

**ASSESSING THE CAPABILITIES AND COORDINATION
OF THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAMS**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY
COMMUNICATIONS, PREPAREDNESS,
AND RESPONSE**

OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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**ASSESSING THE CAPABILITIES AND
COORDINATION OF THE FEDERAL
EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAMS**

Wednesday, May 9, 2007

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS,
PREPAREDNESS, AND RESPONSE,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:10 a.m., in Room 311, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Henry Cuellar [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Cuellar, Lowey, Norton, Christensen, Etheridge, Rodriguez, and Dent.

Mr. CUELLAR. [Presiding.] Good morning. The subcommittee will come to order.

This subcommittee is meeting today to assess the roles and responsibilities and coordination of the federal response teams deployed in the wake of a catastrophic incident.

Good morning. And, first of all, on behalf of the members of the subcommittee, I would like to welcome our panel.

At the outset, I would like to express concern about the timeliness of receiving the witnesses' testimony. It is important that all witnesses before—the committee rules requires that we receive the testimony 48 hours in advance of the hearings so members will have ample time to review and develop follow-up questions. I hope this rule will be honored in the future.

For my ranking member, Mr. Dent, if it is okay with you, I would ask the committee's staff to sit down with our FEMA folks and let's go through the process on how this works, what we can do to make sure this doesn't happen again, because it is not the first time. If it would have been the first time, we would not be doing this.

But I would ask that FEMA, the governmental liaison, sit down with Graig and the committee staff to go over this because, again, if it was the first time, Mr. Dent, I would just make that statement and move on, but it is one of those bad recurring dreams that keeps coming back and back and back again.

So I would ask the staff to sit down with FEMA and any other Homeland Security part that is under our jurisdiction to make sure that we get these procedural issues out of the way.

On a positive note, we are glad that all of you are here to discuss the coordination and the capabilities of the federal response teams that are up in response to this type of incident, whether they are

terrorist attacks or natural disasters. I look forward to hearing testimony from Mr. Powers from FEMA, so we can get an overview of how disaster operations will work in the new FEMA.

I also look forward to an update of how the department's reforms will impact their ability to quickly deploy assets before, during and after disasters. Key assets that FEMA can call on in the wake of a disaster are the urban search and rescue system and the national disaster medical system. These programs form the backbone of a coordinated federal response and we need to make sure that they have the resources and the management they need.

Specifically, I am interested in looking at how these teams fit into the overall FEMA command structure, especially the NDMS, which was transferred from FEMA to the Department of Health and Human Services at the beginning of the year. The issues identified in the wake of Katrina highlighted the discrepancies over who is responsible for bringing response capabilities to bear in these types of emergencies.

At the same time, there were many success stories that came out of that disaster. The work of the urban search and rescue and the disaster medical assistance teams were definitely among them. Congress must ensure that these teams are fully funded, adequately trained, and that each team member is given the equipment necessary to perform and function at the highest level possible.

It is unsettling that after the devastating Oklahoma City bombing, the 9/11 attacks, the Hurricane Katrina, that funding levels to support the urban search and rescue systems have drastically decreased from \$66 million in fiscal year 2003 to \$25 million in fiscal year 2007. We can all agree that we need to make and take the appropriate steps to provide consistent funding, as these emergency responders are vital in preserving and protecting the lives and the property of American citizens.

Finally, it has not gone unnoticed by this committee that the Department of Homeland Security will likely not meet the June 1 deadline in producing the final version of the national response plan, which will reflect lessons learned from Katrina. Again, I emphasize there have been several deadlines that have not been met, and this is another one that has not been met by the agency.

Again, we are interested not in a "gotcha"-type of politics, but we are more interested in how we can work together so we can all do our job together. With the 2007 hurricane season only a few weeks away, we anxiously anticipate its release.

I want to thank the witnesses again for their testimony.

The chair will now recognize the ranking minority member of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Dent, for any statement that he might have.

Mr. DENT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This hearing continues the subcommittee's oversight of the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to strengthen the capabilities of FEMA and implement the post-Katrina emergency management format of last year.

One of the lessons learned from the response to Hurricane Katrina was that the federal government lacked a clear incident

command structure, and that information and situational awareness were insufficient.

The emergency response teams we are going to discuss today were established to help improve situational awareness and support state and local response operations. These teams provide federal assistance to help integrate federal, state, local, tribal and nongovernmental response efforts in the early stages of a catastrophic incident. It is my understanding that some of FEMA's response teams will soon be restructured to meet the requirements of last year's reform legislation.

I look forward to discussing the steps FEMA has taken in the interim to improve its responsiveness with Mr. Bob Powers, FEMA's assistant administrator for disaster operations. I also look forward to hearing from him on when and how FEMA anticipates the current emergency response teams will be transformed into incident management assistance teams, and how this will affect the roles of other existing federal response assets.

As the chairman has mentioned today, too, also here with us will be Mr. Fred Endrikat, the special operations chief of the Philadelphia Fire Department; Mr. Charles Prather, chief of the Orange County Fire Authority; and Mr. William Devir, commander of Ohio's disaster medical assistance team.

So I do look forward to discussing with each of these gentlemen their perspectives on the coordination of federal emergency response teams with other response efforts by state and local governments. I also hope to discuss with them ways in which Congress can help strengthen this important surge capacity for disaster response and whether legislation is necessary to do so.

So I thank the witnesses for taking the time to be here today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. CUELLAR. Thank you, Mr. Dent.

Other members of the subcommittee are reminded that, under the committee rules, opening statements may be submitted for the record.

I ask at this time for unanimous consent that the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Rodriguez, be permitted to join our hearing and ask the witnesses questions.

Without objection, it is so ordered.

I now welcome the panel of witnesses.

Our first witness is Mr. Bob Powers, who is the acting deputy assistant administrator for disaster operations at the Federal Emergency Management Agency within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Prior to his current post, Mr. Powers served as the operations branch chief, response division for FEMA, where he was responsible for incident response.

Our second witness is Mr. Fred Endrikat, who is the special operations chief of the Philadelphia Fire Department. The chief has been a Philadelphia firefighter for 32 years. He also serves FEMA's urban search and rescue national response system in concurrent duty assignments as the national task force leaders representative, incident support team operations chief, task force leader for the Pennsylvania Task Force 1.

Our third witness is Mr. Charles Prather, who is the chief of the Orange County Fire Authority. Chief Prather began serving in this

capacity in 1997, and is responsible for the daily operations of one of the largest fire operations in the state of California.

Our fourth witness is Mr. William Devir, who is the commander for the disaster medical assistance team, Ohio 5, for the national disaster medical system for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Commander Devir is the founding member of the Team Ohio 5 and has served as team commander since 1991.

We are all pleased to have you present. Again, welcome.

Without objection, the witnesses' full testimony will be inserted in the record.

I now ask each witness to summarize the statement for 5 minutes, beginning with Mr. Powers.

Mr. Powers, if you want to get started?

STATEMENT OF ROBERT F. POWERS, ACTING DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, DISASTER OPERATIONS DIRECTORATE, FEMA

Mr. POWERS. Good morning, Chairman Cuellar, Mr. Dent, members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me here today. I am Robert Powers, the acting deputy assistant administrator for disaster operations at FEMA. I look forward to working with you to continue our joint efforts to enhance the capabilities of the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the Department of Homeland Security.

In May 2006, as FEMA was being scrutinized in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the president nominated and the Senate confirmed David Paulison as the FEMA director. Mr. Paulison's vision for a new FEMA is for FEMA to become the nation's preeminent emergency management and preparedness agency. We are working hard, very hard, to achieve this vision, especially as it relates to strengthening the full spectrum of disaster operational capabilities, including developing more robust national and regional emergency response teams.

The post-Katrina reviews, including those from the White House, the Senate, the House, and others, and the Post-Katrina Emergency Management and Reform Act of 2006 identified a number of candidate areas to improve our disaster response capabilities. An overarching theme among the recommendations was the need to strengthen command, control, coordination and unity of effort, and to be able to field a new generation of rapidly deployable federal emergency teams.

Drawing upon our extensive disaster response experience, lessons learned, and these recommendations, we are taking definitive steps to improve incident management to ensure greater operational awareness and to become more proactive in our approach. FEMA employs a network of operations and coordination centers to help integrate and manage disaster response, maintain situational awareness, and develop a common operating picture.

These centers facilitate information-sharing, oversee resource allocations, and prepare consolidated, consistent and accurate reports on the status of incidents, responses or potential events for use by FEMA and department leadership. Operationally, FEMA maintains very close connectivity with the Department of Homeland Security through the national operations center, as well as with national

and regional federal, military, state, and local operations centers, including our joint field offices responding to a disaster, state fusion centers, and joint terrorism task forces.

To manage our situational awareness, coordination and alert and notification needs, FEMA has a network of centers, including the national response coordination center located at FEMA headquarters. It is one of the five component elements of the DHS national operations center. The NRCC is a multiple agency coordination center that integrates overall federal emergency response actions, coordinates FEMA operational activities, and manages disaster response from the federal interagency.

Regional response and coordination centers are located in each of our 10 FEMA regions. The RRCCs are multi-agency centers that coordinate tactical response actions and support the regional administrator at joint field offices located within their region, and the FEMA administrator. The FEMA operations center located at Mount Weather serves as a critical node in the nation's warning and communications network.

As part of our mandate to provide critical assistance to state, local and tribal governments, we can activate and deploy a number of response teams and assets. They include a national-level emergency response team called an ERT-N. It is deployed by FEMA headquarters for incidents of national significance and major disasters; advanced element emergency response teams, called ERT-As, are located in each of the 10 FEMA regions. They can be deployed in the early phases of an incident to work directly with the state and local officials to assess the disaster impact, to gain situational awareness, to help coordinate the federal response, and to respond to specific state requests for assistance.

The federal incident response support team, or FIRST, can rapidly deploy to or work with state and local officials to provide preliminary on-scene situational awareness and provide initial federal support at the local incident commander level to ensure integrated and interjurisdictional response. Urban search and rescue task forces can be deployed to assist in structural collapse rescue. Mobile emergency response support systems, also called MERS, can be deployed to provide mobile telecommunications, logistics and operational capabilities.

As directed by the Post-Katrina Reform Act and adopted as part of our continual improvement process, we are developing a next-generation of rapidly deployable interagency national and regional emergency response teams. Unlike our current emergency response teams, which are staffed on a collateral duty basis, these new teams will be staffed with a corps of dedicated, permanent, full-time employees who when not responding to a disaster, will regularly train and exercise as a unit to support state and local emergency response, planning, training, and exercises.

These teams are designed to provide better management coordination and integration of the federal disaster response, and when fully operational will replace the existing emergency teams at both the national and regional levels. We are taking FEMA in a new direction, one that reflects a broader mission challenge, a wider set of partners, and a greater depth of mission perspective. The new

FEMA will require new skill sets, a greater investment in people, and new tools to help ensure mission success.

The response team upgrades currently underway will position FEMA to more effectively carry out our core missions to protect the American public.

Thank you for your time today. I look forward to answering your questions.

[The statement of Mr. Powers follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROBERT F. POWERS

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Thompson, Subcommittee Chairman Cuellar, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today.

I am Robert F. Powers, Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Disaster Operations Directorate at FEMA. I look forward to working with this Subcommittee and Congress to continue improvements to enhance the capabilities of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Based on our experiences and lessons learned over the years, we are building a new FEMA to further improve our Nation's all-hazards preparedness, protection, response, recovery and mitigation systems and capabilities. We are taking the first steps in what will be a multi-year effort to significantly increase FEMA's core operational capabilities and capacity to better serve and protect our Nation and its citizens.

FEMA learned significant lessons from the 2005 Hurricane Season. Following Hurricane Katrina, the White House recommended in its report, "The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina Lessons Learned," that FEMA strengthen operational disaster response capabilities. Similar recommendations were made in General Accountability Office, Inspector General, and the Senate and House of Representatives reviews. More recently, the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (Post-Katrina Act) articulated new expectations for FEMA, established new leadership responsibilities, brought an expanded scope of missions, and called for FEMA to undertake a broad range of activities involving preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation both before and after terrorist events, natural and manmade disasters. Specific responsibilities assigned to FEMA in the Post-Katrina Act are the need to:

- partner with non-Federal entities to build a national emergency management system;
- improve Federal response capabilities; and
- establish national and regional emergency response teams.

Our goal is to build a new FEMA that will be the Nation's preeminent emergency management and preparedness agency. FEMA is adopting a more forward leaning and collaborative disaster response approach and, we are strengthening our capabilities across the full spectrum of operational and support missions. Central to this effort will be developing more robust National and Regional disaster response teams that will provide the critical support needed to help State, local, and tribal governments respond to disasters. It is my pleasure to discuss with you today in more detail our current disaster response teams and assets, and actions we are taking to improve our capabilities to serve the American people.

BACKGROUND

FEMA's primary mission is to reduce the loss of life and property and protect the Nation from all hazards, including natural disasters, acts of terrorism and other man made disasters by leading and supporting the Nation in a risk-based, comprehensive emergency management system of preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation. FEMA has the primary responsibility for leading and coordinating the Federal government's disaster response efforts.

The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act provides the legal basis for FEMA to provide disaster response and recovery assistance. Following a major emergency or disaster declaration by the President, FEMA is authorized to dispatch its own disaster response teams and assets to provide support or to issue a Mission Assignment to the National Response Plan (NRP) signatory Departments and Agencies for support. In addition, FEMA can surge assets into an area in anticipation of an approaching storm or event that is expected to cause a significant impact and result in a declared emergency or major disaster. This surge allows FEMA to position for a quick response, but actual assistance cannot be provided until the Governor requests and a Presidential declaration is made.

