used the Lake Okeechobee Plan developed in preparation for and response to a Category 5 Hurricane (CAT5) in Miami. This plan was developed as part of FEMA's Catastrophic Planning Initiative.

FEMA can now rapidly deploy telecommunications assets during disaster response to support communications operability and interoperability. We are upgrading outdated equipment and procuring tactical response vehicles and have also established Regional Emergency Communications Coordination (RECC) Work Groups in a majority of the Regions to facilitate communications planning and response capabilities. We provided direct assistance to Gulf and East Coast States in developing state and regional communications plans for hurricane season. Our MERS assets continued to provide communications support to states/locals, as well as our response teams and other interagency response teams.

Disaster Staffing: Creating a Ready Workforce to Meet Disaster Needs

Recognizing that our disaster reservists are the backbone of our agency – routinely accounting for 70 to 90 percent of any disaster response and recovery effort, FEMA created the Disaster Reserve Workforce Directorate in 2008. This Directorate has primary responsibility for the development, deployment and support of a disaster workforce ready for the national, all-hazard response needs of FEMA program managers and regional leadership. This office is led by a long-time FEMA senior executive and staffed with senior managers with leadership experience in managing other successful reserve programs.

This Division is dedicated to developing and implementing initiatives which will dramatically contribute to the overall disaster response and recovery capability of FEMA. Current initiatives of the office include assisting in the standardization, credentialing and development of uniform guidelines and policy to govern the workforce. FEMA recognizes that its disaster workforce is dedicated and self-sacrificing in its response to the nation's call for help and it is incumbent upon the Agency to provide standardization of administration and formal training that will further prepare and motivate reservists, attract more dedicated individuals to service, and provide a force with consistent and standardized training and credentialing.

The number of disaster reservists in the Disaster Reserve Workforce continues to remain steady. There are currently 2,016 reservists deployed in support of disaster response and recovery throughout the United States. Of those not presently in the field, over 50 percent have recently returned from disaster operations. As a result of a new initiative implemented by FEMA Regions and Headquarters, our daily number of available reservists for deployment is steadily increasing.

To achieve a ready workforce FEMA will continue to review policies and develop ways to make all components of our workforce more equitable as they serve side by side. Additionally, we

have begun the effort to develop standardized training and credentialing which will transform our force into a competent, reliable, and nimble Disaster Reserve Workforce; a national asset ready to deploy as an all-hazard response and recovery team anytime, anywhere.

Acquisition Management: Leaning Forward to Make Better Business Decisions and Partnerships

Pre-Positioned/Pre-Competed Contracts

FEMA has implemented several pre-positioned contracts in response to the need for advance planning and preparation. FEMA currently has approximately 75 pre-positioned contracts in its inventory. For Gustav, FEMA activated its ground and air ambulance evacuation services contract with American Medical Response, Inc.; its rail evacuation services contract with AMTRAK; and its pre-positioned housing inspection services contract with PaRR Inspection Services.

Following Katrina, there was increased focus surrounding FEMA's Individual Assistance-Technical Assistance Contracts (IA-TAC). Recent reports have recognized that FEMA has overcome many of the challenges that have been identified. There are currently five IA-TACs that were competed under IA-TAC II in 2006 to support the response to and recovery from disasters. The contractors are able to bring the breadth and depth of response and recovery services disaster victims may require from FEMA, to include: Mass Care/Sheltering support; site assessments; design and development of temporary Group Housing Sites; installation of temporary housing; and general Housing operations support. Task orders are now competed within the five contracts so that the requirements, as they arise, are awarded under fair opportunity procedures. Once the housing mission in response to Hurricanes Gustav and Ike are defined, the scope of any potential IA-TAC II task orders can be developed. The task orders will be for the immediate support needed to establish the housing mission. However, housing operations and long-term support, such as maintenance and deactivation of temporary housing units or group sites, will ultimately transition to local and small business contractors for execution.

Summary

The coordination of response and recovery actions in recent disasters has demonstrated an improved level of collaboration and cooperation between all partners – federal, state, local, tribal and voluntary organizations. FEMA begins monitoring an event early on, activates affected Regions and the National Response Coordination Center, hosts daily video teleconference calls with federal and state interagency partners, reviews and works with states in the formulation of Governors' requests for major disaster declarations, alerts our national response teams, pre-stages resources and commodities, and deploys our housing task force; every effort FEMA makes is strategic, proactive and aimed at anticipating needs of the states and local governments before they arise.

Our efforts to work with our public and private partners to improve our capability and capacity to deliver disaster assistance continue. We remain determined to better posture our Nation to respond to the response and recovery challenges now and those of the future, no matter their scope or scale. And, while disasters always present unanticipated challenges and obstacles, we know we will be measured by how quickly and surely we resolve them. FEMA has come a long way, but is by no means either satisfied or complacent, and fully recognizes that we, along with our partners, must continually strive to address the challenges presented.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I am prepared to respond to your questions.