The Mission Assignment is the vehicle used by FEMA in a Stafford Act major disaster or emergency declaration to order immediate, short-term disaster response assistance from Departments and Agencies to help State, local, and tribal governments that are overwhelmed by the event and unable to perform the necessary work. To streamline and facilitate rapid disaster response, FEMA has also approved a number of Pre-Scripted Mission Assignments (PSMAs). In 2006, FEMA had a total of 44 PSMAs in place for support—16 Department of Defense PSMAs and 28 United States Army Corps of Engineers PSMAs. By June 15, 2007, we expect to complete an additional 141 PSMAs for a total of 185 to support our disaster response activities.

Disaster response support is coordinated through one or more of the NRP's 15 Emergency Support Functions (ESFs). The ESFs serve as the primary operational-level mechanism supporting FEMA in providing State and local disaster assistance in functional areas such as transportation, communications, public works and engineering, firefighting, mass care, housing, human services, public health and medical services, search and rescue, agriculture, and energy. The 32 Departments and Agencies signatory to the NRP provide substantial disaster response assistance in their areas of expertise and in essence become force multipliers for FEMA when assigned missions to support the disaster response. In addition, FEMA can surge its own teams and assets into an area in anticipation of an approaching storm or event that is expected to cause a significant impact and result in a declared emergency or major disaster and can turn to other DHS components such as the U.S. Coast Guard for assistance. The surge capability allows FEMA to pre-position for a quick response, but actual assistance cannot be provided until the Governor requests and a Presidential declaration is made.

FEMA DISASTER RESPONSE ASSETS

FEMA has multiple disaster response operations centers and teams that allow us to provide and coordinate disaster response assistance. As stated above, our approach is to lean forward aggressively in pushing resources out and sustaining the flow of these resources to ensure immediate and continued support to the impacted governments.

OPERATIONS CENTERS

FEMA manages a network of FEMA operations centers to coordinate and sustain response operations, maintain situational awareness and a common operating picture for DHS and FEMA leadership, facilitate information sharing between FEMA and non-FEMA entities, and provide internal and external stakeholders a consolidated, consistent, and accurate status of on-going incidents, responses, or potential events. The key components of this network are the National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) in FEMA Headquarters; the Regional Response Coordination Centers (RRCC) located in each of the ten FEMA Regions; the FEMA Operations Center (FOC) located at the Mt. Weather Emergency Assistance Center; the five Mobile Emergency Response Support (MERS) Operations Centers (MOC) located in the States of Massachusetts, Georgia, Texas, Colorado, and Washington; and the Logistics Response Center at Headquarters.

NRCC

The NRCC is a multi-agency center that functions as the operational component of the DHS National Operations Center (NOC) to provide overall Federal response coordination for Incidents of National Significance, disaster response operations, and emergency management program implementation. The NRCC maintains situational awareness linkages with the RRCCs, State Emergency Operations Centers (EOC), selected local EOCs in each of the ten FEMA Regions, Regional DHS components, Regional ESF EOCs, State Fusion Centers, Joint Terrorism Task Forces, Regional Department of Defense Operations Centers, and other key operational nodes. The NRCC routinely supports program implementation and disaster response and resource planning; coordinates incident management operations; monitors potential or developing Incidents of National Significance; supports regional and field components; and provides overall response and resource coordination for DHS and FEMA. In addition to maintaining a 24/7 Watch Team, the NRCC is augmented by the ESFs during disaster operations and is responsible for:

- Drafting and distributing operational warnings and orders;
- Monitoring the preparedness of national-level emergency response teams and resources;
- Initiating MAs to other Federal Departments and Agencies;
- Activating and deploying national-level teams and entities;
- Tracking and managing Federal resource allocations;

- Coordinating operational response and resource allocation planning with other Departments and agencies, the RRCCs, the Joint Field Office (JFO), including the use of Federal remote sensing/disaster assessment support; and
- Collecting, evaluating, and disseminating information and incident reports on resource status.

The Logistics Response Center is part of the NRCC and manages logistics activities at the Headquarters level. The Mobile Emergency Response Support Operations Centers also support the FEMA Regions, DHS Components, State EOC(s) and other MERS deployed command and control assets while supporting emergency communications in the field during Incidents of National Significance.

RRCC

The RRCCs are regionally-based multi-agency coordination centers that perform a complementary role to the NRCC. Operating in the ten FEMA Regions, the RRCCs provide situational awareness information, identify and coordinate response requirements, perform capabilities analysis, and report on the status of Federal disaster response operations. FEMA is in the process of hiring two new Watch Analysts in each Region. The RRCCs deploy liaison officers and the Emergency Response Team-Advanced (ERT-A) to initiate Federal support, facilitate initial delivery of goods and services to save lives and property and stabilize local infrastructures, and facilitate prioritizing “in theater” interagency resource allocation and coordination, and support multiple concurrent disaster operations within the Region. NRCC and RRCC activations and operations are scalable and based on the nature, scope, magnitude, and potential impacts of the potential or actual incident.

Operational Planners have been hired at FEMA Headquarters and will be hired for the Regions to augment the ability to conduct more sophisticated analyses in the NRCC and RRCCs. In addition, ongoing assessments of capabilities are underway to identify shortfalls and equipment needs in order to improve coordination and connectivity between the Regions and Headquarters.

FEMA Operations Center (FOC)

The FOC supports the NRCC with a 24-hour watch. The FOC implements notifications to the Departments and Agencies that support the NRCC as well as activating emergency management staff. The FOC receives, analyzes, and disseminates all-hazards information within FEMA and DHS and to Departments, Agencies, and disaster response team members. The FOC, in coordination with the National Operations Center, facilitates distribution of warnings, alerts, and bulletins to the emergency management community using a variety of communications systems such as the National Warning System, the Washington Area Warning System and the National-level Emergency Alert System.

DISASTER RESPONSE TEAMS AND ASSETS

To assist State, local and tribal governments overwhelmed in a disaster situation, FEMA's Disaster Operations Directorate can immediately deploy multiple disaster response teams. We regularly test the capability of our teams and systems to execute their mission by participating in multi-agency and State and local exercises. Several different types of disaster response teams can be deployed to support disaster response, as discussed below. In accordance with the Post-Katrina Act, FEMA is developing a next generation of rapidly deployable interagency National and Regional emergency response teams, tentatively identified as Incident Management Assistance Teams (IMAT). These teams will eventually replace existing Emergency Response Teams at the National and Regional level and the Federal Incident Response Support Teams (FIRST) and be designed to provide a forward Federal presence to better manage and coordinate the National response for catastrophic incidents. The new IMAT concept is discussed later.

Emergency Response Teams-National (ERT-N)

FEMA's ERT-Ns are deployed by FEMA Headquarters in response to Incidents of National Significance and major disasters. Their purpose is to coordinate disaster response activities, coordinate and deploy key national response assets and resources, provide situational awareness, and maintain connectivity with key Department of Homeland Security operations centers and components. ERT-Ns are made up of approximately 32 individuals from FEMA Headquarters and Regions who also have day-to-day responsibilities beyond their team assignments. ERT-Ns are organized according to National Incident Management System/Incident Command System (NIMS/ICS) standards, which provide a systematic, proactive, and coordinated approach for governmental and nongovernmental organizations at all levels to effectively prepare for, prevent, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of incidents. ERT-N members typically provide the initial staffing cadre for a JFO supporting a major disaster/Incident of National Significance. The JFOs and ERT-Ns

are supported by FEMA's MERS detachments which provide support in operations, communications, and logistics. FEMA is working toward achieving NIMS compliance for all teams.

Emergency Response Teams-Advanced (ERT-A)

ERT-As are located in the ten FEMA Regions and can be deployed in the early phases of an incident to work directly with the States to assess the disaster impact, gain situational awareness, help coordinate the disaster response, and respond to specific State requests for assistance. The ERT-As are made up of approximately 25 individuals from the FEMA Regions, who also have day-to-day responsibilities beyond their team assignments, and representatives from the ESF Departments and agencies. The ERT-A initially establishes its presence in the State Emergency Operations Center and later staffs the JFO to support the disaster response. The ERT-As deploy with basic communications capabilities including cell phones, wireless laptop computers, and a limited number of satellite cell phones. As needed, they can also be supported by the MERS detachments and their capabilities. A small component of an ERT-A, the Rapid Needs Assessment Team, is designed to collect disaster information in field needed to determine more specific disaster response requirements.

Federal Incident Response Support Teams (FIRST)

FIRSTs are emergency response teams consisting of approximately five individuals who can be deployed immediately to an incident or disaster, particularly an Incident of National Significance. We currently have two FIRSTs, one located in Region IV in Atlanta, Georgia, and the other in Region V in Chicago, Illinois. They are designed to serve as the forward component of the ERT-A and will provide the core preliminary on-scene Federal management that supports the local incident commander or area commander to ensure an integrated inter-jurisdictional response. Current Federal incident response support provided by these teams includes a command vehicle and communications capabilities consisting of Trac-star, Global Star, Iridium, high frequency, very high frequency repeaters, CATV, INMARSAT/BGAN, internet, computers, mobile radios, and GPS Units. The FIRSTs will ultimately be consolidated into the next generation of emergency response teams, tentatively being called IMATs, which are being developed.

Hurricane Liaison Team (HLT)

The HLT is a small team designed to enhance hurricane disaster response by facilitating information exchange between the National Hurricane Center in Miami, Florida, and other National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration components and Federal, State, and local government officials.

Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Task Forces

The National US&R Response System is a framework for structuring local emergency services personnel into integrated disaster response task forces. The 28 National US&R Task Forces, complete with the necessary tools, equipment, skills and techniques, can be deployed by FEMA to assist State and local governments in rescuing victims of structural collapse incidents or to assist in other search and rescue missions.

The 28 Task Forces are located throughout the continental United States. Any Task Force can be activated and deployed by FEMA to a disaster area to provide assistance in structural collapse rescue, or may be pre-positioned when a major disaster threatens a community. Each Task Force must have all its personnel and equipment at the embarkation point within six hours of activation. The Task Force can be dispatched and en route to its destination in a matter of hours. There are three types of task forces. A Type I task force consists of 70 multi-faceted cross-trained personnel divided into six major functional elements: search, rescue, medical, hazmat, logistics, and planning, supported by canines and capable of conducting physical search and heavy rescue operations in damaged or collapsed reinforced concrete buildings. Each Task Force can be divided into two 35-member teams to provide 24-hour search and rescue operations and are completely self-sufficient for 72-hours. Task Forces are also equipped with convoy vehicles to support over the road deployments and can be configured into a Light Task Force to support weather events such as hurricanes and tornadoes and other similar type incidents. An intermediate size Task Force is currently under development.

The US&R Task Forces have the following specific capabilities:

- Ability to conduct physical search and rescue operations in damaged/collapsed structures;
- Ability to operate in a known or suspected weapons-of-mass-destruction environment;

- Ability to provide emergency medical care for entrapped victims, Task Force personnel and search canines;
- Ability to provide reconnaissance to assess damage and needs, and provide feedback to other officials;
- Ability to provide assessment/shut-off of utilities to houses and other buildings;
- Ability to provide hazardous materials survey/evaluations;
- Ability to provide structural and hazard evaluations of buildings; and
- Ability to stabilize damaged structures, including shoring and cribbing;

In preparation for the 2007 Hurricane Season, the US&R Hurricane Concept of Operations has been updated based on lessons learned. Also, in coordination with our partner agencies, including the U.S. Coast Guard, Department of the Interior, and Department of Defense, we have expanded the NRP ESF-9 Annex and to reflect a broader scope of search and rescue capabilities including water and wilderness search and rescue.

Mobile Emergency Response Support (MERS)

Another key FEMA disaster response asset is the MERS System. The primary function of MERS is to provide mobile telecommunications, logistics, and operational capabilities for the on-site management of disaster response activities. MERS support falls into three broad areas:

- Operations—Mobile Emergency Operations Centers, quick reaction support, disaster preparedness (HAZMAT) officers, and MERS security officers.
- Communications—satellite, multiple radio vans, High Frequency line of sight microwave, land mobile radios, voice, video, and data capabilities, and wide area interoperability.
- Logistics
- fuel, water, HVAC, life support, transportation, and power.

MERS provides support required by Federal, State and local responders in their efforts to save lives, protect property and coordinate disaster operations. MERS can provide prompt and rapid multi-media communications, information processing, logistics, administrative, and operational support. Staged in six strategic locations, one with offshore capabilities, the MERS detachments can concurrently support a large JFO and multiple field operating sites within a disaster area. The telecommunications function is accomplished using a variety of communications transmission systems including satellite, high frequency, and microwave line-of-sight interconnected by fiber optic cables to voice and data switches, local area networks, and desktop devices such as personal computers and telephones. MERS Telecommunications assets can be provided for one or multiple locations within a disaster area and can be used to establish or reestablish communications connectivity with the public telecommunications system or Government telecommunications networks. Facilities within a disaster region can be interconnected by MERS assets to enhance emergency communications interoperability and austere facilities can be wired for computer, telephone, and video networks.

FEMA deploys MERS capabilities to support the JFO and provide for its continuing operational communications and systems needs. FEMA focuses on providing seamless emergency communications across the full spectrum of disaster operations. To meet this objective, FEMA provides a national, tactical and fixed emergency communications capability for command and control and situational awareness at all levels of government during emergencies and incidents. Additionally, FEMA can use supplemental assets to provide Forward Area Wireless access (satellite, cellular and land mobile radio) to users across the department. This deployment strategy improves our support to State, county, and local first responders. As the Nation's pre-eminent emergency management agency, FEMA will extend its sphere of influence and assume a leading National role in the field of disaster emergency communications, supported by MERS, and in full coordination with all of the Federal stakeholders and ESFs partners.

Nuclear Incident Response Team (NIRT)

The NIRT teams are specialized teams managed day-to-day by the Department of Energy (DOE)/National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). They are operationally controlled by DHS/FEMA when activated to provide expert technical advice and support in disaster response operations and other needs involving:

- Nuclear weapons accidents and incidents of national significance;
- Radiological accidents;
- Lost or stolen radioactive material incidents; and
- Acts of nuclear terrorism.

The NIRT consists of assets from DOE and the EPA and, when activated, operates as a DHS organizational unit under the operational control of DHS. The NIRT is configured for rapid response to nuclear accidents or incidents. The NIRT inter-agency specialized teams are a quick deployment advance element with specialized equipment and trained personnel that assess situations and advise local, State and Federal officials on the scope and magnitude of response needs. NIRT teams have the capability to conduct specialized search and detection operations for nuclear weapons, improvised nuclear devices, or radiological dispersal devices in urban or other areas on the ground or by special air support. They support the full spectrum of all nuclear/radiological incidents or accidents considered to be Incidents of National Significance including: terrorist use of radiological dispersal devices or improvised nuclear devices as well as reactor accidents (commercial or weapons production facilities). NIRT consists of one or all of the following DOE/NNSA and EPA response assets:

- *Aerial Measuring System*: airborne radiological sensing and surveying;
- *Accident Response Group*: scientific technical expertise and equipment;
- *Federal Radiological Monitoring and Assessment Center*: operational and logistic management focused on radiological consequence management;
- *National Atmospheric Release Advisory Capability*: computer modeling of transport, diffusion, and disposition of radioactive and hazardous materials;
- *Nuclear Emergency Support Team*: umbrella team encompassing Nuclear/Radiological Advisory Team, Joint Technical Operations Team, and the Search Response Team;
- *Radiological Assistance Program*: regional first response capability;
- *Radiation Emergency Assistance Center/Training Site (REAC/TS)*: cadre of physicians, nurses, and other specialists who provide advanced health physics and medical assistance and advice needed to treat victims of acute radiation exposure accidents.
- *Radiological Emergency Response Team*: provided by the EPA, works with other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and international organizations to monitor, contain, and clean up the release while protecting people and the environment from harmful exposure to radiation.

NIRT assets deploy at the direction of the Secretary of DHS in connection with an actual or threatened terrorist attack, major disaster, or other emergency in the United States. A U.S. Secret Service liaison is detailed to FEMA Headquarters to coordinate NIRT activities and is working closely with DOE and DHS to better define the roles and responsibilities of the multiple agencies involved with the NIRT.

Domestic Emergency Support Team (DEST)

The DEST is another specialized interagency U.S. Government team designed to expeditiously provide expert advice, guidance and support to the FBI On-Scene Commander (OSC) during a WMD incident or credible threat. The DEST is comprised of crisis and consequence management components and augments the FBI's Joint Operations Center with tailored expertise, assessment and analysis capabilities, providing the FBI OSC with expert advice and guidance in the following areas:

- *interagency crisis management assistance;*
- *information management support;*
- *enhanced communications capability;*
- *contingency planning for consequence management support;*
- *explosive devices and their components;*
- *chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons/devices and their components and radiological dispersion devices; and*
- *technical expertise and equipment to operate in a contaminated environment to conduct threat sampling, take measurements, and collect tactical intelligence and evidence.*

The U.S. Secret Service liaison detailed to FEMA Headquarters who is coordinating NIRT activities is also responsible for coordinating DEST activities. The liaison is working closely with the FBI to better define the roles and responsibilities of the multiple agencies involved with the DEST.

Next Generation Emergency Response Teams—Incident Management Assistance Teams (IMAT)

To further enhance disaster response capabilities and ultimately provide for the three national-level response teams and regional-level emergency response "strike" teams required in the Post-Katrina Act, FEMA is developing the next generation of rapidly deployable interagency emergency response teams, tentatively identified as IMATs, designed to provide a forward Federal presence to facilitate managing the national response to catastrophic incidents. The primary mission of a FEMA IMAT will be to rapidly deploy to an incident or incident-threatened venue, provide leader-

ship in the identification and provision of Federal assistance, and coordinate and integrate inter-jurisdictional response in support of the affected State(s) or US Territory(s). The IMATs will support efforts to meet the emergent needs of State and local jurisdictions; possess the capability to provide initial situational awareness for Federal decision-makers; and support the initial establishment of a unified command.

IMATs will meet the multi-disciplinary needs of emergency management and in the future may include members from the inter-agency community. For events where the Secretary determines, or may determine, that an Incident of National Significance exists, a national-level team will lead the response, supported by regional-level teams. The National teams are envisioned to have the capability to establish an effective Federal presence within 12-hours of notification, to support the State, coordinate Federal activities, provide initial situational awareness, and to be self sufficient for a minimum of 48-hours to augment potentially scarce local resources.

The new IMATs will eventually subsume the existing mission and capabilities of the FIRST and ERTs and their mission and capabilities and will incorporate similar leadership, emergency management doctrine, and operational communications concepts. The national-level and regional-level teams will be staffed with a core of permanent full-time employees, unlike the ERTs, which are staffed on a collateral duty basis; will be fully compliant with NIMS and ICS; and will train and exercise as a unit.

The National IMATs will consist of approximately 26 staff members and the Regional IMATs each will consist of approximately 15 staff members. Both teams can be augmented with additional staff as needed. The teams will be supported by FEMA's MERS elements as described earlier. The teams are still being designed and decisions on team assets, equipment, and expected capabilities have not yet been finalized. When not deployed, the teams will train with Federal partners and provide a training capability to elevate state and local emergency management capabilities. The teams will also engage in consistent and coordinated operational planning and relationship-building with State, local, tribal, and other stakeholders.

Initially, our goal is to establish interim Regional and National teams utilizing existing personnel within FEMA. The IMATs will be led by a credentialed Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO). Our short-term plan is to, at a minimum, stand-up one fully operational interim National IMAT and one fully operational interim Regional IMAT by June 30, 2007. The interim teams will form the nucleus of FEMA's next generation of emergency response personnel until we hire and train personnel to staff permanent teams. Our longer-term plan is to have one permanent National IMAT and three permanent Regional dedicated IMATs by September 30, 2007.

CONCLUSION

We are taking FEMA in a new direction, one that reflects a broader mission challenge, a wider set of partners, and a greater depth of mission perspective. The new FEMA will require new skill sets, a greater investment in our people, and new tools to ensure more effective response, recovery and mitigation. We will be more engaged in operational planning to improve the capabilities of our disaster response teams, work proactively and collaboratively with our Federal, State, local, tribal, and private sector partners, and always maintain focus on our core mission to protect the American people.

Thank you for your time today and I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. CUELLAR. Mr. Powers, thank you for your testimony.

I now recognize Mr. Devir to summarize your statement for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF WILLIAM L. DEVIR, COMMANDER, DISASTER MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TEAM OHIO-5

Mr. DEVIR. Mr. Chairman, Congressman Dent, and members of the subcommittee, I would like to take this opportunity to speak to you on behalf of the team commanders and the approximately 8,000 professionals who comprise the 107 response teams of the national disaster medical system.

You have asked me to address the role of the disaster medical system team commanders and also the coordination of federal response teams with state and local operations. To put this in a glob-

al perspective, I gave you a copy of the assistant secretary for preparedness' response mission and vision statements, and also the NDMS statements, so you can see the role that NDMS plays within ASPR.

A disaster medical assistance team, or DMAT, provides temporary medical care to the victims of disasters or public health emergencies. In addition to the standard team, which deploys as a 35-to 50-member unit, and is depicted in the slide picture that you have, specialized teams and equipment are also available to provide surgical capability, burn, pediatric, and mental health specialties, as well as teams that can operate in hazardous chem-bio environments.

While DMATs comprise the greatest share of the response teams, NDMS is significantly broader in its overall capabilities. The slide with the dog shows a veterinary medical assistance team, or VMAT. VMAT supports states in the care of animal victims of disasters, but they are also invaluable resources to the DMATs because they are specialists in zoonotic diseases, the same diseases which represent the greatest threat to humans as potential biological weapons.

Disaster mortuary operational response teams, or DMORTs, provide disaster portable morgue units, forensic specialists, and family assistance personnel to assist local medical examiners in working with the victims of mass fatality incidents and their families. While the teams came from a number of origins across the country, NDMS has been able to mold these teams so that they are uniform in their composition, equipment, credentialing and resource typing.

Today, team members are appointed as federal intermittent employees, and these appointments provide the process to validate and maintain professional credentials, and also give support for the extensive day-to-day team operations of training and maintaining the specialized equipment that the teams deploy with. Another key benefit of this appointment is that it provides the members with USERRA rights at a time of deployment.

In response to your specific questions, the role of the DMAT commander has several key elements. The first is serving as the manager responsible for these intermittent government employees and the federal property entrusted to them, but also in representing NDMS in the local community. Occupying a public or private professional position in the local community is key because this local private position that they have is their primary occupation. Sometimes it can be both complementary and competitive to their role as a team commander.

If they have a disaster in their community, they are certainly called on to be a participant in their regular job. But this is, in fact, the rationale of the NDMS response teams: the ability to bring in outside resources to a community at a time when they are under duress because of the stress of having their own disaster.

When deployed to a disaster, NDMS response teams truly demonstrate their expertise. In a response team deployment, they are going to be located near traditional medical care, self-sufficient for 3 days, and work within the national incident management system. This is key because when the local medical infrastructure comes back into operation, the team leadership then coordinates the de-

mobilization of the teams with the incident command medical officer, HHS regional personnel in the area, and then they work in turn with the local, state and local health care officials to decide when it is best for the team to withdraw.

Once in an assignment, the team is often positioned in locations where a hospital either formerly operated or where it is operating today, but the demands exceed what it can do. The slide that is provided with the patients on the litters is actually a shot of the New Orleans Airport during Hurricane Katrina, and one of the DMAT treatment areas that was set up inside.

As a federal asset, the role of the NDMS response team, we have to come in and maintain control as we operate in the incident, but it is not our role to come in and take control of the incident. That is kind of an important distinction.

I would like to address how the members of Congress can support us in our mission. The need for our services and the time that we put out over the last 5 years has significantly increased. Unfortunately, I can't say the same for our resources. In fact, our budget has remained flat for several years now. Looking forward, the new Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act actually adds additional tasks for us by calling for us to do specific planning for at-risk individuals, to include the medical reserve corps in our planning and exercises, and also to have additional training in NIMS and the national response plan.

I know the fiscal year 2008 HHS budget calls for a modest \$6 million increase in the NDMS budget. I have to say that in the shadow of some of the most significant disasters this country has ever witnessed, I think we are in a unique position to argue the value of this type of preparedness.

We in the NDMS deal with citizens one at a time, whose daily lives have been shattered by a disaster, either as patients, victims or the affected family members. This provides us with a unique hands-on perspective on disaster medicine, and it provides the federal government with a very unusual personal role in their care. Providing the best care possible under austere conditions is our passion, and it is what drives us to prepare for the call. We are grateful for this opportunity to serve.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would like to thank you and the members of your subcommittee for your attention. I hope I have been able to provide you with a clear picture of the role and duties of an NDMS team commander, and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have later.

Thanks.

[The statement of Mr. Devir follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF WILLIAM L. DEVIR

Mr. Chairman, Congressman Dent, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I would like to take this opportunity to speak to you on behalf of the team commanders and the approximately 8,000 professionals who comprise the 107 response teams of the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS). I hope to be able to convey to you in this short time the incredible amount of work and sacrifice these members put forth in their service to our nation, and specifically, to the citizens and their families impacted by disasters, both natural and man-made.

You have asked me to address the role of Disaster Medical Assistance Team (DMAT) commanders and the coordination of the federal response teams with state and local operations. Much of what I will relay to you will be from the perspective

of my own team's experiences, or the experiences that I have had working with the Management Support Team, a part of the NDMS Incident Command infrastructure that supports the teams when deployed in the field.

Since 1979, I have served in the Fire Service and Emergency Medical Services. In my role as a Fire Department EMS Captain, I recognize the need for a disaster medical resource outside the immediate state and local community at the time of a major disaster. NDMS fills that unique niche with trained, equipped and uniformed disaster medicine specialists.

I came to the position of DMAT commander 16 years ago, when the Office of Medical Readiness at Wright Patterson Air Force Base (WPAFB) in Fairborn, Ohio, came to the members of the Greater Miami Valley Emergency Medical Services Council with a request for our support in the formation of a Disaster Medical Assistance Team in the Dayton, Ohio, area. As a Federal Coordinating Center for NDMS, WPAFB was completing contingency planning in the face of thousands of potential military chemical casualties returning from the Desert Storm conflict. The reception and care of military patients is just one facet of NDMS, while the more common use of the teams has been in caring for civilian patients, animals, and the deceased following a major disaster. While DMATs comprise the greatest share of the response team assets, NDMS is significantly broader in its overall capabilities.

DMATs provide temporary medical care to the victims of disasters or public health emergencies. In addition to the standard team, which deploys as a 35-40 member unit, specialized teams and equipment are available to provide surgical capability, as well as burn, pediatric, and mental health specialties, and even teams capable of providing care in hostile Chemical, Biological or Radiological environments.

Veterinary Medical Assistance Teams (VMATs) support states in the care of animal victims of disasters. They are also an invaluable resource to DMATs, due to their expertise in the zoonotic diseases, which represent the greatest threat to humans as potential biological weapons.

Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams (DMORTs) provide Disaster Portable Morgue Units (DPMU), forensic specialists, and family assistance personnel to assist local medical examiners in working with the victims of mass fatality incidents and their families.

I have told you how DMAT OH-5 started, but if you study the response teams nationally you find a variety of origins that led to their development. Teams were started by university medical schools, as the result of a specific mass casualty incident in the community, or as part of a state's emergency management planning activity to name a few. Although teams have evolved from a variety of backgrounds, NDMS has molded the various teams to be uniform in their composition, equipment, credentialing and resource-typing.

Under the early System, each individual deployment initiated a hiring process for team members, who were then terminated upon its completion. Today, team members are appointed as Federal Intermittent employees, essentially employees who are on the federal rolls "on call," who then clock in at the beginning of an assignment and clock out when they return home. These intermittent appointments provide the process to validate and maintain professional credentials, but also allow for the extensive day-to-day team operations of training and maintaining specialized equipment to be able to deploy a team within hours of activation.

The experience of my team and its development is unique, but it parallels that of other teams. Our initial challenge was the recruitment of medical professionals and support personnel to be able to field a team capable of providing medical care in an austere environment. With the support of the Greater Dayton Area Hospital Association, we were able to staff and train a core group, and most of them still remain as members of the team today. The Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) in Dayton provided guidance on obtaining surplus medical equipment through the Defense Reutilization and Marketing Service, and gave us access to VAMC facilities to both store our equipment and conduct exercises. When we achieved the requisite staffing and readiness, we became eligible for a federal cache of medical and logistical equipment. This brought with it its own challenges to be able to transport, store and maintain the equipment. Today, as an Operational DMAT, our team has three box trucks and a 6,000 square foot warehouse where we keep our federal vehicles and equipment.

The Committee's request for my testimony today asked about the role of the DMAT Commander, and how our services are coordinated with state and local operations.

The role of the DMAT Commander has several key elements, including:

- Serving as the manager responsible for intermittent government employees under his/her command and the federal property assigned to the team.

- Representing NDMS in the local community; often serving in a leadership role in disaster planning for public health and broader emergency management functions.
- Occupying a public or private professional position in the local community: Emergency Physician, Registered Nurse, Hospital Administrator or Emergency Services Officer.

This latter local community role is the primary occupation of the team commander. This is important to keep in mind because the local position is both complementary and competitive to the role of team commander. Should a disaster or public health emergency occur locally, this individual more often than not has associated duties in that local community. This is in essence the reason for the NDMS Response Teams—the ability to bring in outside medical resources to a community with insufficient local resources during a disaster. This is further complicated because many of the NDMS teams started as a local resource, and continue to play a role in state or local emergency management plans. The disaster medical resources of this nation are limited in nature. Participation of a team member in a local employer's disaster plan, in a state or local emergency management plan, and in an NDMS Response Team presents a confusing scenario when determining how many disaster medical personnel truly exist. An emergency planner must be careful not to count the same responder more than once.

Because NDMS Response Teams often developed as a local resource, there is an associated local attitude of “ownership,” even though financial support and equipment is essentially federal. This has caused some states to turn to creating state disaster medical teams in order to maintain command and control over a local resource. Some of these teams then compete for the same medical professionals needed by a DMAT. Better coordination of the state and federal role of a team could minimize this duplication.

When deployed to a disaster, NDMS Response Teams truly demonstrate their expertise. Teams follow an organized rotation schedule, and several times a year pre-plan a roster of available personnel to respond as needed to disasters. If a disaster occurs, they “ramp up” in anticipation, but wait for deployment orders to activate team members. Variables like distance, the medical services required, and whether an on call team is impacted by the incident combine to determine what teams are sent on a deployment. Some events like a hurricane provide a pre-planning timetable, with the ability to pre-position teams in a response location close to the storm's landfall, but safe from the impact of the storm. In fact, significant NDMS resources were pre-positioned prior to the landfall of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma, then moved to the impacted areas as needs were identified and the travel routes cleared.

Once in an assignment, the team is often positioned in a location where a hospital formerly operated, or where the demand for medical care exceeds what the local medical facility can provide. In a matter of hours, the DMAT sets up in a parking lot or standing structure, and starts to see patients. The team is designed to have sufficient logistical and medical supplies for up to 3 days. In these early hours and days, it is easy to define our role in medical care, as we are often the only option available. However, if and when the local community sees its infrastructure come back into operation, the team leadership works under the direction of the Incident Command Medical Officer and the HHS regional personnel, who in turn work with state and local officials to reach agreement when the team can withdraw. The team commander plays a key role in this decision, providing input on the number and acuity of patients seen, and what local alternative resources are available to treat patients. Incoming teams are often viewed as the “cavalry,” the federal response coming to the rescue in a disaster. Teams easily take charge in this environment of chaos because they bring discipline, training, and experience. The role of the NDMS Response Team, however, is to *maintain control* in the incident without *taking control* of the incident. The teams are a temporary supplement to that local community's healthcare system.

Most of the committee members are no doubt aware of the shortage of medical personnel across the country. When the members of our teams leave for a deployment, hospitals and employers back home double-up shifts and fill in for those team members who are deployed. Although NDMS Response Team members enjoy USERRA coverage associated with their deployment, there can still be negative feelings back home, both with employers and the co-workers who cover their shifts. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita were especially challenging in this respect because of the multiple or extended deployments of team members. Team leadership is often faced with explaining to local employers why team members are being utilized, and reassuring those same employers that their employees' NDMS service is essential to the disaster response.

While team members are deployed, family members go without hearing from their loved ones, and endure the associated media blitz detailing all the problems and dangers in the affected areas. This places stress on the family members, and needs to be addressed by the non-deployed team members with a family support structure. This was especially important for families during responses associated with the 9-11 attacks.

I would be remiss in my duty to my fellow team commanders, if I did not take this opportunity to tell the members of your committee how you can support us in our mission.

Whether it be the response to the events of 9–11, the multiple hurricane responses of the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons, or the vigilant preparedness of our specialized Weapons of Mass Destruction response assets, the need for our services and the time and effort expended to improve our readiness have significantly increased over the past five years. Unfortunately, we have not seen our resources increase with these demands. The NDMS program budget specifically has remained flat since 2003. Looking forward, the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act (P.L. 109–417) addresses new areas for which teams must prepare:

- Specific planning for the “at-risk individuals” in a disaster response.
- Specific planning for inclusion of the Medical Reserve Corps in coordinated response plans and exercises
- Additional training of team members in the National Response Plan and the National Incident Management System

The recent Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act of 2006 will require VMATs to work with state governments and other national animal service agencies to define how disaster responses will coordinate veterinary and animal rescue efforts.

I know that the FY 2008 DHHS budget request calls for a modest \$6 million increase in the NDMS budget. I can tell you from the perspective of the team commander that these funds and more are truly needed, and have the potential for a tremendous payback to the taxpayer. In the shadow of some of the most significant disasters this country has ever witnessed, I think we are in a unique position to argue the value of this type of preparedness.

The additional provisions of the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act are equally important with respect to their emphasis on local planning and preparedness. NDMS Team Commanders experience first-hand the ability to integrate operations in an impacted state where robust Department of Health and Emergency Management Agency disaster planning exist. Local preparation for known hazards is especially important for successful outcomes in the real event.

We in NDMS are an unusual entity in the federal government, in that many of us deal with citizens, one at a time, whose daily lives have been shattered, either as patients, victims, or affected family members. This provides us with a unique hands-on perspective in disaster medicine, and provides the federal government with an unusual personal role in their care. Providing the best care possible in these conditions is our passion, and it is what drives us to train and prepare for the call. We are grateful for the opportunity to serve.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the Members of your Subcommittee for your attention. I hope I have been able to provide you with a clear picture of the role and duties of an NDMS Team Commander.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer your questions.

Mr. CUELLAR. Thank you, Mr. Devir, for your testimony.

Now at this time I recognize Chief Prather to summarize your statement for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF CHARLES “CHIP” PRATHER, CHIEF, ORANGE COUNTY FIRE AUTHORITY

Chief PRATHER. Chairman Cuellar, Ranking Member Dent, members of the committee, I am Chip Prather, the fire chief of the Orange County Fire Authority. Thank you for this opportunity to address the committee.

I also want to thank Congresswoman Sanchez for her role in pushing forward issues having to do with the urban search and rescue task force, and drafting and preparing a crucial piece of legislation that should be introduced later.

My remarks this morning are on behalf of the Orange County Fire Authority, but more importantly, the local agencies that sponsor the 28 national urban search and rescue task forces located in 19 states. For several years, the 28 sponsoring agencies have been advocating for legislation that would authorize the task forces under FEMA and address an array of administrative issues. It is our hope that this morning we are taking a step forward in that goal.

For the last 10 years, I have served as the fire chief of the OCFA which provides services to a population greater than that living in 12 states. My department has been a USAR-sponsoring agency since 1991. Before being approached by FEMA to consider USAR, we and other major urban areas had begun to independently prepare for major building collapse and search and rescue operations.

Because of that ready resource of highly trained firefighters, I believe most would agree with FEMA wisely choosing not to have an in-house rescue capability of its own. Instead, FEMA recognizes the best source of urban search and rescue knowledge and skill resides at the state and local level. Back then, not every local agency saw value in participating in this new federal initiative. Many saw USAR as a potentially costly burden where local agencies would be stuck with administering this new program and not receiving a commensurate value.

On the other hand, 28 of us recognized that we and those that we serve would be better off with developing the personnel, training, skills and protocols to work together during a large-scale incident. In fact, in California we had just experienced the Loma Prieta earthquake and the collapse of the San Francisco Bay Bridge, where, by the way, it was my firefighters who traveled 300 miles to Northern California and rescued the last survivor from the I-80 collapse 89 hours after the earthquake.

This ever-present earthquake risk and our intense preparation is likely part of the reason why FEMA saw fit to have eight of the 28 national task forces located in California. As I stated, FEMA appropriately recognized that local and state agencies have the expertise and knowledge upon which they could build to develop the premier national response system.

The purpose of USAR is to have a ready and trained force so that the 6,000 participants may deploy to incidents across the nation within the FEMA-mandated 6-hour target. And they must be fully able to sustain themselves for 72 hours after they have arrived at the theater of operations.

Again, let me emphasize, the urban search and rescue task forces act as a ready reserve team immediately available to respond at the direction of FEMA. Just like we see today in Kansas, with the deployment of Nebraska Task Force 1, we provide the first surge of personnel and equipment that comes in behind the local first responders to help and expand their capabilities.

The vehicles and equipment caches are stored safely and secured, ready to respond at a moment's notice when called upon by FEMA and the federal government. In fact, because of the operational readiness requirements, we are prohibited by our agreement with FEMA from using those resources on the local level. That is not to say that us at the local level don't see value in being a member of

the national response system. In large measure, our job is to develop the protocols and guidelines on how to handle various emergency scenarios.

Quite often, we are working in multiple levels of government and with various agencies. Our participation in the system provides an opportunity to develop interoperable strategies and tactical plans with other agencies, resulting in a coordinated and effective response to those who we are trying to help. Of course, our firefighters are better trained because of our participation.

So what are the needs of the urban search and rescue task forces? Well, I can probably point to our response to the Oklahoma City bombing, the 9/11 attacks, the Gulf Coast and New Orleans, where, by the way, members of my task force once again rescued the final survivor there. We are in constant need of improvements and ongoing support.

Unfortunately, the last few years have seen a decrease in the levels of federal appropriations. The most recent appropriation of \$25 million provides each task force with \$700,000. According to a report by FEMA, it costs approximately \$1.7 million annually to support a single task force in a full state of readiness. This leads these task forces with a \$1 million deficit, and requires the local agency to decide whether they are going to subsidize the federal program or fund their own local important needs.

Therefore, I would respectfully urge Congress to appropriate the \$45 million authorized for 2008 in last year's appropriations bill.

Finally, the national response system needs to address certain administrative issues. That is why we are happy that the legislation that Congresswoman Sanchez is working on will be introduced, and hopefully if approved, will achieve the following. It authorizes the national USAR system and the 28 task forces under our program within FEMA. It would allow FEMA to reimburse local agencies for our costs when there is a deployment, particularly in the area of workers compensation when a member is injured on a federal mission.

It provides protection to our civilian members participating on the task force—our doctors, train operators, structural engineers, heavy riggers, dog handlers—from losing their private sector job when they are engaged in a federal deployment. It also establishes an advisory committee, and lastly and most importantly, it authorizes \$52 million in funding for the system.

I would be pleased to answer any questions.

[The statement of Chief Prather follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHARLES "CHIP" PRATHER

Intro

Thank you Chairman Cuellar, Ranking Member Charles Dent and members of the Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response for this opportunity to discuss the federal government's capabilities to respond to national emergencies. I would also like to thank Congresswoman Sanchez for her role in pushing forward the issues of the USAR task forces and introducing crucial legislation, HR _____.

I'm speaking here on behalf of the Orange County Fire Authority and on behalf of all agencies that sponsor one of the twenty eight National Urban Search and Rescue Task Forces. For several years the 28 sponsoring agencies have been advocating for legislation that will authorize the Task Forces under FEMA, address administrative issues and provide stable funding. It is our hope that we are taking a step forward in realizing these goals today.

I have had the privilege since 1997 of serving as the Fire Chief for Orange County Fire Authority and overseeing the protection of the 1.3 million residents that live in the 22 cities and unincorporated portions of Orange County. In addition to providing basic fire and emergency medical service to our residents and businesses, we also have within Orange County major tourist attractions such as Disneyland, Knott's Berry Farm and Angel Stadium along with the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles immediately to our north and the San Onofre Nuclear Power Plant directly to the south. As with almost all of California we also face the threat of a major earthquake. Undoubtedly this has contributed to our belief in maintaining a prepared and well trained cadre of individuals to be a part of the National Urban Search and Rescue System.

USAR Background

Orange County Fire Authority has been a USAR sponsoring agency since 1990. Before being approached by FEMA, we and other major urban areas had begun to prepare for major building collapses and search and rescue operations. Local agencies were well suited to provide personnel with a high level of training that lent itself naturally to the specialized skills needed to serve as a member of a USAR Task Force. I believe most would agree with FEMA wisely choosing not to have an in-house rescue capability of its own to administer and operate on a daily basis for the sake of responding to the occasional national emergency incident. Instead, FEMA recognized that the best sources for urban search and rescue knowledge and skills resided at the State and local levels.

Back then, local agencies were not sure how to approach this new effort and not every local agency saw value in participating in this new federal response capability. Many saw USAR as a potentially costly burden where local agencies would be stuck with administering this new program and not receiving commensurate value. Some of us recognized, though, overall we would be better off with developing the personnel, training, skills and protocols to work together during a large emergency incident. In fact, in California we had just experienced the Loma Prieta earthquake and the collapse of the San Francisco Bay Bridge. We knew the consequences of not being prepared and trained for large urban emergencies requiring specialized resources from outside the immediate capabilities of local agencies.

This is likely part of why FEMA saw fit to have 8 of the 28 National Task Forces located in California. We had been focused on earthquake preparedness for decades and were well suited to see the value in having our personnel trained and cooperating with, not just each other, but with federal resources to develop a sophisticated response capability.

As a large agency comprised of over 800 safety personnel, we have the resources and ability to make those personnel available for extended deployments responding to large scale national incidents. However, we must still rely on assistance from other agencies such as the Anaheim Fire Department, Santa Ana Fire Department, Orange Fire Department, LA County Sheriffs and Montebello Fire to fully staff USAR Task Force 5. In fact, almost all sponsoring agencies rely upon assistance from other public agencies or other organizations to staff the 210 positions of a USAR Task Force.

As I state above, FEMA wisely recognized that local and state agencies had the expertise and knowledge upon which they could build to develop a national response system. Until this time, the federal government had limited response capabilities. The national guard was available to provide manpower and security during and after incidents but was not trained or equipped to conduct search and rescue in specialized settings, such as a building collapse or massive WMD exposure.

Local and state agencies, however, had experience dealing with hazardous material exposures, earthquake and hurricane related building collapses and mass casualty incidents that require planning and logistics training. To some degree, whether a building collapses due to natural causes or by acts of terrorism, the response is the same. One obvious modification would be the additional use of WMDs in a building collapses but, again, our training for hazardous material spills provides some background in the specialized training needed for those potential incidents.

Locally, the value of the USAR Task Forces isn't that we are given equipment and resources that can be used to supplement local resources. Nothing could be further from the truth. I cannot stress this point enough as it seems to be a recurring misconception by many who have written reports that the task forces and their equipment supplement local response capabilities.

The purpose of the USAR Task Forces is to be ready and trained so that they may deploy to incidents across the country within the FEMA mandated six hours after activation. They must be able to sustain themselves for the first 72 hours of

operation. None of this would be possible if the sponsoring agencies were using the equipment and materials on a daily basis for their local responses.

Let me speak to the specific arrangement of OCFA's USAR Task Force-5. In our possession are the following pieces of apparatus:

- Two tractors & 53 foot trailers
- 2 Box Trucks
- Suburban and pick-up trucks
- Forklifts
- 2 utility vehicles
- 1 flatbed trailer

These vehicles are packed and ready with specialized equipment purchased with FEMA grant funds or provided directly by FEMA. In Orange County, these assets are stored throughout 5 fire stations, where we oversee the logistics and maintenance of the equipment so that it is ready to deploy at a moment's notice. Again, let me emphasize that the USAR Task Forces act as a "ready reserve" team available immediately to respond at the direction of FEMA. We provide the first surge of personnel and equipment that comes in behind the local first responders to help and expand their capabilities. The vehicles and equipment are not being used by local agencies to respond to local EMS calls, fires or other day to day emergency incidents. The vehicles and equipment caches are being stored safely and securely ready to respond on behalf of FEMA and the federal government.

In fact, we are prohibited by our agreements with FEMA from using the cache equipment unless sanctioned by FEMA such as in a training exercise. Moreover, when some suggest that the Task Forces are supplementing local responsibilities, it is important to remember that a Task Force would not respond to a national emergency in their own backyard. The Task Forces are comprised of first responders from local agencies and those persons would be otherwise occupied and committed to the incident. For example, during the attacks on the World Trade Center, some of the firefighters that comprised NY Task Force-1 were those individuals that were running into the towers during their collapse. Those individuals were engaged in the immediate response and it is the other task forces from throughout the country that were looked on to come in and provide support. Consequently, in case of a large earthquake or other disaster in Southern California, we would rely upon the Northern California Task Forces and other out of state Task Forces to respond and assist us.

This is not to say that local agencies see little value from the resources provided via our participation in the National USAR System. A large part of our job is developing protocols and guidelines for how to handle various emergency scenarios. Quite often, we are working across multiple jurisdictions and with various agencies. Our participation in the National USAR System provides an opportunity to develop a fellowship and cooperative understanding with other agencies. The benefits of this relationship extend to FEMA and other federal agencies. Local agencies feel a greater level of comfort and trust when they realize that they are receiving assistance from fellow local first responders.

Lastly, local agencies receive immense value in providing higher levels of training to their personnel. This training is brought back to the local level and spreads to other local and regional agencies. In fact, there are a number of regional and state teams across the country that have organized themselves and modeled their training and protocols on what FEMA and the 28 Task Forces have adopted.

USAR System Needs

While I can proudly point to our response to the Northridge Earthquake, Atlanta Olympic Games, Oklahoma Bombing, Shuttle Columbia, the attacks of 9/11, and 21 hurricanes including Hurricane Katrina, we are in need of continued and ongoing improvement.

Unfortunately, the last few years we have seen decreasing levels of federal appropriations. The most recent appropriation of \$25 million provided each task force with about \$700,000. According to FEMA, it costs approximately \$1.7 million annually to maintain a Task Force. That amount does not take into account responding to incidents, which are funded separately, only the cost of training and maintaining equipment.

This leaves each task force with a \$1 million deficit. As I stated previously, these resources and equipment are not used for local emergency responses. This means a local agency must choose to subsidize a program that ostensibly provides the federal government with a response capability or to fund other local needs such as training, equipment, vehicles or facilities that can be used for local day to day emergency responses.

Therefore, I respectfully urge Congress to appropriate the \$45 million authorized for 2008 in last year's appropriations bill.

Finally, the National USAR System needs to address various administrative and program issues. That is why I am excited about the legislation that Congresswoman Sanchez has introduced which will achieve the following:

1. Authorize the National USAR System and 28 Task Forces as a program under FEMA and allows activation for pre-staging and training activities. Currently, the Task Forces may only be activated during a Presidential declared emergency.
2. Protect task force members and sponsoring agencies by allowing FEMA to reimburse for costs associated with deployment. Specifically, members and sponsors need to be fully reimbursed for costs associated with workers compensation and health claims arising from a member's injury on a federal mission.
3. Protects civilian members of the US&R System (non-uniformed personnel such as physicians, structural engineers, and canine handlers) from employment discrimination and retaliation for engaging in federal US&R activities. For example, we faced this situation when one of our heavy riggers, Don Childress, faced termination from his civilian employer if he chose to respond with us to New Orleans. Fortunately for us, Don came but he did lose his job.
4. Establish a standing advisory committee comprised of sponsoring agency representatives, technical experts and emergency response professionals to advise FEMA and DHS regarding matters affecting the National USAR System.
5. Lastly, yet most importantly authorize \$52 million in appropriations to fully fund the system.

Again, I can not stress how important it is to provide stable funding so that the Task Forces are secure in knowing that they can expend current year funds without the risk of acquiring equipment or hiring personnel that will not be funded in following years.

I hope my testimony and information provided will assist the committee in moving forward our legislation and also in your broader deliberations regarding national response capabilities. Thank you again Chairman Cuellar, Ranking Member Charles Dent and members of the committee for your time.

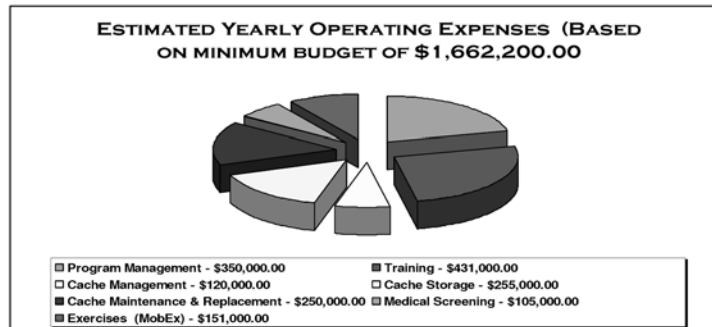
[Attachment follows:]

The Annual Cost of Operating An Urban Search & Rescue Task Force

The local government participants of the Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency's Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Program need to ensure that the Federal Government codify the program, provide necessary protections, and provide adequate recurring funding by sponsoring and then passing the 2006 US&R Legislative Bill. Of principle concern to our elected representatives has been the cost to maintain each US&R Task Force and a determination of the appropriate funding for the cooperative agreements between DHS / FEMA, State Governments and local agencies that sponsor Federal Task Forces.

Program Costs

On January 31, 2006 at the US&R Task Force Leaders / National US&R Conference, the FEMA US&R Program Office provided an overview of their "Report to the Congress on the Status of the Urban Search and Rescue Program". This Report to Congress was originally scheduled to be submitted to Congress on February 10, 2006. Although the report has yet to be made public, it did provide a conservative estimation of the cost to manage and maintain a Federal US&R Task Force. This briefing of the report divided the annual and recurring costs into the following sections:



Based on the figures above, the DHS/FEMA US&R Program Office estimated the annual and recurring cost for each task force to be \$1,662,200. Although the sponsoring agencies believe that this amount is below the actual costs – (for example, important elements such as funding for eventual replacement vehicles is missing) – the US&R Program Office did an exceptional job in determining an "average" cost.

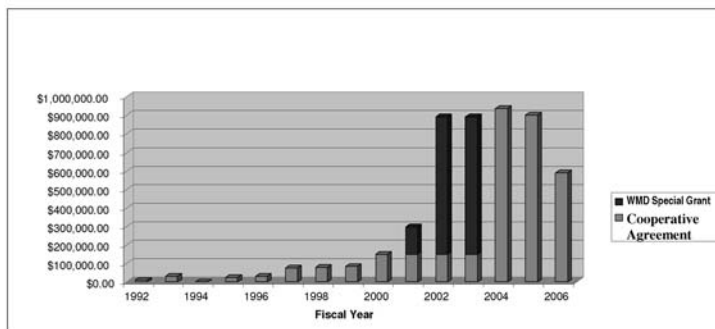
The sponsoring agency's contributions to this national program have exceeded the cooperative agreement funds provided by DHS/FEMA. The program managers of the Task Forces evaluated each of their sponsoring agencies' contributions and found the national average to be \$863,695. When these averages were taken, the cooperative agreement funding was at an all-time high. It could be assumed that if Federal funding is reduced, the sponsoring agencies will need to make up the difference or the readiness of the teams will suffer.

Funding

The US&R Program is based on partnerships between the Federal Government and State and local governments. Funding for the US&R Program has been consistently inconsistent, but has risen significantly since the initial funding of \$422,133 in 1990; rising to \$66,400,000 in 2003 to purchase second equipment caches for each Task Force. The funding has been reduced to \$20,000,000 in 2006. These amounts reflect the total costs to maintain this program; amounts actually received by the individual Task Forces are reflected in the tables below.

In the early years, the funding received by each Task Force was minimal. This funding was used to cover the purchasing of cache equipment and relied on the sponsoring agency to offset the majority of the program costs. After September 11, 2001, the program funding increased significantly to purchase vehicles, provide yearly medical screening, increase training to meet the mandated Weapons of Mass Destruction response capability, and increase full-time staffing to manage the Task Forces at the sponsoring agency level.

The table below reflects the amount of funding that was provided to each individual Task Force through cooperative agreements:



* In 2001 six Task Forces received \$149,600 to begin preparing for WMD capability. In 2002, five Task Forces received \$740,600 to become WMD capable. The balance of the Task Forces received the same amount in 2003.

Conclusion

In summary, based on the presentation by the US&R Program Office on the "Report to Congress", the average cost to maintain a national US&R Task Force is **\$1,662,200.00**. In contrast, the project Federal funding for 2006 is \$592,000 per Task Force; leaving a balance of over \$1,070,200 for the sponsoring agencies and local tax dollars to subsidize this national program. Therefore, if this national program is to continue, funding from the Federal and State governments must be increased to reduce the burden on local governments and the sponsoring agencies. This increase would be in line with the original intent of the partnership, and would ensure a stronger program overall.

Mr. CUELLAR. Thank you for your testimony, Chief.

At this time, I will recognize Chief Endrikat to summarize your testimony for 5 minutes.

Your fellow chief just took 1 minute of your time. No, I am just kidding.

[Laughter.]

Chief ENDRIKAT. He is higher ranking than I am.

Mr. CUELLAR. If he is higher ranking, he can have that extra minute.

**STATEMENT OF FRED ENDRIKAT, SPECIAL OPERATIONS
CHIEF, PHILADELPHIA FIRE DEPARTMENT**

Chief ENDRIKAT. Thank you, Chairman Cuellar, Ranking Member Dent, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, for this opportunity to discuss the capabilities of federal emergency response teams.

I am speaking today as a first responder, but I also have the responsibility and privilege to speak on behalf of the nearly 6,000 members of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's urban search and rescue national response system.

In 1990, following the federal government's responses to the disasters of Hurricane Hugo and the Loma Prieta earthquake, Congress tasked FEMA to develop a national civilian urban search and rescue capability. The primary purpose of this system is to provide a nationwide network of heavy search and rescue teams that can be rapidly deployed to disaster incidents.

The individual teams are established at the local jurisdiction level and can be federalized and deployed by FEMA as needed for nationwide response in order to augment state and local resources in disaster situations. The 28 USAR task forces are the fundamental units of FEMA's national response system and they are strategically located throughout the country.

The FEMA response system also provides an overhead management capability for field operations known as the incident support team. This team provides federal, state and local officials with technical assistance in the acquisition and utilization of federal USAR resources through advice, incident command assistance, management, and coordination of the USAR task forces.

The system has played an essential role in the federal response to terrorist attacks. Eleven task forces and one management team took part in the federal response to the bombing of the Alfred R. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City, and 25 task forces and two of the standing management teams took part in the response to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11.

During the response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, all 28 of the task forces were activated, with 10 being activated a second time for the extended operations encountered. These USAR task forces were credited with the search of thousands of homes and buildings, and the rescue of 6,587 victims. As Chief Prather mentioned, as we speak today, Nebraska Task Force 1 and the FEMA USAR incident support team are operating in support of state and local responders at the site of the devastating tornado that struck Greensburg, Kansas over the weekend.

Regardless of the triggering mechanism that causes a disaster, the FEMA USAR system has been built with a foundation on the concept of all-hazard response and preparedness. This program has also been at the forefront of the implementation and field use of incident command structures at incidents of national significance, which was referenced in last year's FEMA post-Katrina reform legislation.

One of the demonstrated strengths of the national USAR system has been the ability to coordinate state and local USAR assets and quickly fold them into field operations at disaster sites at the re-

quest of the local authorities having jurisdiction. New Jersey Task Force 1 and Puerto Rico Task Force 1 were deployed to the World Trade Center collapse on September 11. Both of those task forces stayed alongside FEMA task forces at the base of operations located at the Javits Convention Center.

Neither team was or is a part of the FEMA USAR system. They technically did not come under the command and control of the FEMA USAR incident support team, but at the request of the Fire Department of New York, the IST effectively coordinated their operations.

State and local rescue teams have realized that FEMA has developed the best practices model and that model has willingly been shared as far as policies, procedures, training curricula, and technical expertise in an outreach effort by FEMA USAR to first-, second- and third-tier emergency management response elements.

There are a number of challenges currently before our system. The system currently operates under authority drawn from different sections of the Stafford Act, and the system response elements can only be activated during a presidential emergency declaration. As the chief mentioned, annual funding amounts to build and sustain the program have varied widely since the program's inception. Currently right now, each task force is faced with an approximate \$1 million deficit, and a lot of that is made up by corresponding soft cost contributions from sponsoring and participating agencies.

The system has been functioning without an advisory committee, and the rechartering, re-seating and active participation of the advisory committee is extremely important for the continued development of the system. Our ability to utilize real-time satellite imagery and sophisticated mapping technology provided by the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency in the field in the response to Hurricane Katrina in Mississippi made a significant difference in our search for buried victims.

Time and funding must be dedicated to continue initiatives like this, as we significantly attempt to advance our operational capabilities with the introduction of new technology. The maintenance and new technology upgrades of our original WMD equipment cache that was issued to each task force after the September 11 attacks requires significant and stable funding that is currently not identified.

Each federal task force consistently undergoes several methods of evaluation, readiness and each task force must submit a self-evaluation and undergo operational readiness evaluations periodically. We also undergo audits by the Office of Inspector General.

They have also illustrated the fact that in these different evaluations that it is impossible for task forces to attain the highest levels the program requires without proper program office staffing, adequate sustained funding, and an increased focused emphasis on training initiatives.

The FEMA USAR system has not reached its full potential. Specific legislative authorization and sustained adequate and recurring funding for the FEMA USAR system remains one of the larger missing pieces of the puzzle of homeland security. In effect, the nation has a proven ready reserve force of nearly 6,000 highly trained

specialists capable of immediate response to any type of incident, with an annual current cost to the federal government of approximately only \$4,000 per member. This program is a proven outstanding example of cost-effective cooperation between all levels of government.

I would like to thank committee Chair Cuellar, Ranking Member Dent, and the distinguished members of the subcommittee for the privilege of appearing before you today.

[The statement of Chief Endrikat follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF FRED ENDRIKAT

Thank you Chairman Cuellar, Ranking Member Dent, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response for this opportunity to discuss the capabilities of Federal Emergency Response Teams.

By way of introduction, I am Fred Endrikat; I have been a Philadelphia firefighter for 32 years, and I am currently assigned as the Special Operations Chief for the Philadelphia Fire Department's Special Operations Command. I also serve the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) National Response System in concurrent duty assignments as the National Task Force Leader's Representative, Incident Support Team Operations Chief, and Task Force Leader for Pennsylvania Task Force 1.

I have served in various capacities at the local, state, and federal levels in disaster response operations, including a 40-day field assignment as the FEMA US&R Incident Support Team Operations Chief at the September 11th attack and collapse of the World Trade Center in New York City and a 30-day field assignment as the FEMA US&R Incident Support Team Operations Chief for Hurricane Katrina (Mississippi theater of operations) and Hurricane Rita.

I am speaking today as a first responder, but I also have the responsibility and privilege to speak on behalf of the nearly 6,000 members of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Urban Search & Rescue National Response System.

Background

Similar to the rapid advances and extensive development of emergency medical services and hazardous materials response capabilities during the 1970's and 1980's, the field of technical rescue has seen significant improvement in terms of organization and training during the 1990's through today. New performance standards and accompanying training and legislative initiatives for technical rescue operations have recently been developed and teams have been assembled with all of the capabilities that are needed for the most complex and challenging incidents. The Federal Emergency Management Agency's Urban Search & Rescue National Response System is the product of these efforts.

In 1990, following the Federal Government's responses to the disasters of Hurricane Hugo and the Loma Prieta earthquake, Congress tasked the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to develop a national civilian urban search & rescue capability. Several advanced Urban Search & Rescue teams had already been developed by individual fire departments and within regions where special risks had been recognized, such as California with its well-known earthquake potential. FEMA, with support from federal, state, and local authorities, fire departments, the nation's top technical rescue specialists, and other interested groups, developed the Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) National Response System.

As you are aware, during a disaster, the Federal Government implements the National Response Plan to provide state and local government with technical expertise, equipment, and other resources. These resources are provided by one or more federal agencies. The primary agency responsible for Urban Search & Rescue is FEMA, under Emergency Support Function 9 (ESF 9) of the National Response Plan.

The primary purpose of this system is to provide a nationwide network of heavy search and rescue teams that can be rapidly deployed to disaster incidents. The individual teams are established at the local-jurisdiction level and can be federalized and deployed by FEMA as needed for nationwide response. The US&R teams provide an organized system of resources to locate, extricate, and provide immediate medical treatment to victims trapped in collapsed structures and to conduct other life-saving operations. The US&R National Response System is responsible for the coordination, development, and maintenance of the Federal effort in providing these resources to augment state and local resources in disaster situations.

The twenty-eight Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) Task Forces are the fundamental units of FEMA's national response system, and are strategically located throughout the country. Each Task Force is sponsored by a State or local government jurisdiction and deploys with technical specialists who are divided into management and operational elements. FEMA has the ability to deploy the Task Forces in one of two operational configurations: as a Type I Task Force with 70 personnel (with a full equipment cache that includes specialized Weapons of Mass Destruction capabilities), or as a Type III Task Force with 28 personnel (with a modified smaller equipment cache) that is primarily designed to operate in weather-driven disasters such as hurricanes.

To ensure the ability to deploy at any time with the required number of personnel, teams are staffed in all positions "three-deep", and carry a total rostered personnel complement of two hundred and ten members. A significant number of the sponsoring agencies are municipal fire departments, and firefighters comprise the largest percentage of the rostered members within the system.

The FEMA US&R National Response System also provides an overhead management capability for field operations known as the Incident Support Team (IST). The IST provides Federal, state, and local officials with technical assistance in the acquisition and utilization of Federal US&R resources through advice, incident command assistance, management, and coordination of US&R Task Forces, and obtaining logistical support. The FEMA US&R Program rosters three 21-member Incident Support Teams (the Red, White, and Blue teams). Each IST is on call one out of every three months, and members must be able to deploy within two hours of receiving their activation orders.

Each Task Force maintains extensive capabilities within seven major functional elements.

- Search Specialists utilize canines and technical electronic search equipment to locate trapped victims.
- Rescue Specialists are skilled in shoring operations, lifting, and cutting and breaching all types of building materials including structural steel and reinforced concrete to extricate trapped victims.
- Physicians and Medical Specialists (at the paramedic or equivalent level) provide advanced life support capability and pre-hospital and emergency care for Task Force members and crush syndrome medicine and confined space medicine for rescued victims. Cross-trained personnel
- Rigging Specialists work in conjunction with heavy equipment, such as large hydraulic cranes, to remove heavy debris and expose collapse voids where victims are buried.
- Structural Engineers (some of them firefighters also licensed as professional engineers) perform structural integrity assessments of structures in rescue operations.
- Hazardous Materials Specialists and Technical Information Specialists provide support to the overall search and rescue mission including planning, hazards evaluation, hazardous materials assessments in rescue operations, and technical documentation.
- Logistics Specialists support the overall search and rescue mission by providing supplies, equipment, communications, and transportation for the Task Force and managing the mobilization and demobilization processes.

In addition to having the above listed capabilities, Task Forces are structured to be able to operate under the following guidelines:

- 24-hour around-the clock operations
- Self-sufficiency for 72 hours
- Report to the Point Of Departure within 4–6 hours of activation, and to be able to deploy all personnel and the entire equipment cache by ground or air (as required)
- Cross-trained personnel
- Standardized equipment and training
- Standardized operating procedures
- Operate under the Incident Command System (ICS)

Current Overview

The US&R System has played an essential role in the federal response to terrorist attacks. Eleven of the then 25 Task Forces and one management team took part in the federal response to the bombing of the Alfred R. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on April 19, 1995, and 25 of the current 28 Task Forces and two of the current three standing management teams took part in the response to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

During the response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, all 28 of the Task Forces were activated, with ten being activated a second time for the extended operations encountered. These US&R Task Forces were credited with the search of thousands of homes and buildings and the rescue of 6,587 victims. As evidenced by the FEMA US&R Program's response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and as highlighted by Secretary Chertoff in his Report to Congress last year, the FEMA US&R Program was one of the federal response entities, along with the United States Coast Guard, that was acknowledged for successful response operations.

Regardless of the triggering mechanism that causes a disaster, the FEMA US&R System has been built with a foundation in the concept of "All-Hazard" preparedness. This program has also been at the forefront of the implementation and field-use of Incident Command structures at incidents of national significance (which was referenced in last year's FEMA Post-Katrina reform legislation).

One of the demonstrated strengths of the National US&R System has been the ability to coordinate state and local US&R assets and quickly fold them into field operations at disaster sites (at the request of the local Authorities Having Jurisdiction). New Jersey TF1 deployed to New York City to the attack and collapse of the World Trade Center on September 11, and Puerto Rico TF-1 deployed on September 13. Both Task Forces staged alongside FEMA Task Forces at the Javits Center Base of Operations. Neither team was, or is, part of the FEMA US&R National Response System, but both are modeled in a similar fashion to Federal Task Forces in the areas of personnel rostering and equipment, and training. They technically did not come under the command and control of the FEMA US&R Incident Support Team, but at the request of the Fire Department of New York, the IST effectively coordinated their operations.

This positive interaction between the FEMA US&R Program and various levels of government is demonstrated not only during disaster operations, but also in the preparedness phase of emergency management. The benefit of the FEMA National US&R System to the first responder can be demonstrated by the fact that state, regional, and local first responders utilize the FEMA US&R National Response System's training curriculum, equipment standards, and policies as benchmarks in preparation for response to local emergencies. These rescue teams have realized that FEMA has developed a best-practices model that they have incorporated into their training and operations, and the National Program has willingly shared policies, procedures, training curricula and technical expertise in an outreach effort to first, second, and third tier emergency management response elements.

The FEMA US&R National Response System is a proven response entity of the Federal government, and is available to provide immediate response to a terrorist attack or natural disasters. Since 1991, this system has responded to 28 major disasters, and has also been deployed to support 12 National Security Special events (to include Presidential Nominating Conventions, the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, the G-8 Summit, etc.).

Challenges

FEMA currently operates the US&R System under authority drawn from different sections of the Stafford Act, and System response elements (Task Forces and Incident Support Teams) can only be activated during a Presidential emergency declaration.

Annual funding amounts to build and sustain the program have varied widely since the program's inception. The current annual cost to maintain a Task Force in a state of readiness has been estimated by FEMA to be approximately \$1.7 million. At the current level of funding, each Task Force is faced with an approximate \$1 million deficit. A significant portion of this deficit is usually made up by Sponsoring Agencies and Participating Agencies who absorb both "hard" costs (such as the payment of vehicle insurance, maintenance, and operating costs), and "soft" costs (such as the payment of salaries for members to maintain specialized rescue skills during training exercises) related to Task Force expenses.

The System has been functioning for many years without an Advisory Committee (historically comprised of members representing FEMA, Sponsoring Agency Chiefs, technical experts, labor officials, and emergency response professionals). In the past, the Advisory Committee has brought the diverse views of all stakeholders together and provided important guidance and a balanced viewpoint to FEMA with regard to the operation and administration of the US&R National Response System. The rechartering / reseating and active participation of the Advisory Committee is extremely important to the Sponsoring Agency Chiefs and US&R System participants.

Time and funding must be dedicated to continue the development of working relationships with other agencies (such as the National Geo-Spatial Intelligence Agency)

and private partners in the science and technology research fields that will significantly advance our operational capabilities with the introduction of new technology.

The maintenance and new technology upgrades of the original Weapons of Mass Destruction equipment cache that was issued to each Task Force after the September 11th, 2001 attacks requires significant and stable funding that is currently not identified.

National US&R Task Forces are evaluated by several methods in relation to operational readiness parameters. Annually, each Task Force must submit a Self-Evaluation to the Program Office. Selected Task Forces are then identified for a Phase II Evaluation. These Operational Readiness Evaluations (where an Evaluation Team of Program Office staff and Peer Evaluators conduct a comprehensive on-site inspection and review of administrative policies, procedures and documentation, logistical readiness, training programs, financial record-keeping, and personnel files) are currently being conducted for six Task Forces each year. The System also undergoes periodic extensive audits by the Office of Inspector General. These various evaluation mechanisms have raised the bar of preparedness and readiness to the highest levels, but have also illustrated the fact that it is impossible for Task Forces to attain the highest levels this program requires without proper Program Office staffing, adequate sustained funding, and an increased focused emphasis on training initiatives.

Summary

Despite the lessons we have learned from our nation's response to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and despite our lessons learned from responses to events similar to the devastating hurricane season of 2004 and the response in 2005 to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Federal Urban Search & Rescue System has not reached its full potential.

These responses have increased the urgency for us to continue to improve our skills and develop new technologies to mitigate complicated large-scale technical rescue / collapse situations. Specific legislative authorization and sustained adequate and recurring funding for the Federal Urban Search and Rescue System remains one of the larger missing pieces of the puzzle of homeland security.

In effect, the nation has a proven "ready reserve" force of nearly 6,000 highly-trained specialists capable of immediate response to any type of incident, with an annual current cost to the federal government of approximately \$4,000 per member. This program is an outstanding example of cost-effective cooperation between all levels of government. Legislation that is currently being introduced by Congresswoman Sanchez would consolidate the statutory authority for the System under the Stafford Act and would, among other things, for the first time, explicitly authorize the US&R System and address the funding uncertainties that this program faces every Fiscal Year. This legislation will ensure a strong federal Urban Search & Rescue response capability, with measurable benefits through all tiers of emergency response.

Again I would like to thank Chairman Cuellar, Ranking Member Dent, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee for the privilege of appearing before you today.

Mr. CUELLAR. Thank you, Chief.

I want to thank all of you all, members of the panel, for being here with us.

At this point, members will now have an opportunity to ask our witnesses questions. I remind each member that he or she will have 5 minutes for the set of questions that he or she might have.

I will now recognize myself for my set of questions.

This question goes to both Chief Endrikat and Chief Prather. After the September 11, 2001 incident, Congress provided substantial increases to the urban search and rescue funding. Federal preparedness funding for the USAR reached a high of \$65 million in fiscal year 2004, but fell to \$30 million in fiscal year 2005, and the amount later decreased to \$20 million in fiscal year 2006.

How has this decrease in funding impacted the efficiency of the deployed teams and the staffing levels of the work that you all have been doing?

Chief Prather, I think you have the highest rank. Is that correct?

Chief PRATHER. It is basically what I said in my remarks, sir. We need to choose whether we are going to fund our local needs or support this task force. We have chosen to try and balance that. There are a number of examples that we make do with what we have. An example is our task force is spread around in six different fire stations, as opposed to being in a single secure facility from which we can efficiently deploy.

Many of the task forces are lacking in some of the administrative support to take care of the grant funds. Probably the biggest shortfall that we see is the ability to complete the required training and to acquire the adequate depth in our resources so that we can deploy and sustain that deployment.

I think the strength of the system, in spite of the cyclic nature of the funding, is, as Chief Endrikat pointed out, you saw that all task forces, irrespective of the amount of funding that was available, were able to respond to the Gulf Coast and New Orleans. So the system works, but we are making it work.

Mr. CUELLAR. Thank you.

Chief?

Chief ENDRIKAT. Mr. Chairman, maybe a word of background on the funding. The \$60 million that was appropriated after the September 11 attacks, a good portion of that was earmarked toward building our capability and giving each task force the potential to be able to deploy two complete elements, so two task forces. And a lot of the funding was geared toward procuring a second equipment cache for the task forces.

We are still in the process of that. That still requires some funding that possibly has not yet been identified. But the goal was to give us more depth at the federal level to be able to respond and support state and local authorities.

As I mentioned, I think one of the benefits of this program is the level of cooperation between all levels of government. Based on what Chief Prather mentioned, we balance or we attempt to balance our local needs with being able to support the federal requirements and the federal mission. Our sponsoring organizations and our participating agencies end up absorbing a lot of this soft cost.

For example, in Pennsylvania, we absorb the soft costs for our vehicle insurance, for our vehicle maintenance, for costs along those lines, simply because there is not enough budget money annually to go around and to fully keep the task force ready and prepared to respond for a federal mission.

Mr. CUELLAR. Okay. Thank you.

A question to Dr. Devir. According to the 2005 House Government Reform report on NDMS, after-action reports following the 2004 hurricane season documented serious breakdowns in planning, supply management, communications, and leadership. Some problems included deployment of teams with inadequate supplies, lacking essential drugs and equipment.

Do you feel these types of issues have been resolved, number one? And number two, does simply moving NDMS from FEMA back to the HHS solve all of the NDMS problems?

Mr. DEVIR. I would like to thank you for my promotion to "doctor," but unfortunately I am just a "mister."

Mr. CUELLAR. Well, then we will call you "honorable."

Mr. DEVIR. There you go. I like that. That is nice.

[Laughter.]

As far as the issues related to our response, you sort of have to separate the individual response from the nature of after-actions. I could probably bring out 10 after-action reports from different incidents, and I could blindfold you and read them to you, and you wouldn't know which was which, because typically the same issues come up—command and control issues, resupply, et cetera.

In terms of have we made improvements, I think we certainly have. I know that while we were still positioned within FEMA, significant changes and improvements were made in the way logistical resupply was organized. Specifically, some of our folks on working groups that were actually in the field sat down and came up with plans that there would be automated resupply, instead of waiting for somebody to put through the purchase order and ask for additional supplies.

We knew that if we were seeing a certain level acuity of patients in certain volumes that we would run out of certain medical supplies. So there was a system put in place that on the second day you would start shipping those supplies in, and on the third day you would start shipping additional supplies in. So that was a significant improvement.

I know there was also some work to supply us with some additional communications equipment. I think we still need to do some work in that area, but the ability to add some satellite communications and infrastructure that was outside what you depend on locally that is typically going to be destroyed, certainly helped our response capability.

As far as moving over to HHS, don't take this as a criticism of our cousins over in FEMA, but it is difficult to do some of the medical things when you are not in the medical community. Anybody that has gone to the doctor, you talk to your doctor about what is going on, and pretty soon in some sophisticated language, he has sort of left you in the dust unless he is an especially good communicator.

We found that in resupply issues that a lot of times the folks that were sincerely trying to do a good job, they just didn't know the medical equipment or some of the medical supplies to be able to provide to us what it was we needed. So I think moving over to HHS, where we have specialized medical logistics, is certainly going to help us in that area.

Mr. CUELLAR. All right. Thank you.

I have a question for Mr. Powers, but since my time is over, I will go ahead at this time and recognize the ranking member of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Dent, for any questions. I will come back in the second round and ask Mr. Powers some questions.

Mr. Dent?

Mr. DENT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all for your testimony.

Mr. Powers, it is my understanding that the national operations center has the capability to deploy disaster situational awareness teams. There are also emergency response teams that are managed

or controlled by other federal agencies such as domestic emergency support teams and nuclear incident response teams.

How many types of emergency response teams does FEMA have? And how do they relate to one another is really the big question?

Mr. POWERS. Let me begin from the very beginning of your questions, the DSAT team that the department has. The reason I am not answering your question directly is because we have a number of teams that I did not mention in my testimony as part of our recovery. There are a number of other things that we deploy. It is not just initial response. There are a good number of those.

The DSAT team is a team that the secretary created after Katrina to provide better situational awareness for the department. Their purpose was to go on-scene and provide video and audio links of what was actually happening back to the Department of Homeland Security so that they did not have to rely on commercial media as their only news source of information.

One of the things that we are intending to do with our incident management assist teams, the new teams that were created, is to provide them a situational awareness capability where they will be able to work with the state and local officials on-scene and provide situational awareness not just back to DHS, but also back to the local incident command and the state EOC and the regional FEMA offices, so that everyone will have the same information at the same time, so that we have a good understanding of what the situation is on-scene so we can apply the right resources to whatever the incident happens to be.

Does that answer your question?

Mr. DENT. Yes. I would like to further elaborate, though. Can you explain how it is not duplicative to have both FEMA and the national operations center deploy emergency response teams and domestic emergency response teams, respectively, at the same time? Why is that not duplicative, essentially?

Mr. POWERS. We are attempting to work together. We respect the wishes of the secretary to deploy situational awareness teams that he needs for his information. We are changing the way we do business, so we are in a position to provide that information directly to him if he needs it. If that meets his requirements, then I would expect that his teams will no longer be required.

Mr. DENT. Thank you.

Questions to Mr. Endrikat and Mr. Prather. Last year, DHS's Office of Inspector General issued an audit of the national urban search and rescue response system, USAR. This audit found that the USAR task forces were falling short of achieving the system's set objectives and that there were operational, logistical and management deficiencies. The audit also criticized FEMA for funding and staffing shortages that prevented proper monitoring and oversight of task forces.

From your perspective, has FEMA taken steps to address these deficiencies? And how does FEMA strengthen its oversight and involvement with these task forces?

Chief ENDRIKAT. Congressman Dent, recently the FEMA program office in the area of program staffing was just authorized basically a doubling of staff. That is something that the sponsoring agency chiefs and the task forces have been supporting for years. So the

national program office at FEMA headquarters, with this increase in staffing, should be able to give greater oversight and greater coordination and guidance to the 28 task forces in the field.

The inspector general audits exposed a number of weaknesses in our system. I think a lot of those weaknesses are based on the high bar and the high standard that has been set. As I mentioned, we have self-evaluations. We have operational readiness evaluations.

But I think the core issue here is that without adequate sustained recurring funding and guessing each year on how we are going to maintain programs and training programs and logistical requirements, it is really pretty much a guess each year what we are going to be able to do in order to maintain that high level of readiness.

Mr. DENT. Thank you.

I see my time is up.

Mr. CUELLAR. No, go ahead.

Mr. DENT. Mr. Prather, do you want to just quickly answer?

Chief PRATHER. I would just echo what Chief Endrikat said. I think the increased staffing for FEMA and the use of our program will be of great help and enable us to roll this forward. They have had eight people in there—that is half of what I send to a single structure fire—responsible for managing the 6,000 people, not only on the administrative side, but also during the support. So we are very happy with that.

Mr. DENT. Thank you.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CUELLAR. All right. Thank you, Mr. Dent.

The chair would now recognize other members for questions they may wish to ask the witnesses. In accordance with our committee rules and practices, I will recognize members who were present at the start of the hearing based on seniority on the subcommittee, alternating between the majority and minority. Those members coming in later will be recognized in the order of their arrival.

Also, for the members who came in a little bit afterwards, we did grant Mr. Rodriguez, who is also part of the subcommittee on appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security. He also had a disaster in Eagle Pass in his district.

So at this time, just so everybody knows the order we will be following, I will lean over to this side. Ms. Norton will go first. I will recognize her in a second. Ms. Christensen will go second. Mr. Etheridge, if he comes back, will go third. Ms. Lowey will go next, and then Mr. Rodriguez will go after that. If any other members come in, we will go ahead and put them in.

So at this time, just so everybody knows the order that we are going, the chair recognizes for 5 minutes the gentlewoman from D.C., Ms. Norton, for her 5 minutes of questioning. Ms. Norton?

Ms. NORTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Powers, one of the most serious issues in the catalog of problems from DHS following Katrina was the confusion and overlap between FEMA officials and DHS officials. Mr. Dent has alluded to some continuing overlap in his questions. One thing Katrina taught us was that essentially we were not prepared to respond to a WMD attack, because there should be no difference. The only difference

is you don't get a weather forecast ahead of time telling you that an attack is coming, as we did with the hurricane.

As I understand it, you worked as something called the "principal federal official" during Hurricane Katrina. Is that not true?

Mr. POWERS. That is not true. I worked as the operational—

Ms. NORTON. You worked for the principal?

Mr. POWERS. I worked for the principal federal official during Hurricane Rita.

Ms. NORTON. Not during Hurricane Katrina?

Mr. POWERS. I did not work in Hurricane Katrina.

Ms. NORTON. Were you the so-called "senior DHS official" in Hurricane Wilma?

Mr. POWERS. That is correct.

Ms. NORTON. The principal federal official is, as I understand it, a Department of Homeland Security position. Is that the case?

Mr. POWERS. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. NORTON. The senior Department of Homeland Security official in Hurricane Wilma was also a DHS official. Is that right?

Mr. POWERS. That is correct.

Ms. NORTON. I would like to know what operational role these officials have—the principal federal officer, the senior DHS official—what operational role do these officials have that is not or could not be played by the federal coordinating official who is the lead official under the Stafford Act?

Mr. POWERS. You are correct. The federal coordinating officer is the primary federal official. We are all emergency management that is related to Stafford Act issues. The federal coordinating officer is the primary leader in the unified coordination group. He or she brings synergy to the federal agencies and is the person with the fiduciary responsibility, the FCO, the federal coordinating officer, as given under the Stafford Act.

The role of the FCO complements the PFO. The PFO has three roles. First of all, he is the personal representative of the secretary of homeland security.

Ms. NORTON. Is not the federal coordinating official also the representative of the secretary?

Mr. POWERS. He is, but the principal federal official is the personal representative of the secretary.

Ms. NORTON. Is he paid more than the federal coordinating officer?

Mr. POWERS. It depends on the situation. They may or may not be.

Ms. NORTON. Why do you need two officials who apparently report to the secretary, when in fact that was precisely the kind of confusion that we was reported in Katrina? Now, you have somebody being paid at a time when this committee was asking about funding that is not available for WMD, for example, in post-9/11 task forces. We have senior officials over officials who report to the secretary.

You need to explain to me who is in charge. If there is somebody who says "I come from the secretary," and there is somebody else who says, "I am the federal coordinating official," and I am in one of these areas which has just had a disaster, who is in charge?

Mr. POWERS. The person in charge for the federal response under the Stafford Act is the federal coordinating officer.

Ms. NORTON. So why do we need a highly paid senior DHS official and a highly paid principal federal official, alongside the federal coordinating officer, who is the only officer recognized by law—the only one recognized by law? And here I am sitting in Podunk, Nevada, or someplace—pardon me, Nevada—and these two people report. How am I to know who is really in charge? Or am I left to try to figure out who I should really relate to? What is the point?

Mr. POWERS. During an event, there are a lot of people who respond. There are a lot of agencies that respond. There are the state coordinating officers, federal coordinating officers. There is a senior law enforcement official who responds, who does not report to the FCO. And there are other people—

Ms. NORTON. I know what these other officials do. I am trying to find out what the principal federal official does. I understand who he reports to. I want to know what he does.

Mr. POWERS. He is the one who coordinates these groups of various disparate groups.

Ms. NORTON. That is now what the federal coordinating official does, although his word says that he is the coordinating official. That is what his title is.

Mr. POWERS. The way the national response plan is laid out, that is his title. I agree with you. But the role of the principal federal official is to coordinate all of the responders, all of the senior-level responders, kind of the chairman of the board, so to speak, and to get the teams to work together.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Chairman, I just want to note for the record that I have tried in my other committee, which also has jurisdiction over FEMA, to find out why we have these overlapping officials. I am very seriously concerned. I mean it. If I am in some catastrophe and these two guys report and salute and say they are representing the secretary, I am seriously confused about who it is who is in charge. I have no reason to believe that the federal government ought to be paying for two people to be in charge post-Katrina.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CUELLAR. Yes, Ms. Norton.

Can you follow up with the staff and let's see if we can try to answer this question at another time, maybe working with Ms. Norton, to see if we can sit down and try to get this down as soon as possible? If we can try to do it later on this week, it would be really good.

Can you just send me a little note to say that you all have done the meeting? Okay. Thanks.

At this time, the chair will recognize for 5 minutes the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands, Ms. Christensen, for 5 minutes of questions.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for this hearing.

My first question would be to Mr. Devir. You responded to Mr. Dent's question about the move back to the Department of Health and Human Services. If I remember correctly, during Hugo, that is where the DMAT team was to begin with. So it seems to me that that is where it properly belongs.

My question is about the coordination now between HHS and DHS. Has that been exercised? Is that operationally seamless coordination between the two? It was back in 1989, but a lot of things have changed in FEMA since then.

Mr. DEVIR. Yes, ma'am. It has been exercised. There is an additional point that impacts that. That is the fact that the assistant secretary for preparedness response in Health and Human Services is a new under secretary under law. That position has just been appointed, Admiral Vanderwagen, by the president.

So you are talking about a move within an agency that is sort of going under a mini-reorganization, if you will. We are aware of the fact that we do have to identify how those folks will interface with one another. Going back to your point about Hugo, the medical response has always fallen under ESF-8. So as it relates to a medical need, the folks in Health and Human Services, working with local officials, determine that there is a need, FEMA had the overall responsibility for managing the incident, and HHS always had responsibility for serving the medical needs.

So that coordination has been in place, and we see the same people in our meetings. They just may have a different name tag.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Okay.

Mr. Powers, I think it was in your testimony—actually, I was trying to find where I was reading about the type one or type two task forces. Is that in your testimony? Well, in one of the testimonies, the type one task force was described as having specialized weapons of mass destruction capabilities.

I know in my district and other districts, we have the civil support teams of the National Guard that also have special weapons of mass destruction capabilities.

I was wondering, are these two agencies duplicating each other? Is there an effort to make sure that their activities are coordinated? Or are they different? Are their responsibilities different?

Mr. POWERS. Let's just say that the capabilities of the National Guard complement the weapons of mass destruction capabilities of the USAR teams. The teams do joint training. We make sure that they complement, not compete, with one another because during that kind of an event, you probably never have enough resources and we need all the resources that we can muster.

So the resources that the National Guard puts forward, the resources that area available in the active Army and the DOD, plus the resources that we have available in the USAR teams, all complement one another.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. I see Mr. Endrikat nodding. Let me ask the question to Mr. Endrikat and Mr. Prather, and you can respond to that question as well.

Do any of these teams, the search and rescue teams, exist outside of fire departments? Are you aware of any that exist outside of fire departments? We have a rescue in each island in the Virgin Islands, and to me, they fulfill that role. I was just wondering if they would qualify to be one of these task forces, or must it be inside of fire services?

Chief ENDRIKAT. No, ma'am. Most of the 28 are sponsored primarily by fire agencies, but one example would be Texas A&M University sponsors Texas Task Force 1. In the past, New Mexico was

sponsored by the University of New Mexico. So there are some other agencies. There are also some emergency management agencies at the state or local level that sponsor federal task forces, but primarily they are mostly fire-based.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Did you want to add a response to the question about the civil support teams?

Chief ENDRIKAT. The WMD, I think in my written testimony, I spoke to the difference between the type one FEMA USAR task force and the type three FEMA USAR task force. The type one is the one with the weapons of mass destruction capability. I also referenced in my testimony that right now, we are about 5 years into the technological shelf-life of our WMD equipment. We are really struggling with how to maintain that capability in the state-of-the-art effective way, without sustained funding specifically dedicated for that.

But as Mr. Power said, the civil support teams and the DOD teams that operate in a WMD arena, we do coordinate and we do have very similar roles as far as the assessment of the WMD event. I think our problem for all of our teams is how we mitigate and actually engage in hot zone operations. We are still defining that concept of operations across the board.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CUELLAR. Thank you very much.

At this time, the chair will recognize for 5 minutes the gentleman from New York, Ms. Lowey.

Mrs. LOWEY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Before I get to my questions, I want to mention an emergency response team in my district. In Westchester County, New York, a group of fire chiefs have formed a county-wide task force to better handle certain emergencies. Members of the task force including more than 75 firefighters, fire chiefs, have received specialized training, including trench and building collapse, mass casualty, HAZMAT, and WMD training.

This has proven to be a tremendous success. The task force has responded to numerous emergencies in the community, and I have worked with them for several years to secure federal funds. Last year, a team from DHS went to Westchester to document the task force's work and they use it as a prototype to encourage other communities to develop their own teams.

After personally seeing the success of our local task force, I am certainly appreciative of the work of all of our witnesses in urban search and rescue teams, and disaster medical assistance teams. I thank you.

Mr. Prather explicitly stated in his testimony that USAR equipment is not used for everyday local events. The equipment purchased is set aside for appropriate emergency use only. What troubles me is that the federal government asks state and local public safety agencies to do this, at the same time that the administration has repeatedly proposed to cut funding for the program.

Mr. Prather's testimony mentions that locals must pay \$1 million for the federal government's \$700,000 contribution. The federal government reaps the benefit, but only pays 40 percent of the cost. As an appropriator, I frankly have been far too many examples of

the department claiming that it fully supports a program, only to propose that funds are cut. This is unacceptable.

I suggest this to Mr. Powers. Why has the administration proposed to cut funds for this program in recent years? And to the other members of the panel, how would increased funding assist your response to emergencies?

Mr. Powers can begin, and then we can hear from the others.

Mr. POWERS. I will have to get back to you on the department perspective on that. I can answer from the program perspective, but not the department perspective.

Mrs. LOWEY. Okay. So you are not aware of cuts in the program?

Mr. POWERS. I know that the budget was submitted for \$25 million in 2008.

Mrs. LOWEY. Okay. Do you have an opinion about it?

Mr. POWERS. Pardon me?

Mrs. LOWEY. You want to get back to me. Okay.

Do any of the others care to comment on the fact that the local share is so high?

Chief PRATHER. I think your follow-up question was what would be the operational capability if we were fully funded? What difference would it make?

Mrs. LOWEY. Okay.

Chief PRATHER. From my perspective, what would be different is our second cache would be completed. As Ranking Member Dent mentioned, the inspector general's report identified some areas where we were weak and still needed improvement.

Much of that was based on the need for funds—the depth in training, the operational exercises, to conduct those, the readiness exercises, and a number of things that would basically strengthen the program and allow us to fully fund the federal program, as opposed to the locals having to do something with our money for the federal program.

Mrs. LOWEY. Before anyone else responds, let me throw out some other ideas directly related. When a team is deployed, there are backfill costs for those on the team who are first responders. If so, does FEMA reimburse public safety agencies for backfill costs? Perhaps you can respond?

Chief PRATHER. Yes. The \$1.7 million figure that we are talking about is the ongoing maintenance costs. It does not take into consideration the actual costs of response. When we respond, that is probably the place that we do get the full funding, not only for the cost of the deployment, but also for the backfill.

One of the things that is a problem there, which would be addressed in the legislation Ms. Sanchez is considering introducing, would be the workers comp reimbursements.

Mrs. LOWEY. Did you want to respond? Yes?

Chief ENDRIKAT. I just wanted to echo what Chief Prather said. I think, Congresswoman, that one of the problems is that the funding varies so much year to year. I am not quite sure who suggested it or how we arrived at a fixed dollar amount, but what really suffers is our ability to fully prepare and be ready to go out the door.

I think increased funding, the one main area that it would impact us and really benefit the citizens would be our ability to train

the way we should train, and to certify our people the way they should be certified and credentialed.

Mrs. LOWEY. My red light is on, so I thank you, Mr. Chairman.
Mr. CUELLAR. Thank you, Ms. Lowey.

At this time, the chair will recognize for 5 minutes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you for allowing me this opportunity to ask a few questions and also make a few comments.

Let me indicate to you that I had the opportunity to be a congressman in 1998, and in 2000 we had floods in San Antonio. The major cities like San Antonio can do the match, but little communities like Seguin, Brownsville and those areas have difficulty doing that. And so somehow we have to come up with a different response to be able for them to react and be able to compete with a major metropolitan area when the disaster hits them. I think that there is something that we need to do about that. I don't know what the answer is. Maybe you can come up with that.

Secondly, is it correct to say that FEMA only responds after the request for assistance from the state is given? And is there anything proactive that FEMA can do, you know, right after the event or during the event? I want to ask a second question also, and then I want you to keep that in mind, Mr. Powers.

The second question is, after a disaster occurs, it is my understanding that infrastructure and personal damage assessments are conducted in order to gauge the extent of the damage. These are assessments that sometimes take days or weeks. Is there any assistance that FEMA could provide while the assessments are being conducted?

I just went through another disaster in Eagle Pass. As far as I am concerned, it took too long to respond. I, prior to being here, had experienced a disaster that occurred in El Paso during a flood, and that took too long to respond. I want to just give you an embarrassing situation. Ten people lost their lives in the tornado, three in Mexico and seven in the U.S., there in Eagle Pass.

I had gone to Mexico because the military had come to San Antonio when we had some 20,000 people from Katrina, and they had come in to feed some of the people there, and they stayed a pretty good long time there in San Antonio feeding them. So I went and paid my respects to some of the people in Guerra Negros, because they actually got hit hard.

I am here to tell you, I was impressed with them. They had doctors on the field. They had a pharmacy there. They were given tetanus shots. They had mobile units doing X-rays. They were cleaning. They finished up and it was worse on that site. After 7 days, my judge down there and my mayor calls me and tell me that the state of Cohilla just asked if they could come and help us. Our president hadn't moved yet.

And it wasn't because we hadn't asked, because the governor had asked. Senator Hutchison had asked. Senator Cornyn had asked. I had asked. We had sent letters. I had personally handed a letter to the president on Thursday, and the accident occurred on Monday. And we still couldn't get a reaction.

I want you to know those people read the paper on both sides. They know how they responded on the other side, and on this side, what we were still hearing was—and this is the frustration part of it—I go there Thursday after the votes, 3 days later, the response is these kind of arguments: “Well, don’t clean up your area because it is going to reflect on your insurance. No, you cannot pick up that stuff because you are not going to get reimbursed by FEMA.”

Don’t quote me on this. It might be Red Cross. It could be the Salvation Army. “Don’t accept any money for anything because that is going to be deducted”—those kind of stuff going on, when there are people that were in need, and everybody was over here, and the accident occurred over here.

And so if you could respond to those two comments, I would appreciate it.

Mr. POWERS. The first question on the lack of response. The Stafford Act requires us to follow certain protocols, which we attempt to do. FEMA has tried very hard over the last 6 months to assume a much more proactive posture. In some cases, we have provided commodities, as we call them, support things before a disaster is declared. But when we do that, we ask the state to sign an agreement, to say that if a disaster has not occurred, that they will either reimburse us for the cost of those materials or will replace them in-kind.

I don’t know the particulars of the incident that you are describing in that particular piece. As far as working with the state, for example Eagle Pass, the incident occurred around the 25th of April, I think. We had a FEMA person physically with the state on the 26th. We started the damage assessments on the 26th. We have to do those with the state. We cannot do those by ourselves. It has to be a joint thing.

So many times we are finding that, and I don’t know if it was the case at Eagle Pass, but the states are not ready as quickly as we are ready to do the—

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. You are right. Mr. Chairman, it is a real problem. In this case, we had a good mayor and a good judge, and actually a governor that declared it early. But if the ground troops are not experienced or don’t know, they are only going to do based on, and it is a first-hand experience. So somehow it is not working.

Mr. POWERS. During Eagle Pass, we did provide tarps before the declaration. We did provide—

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. I got there on Thursday, and on Thursday the first thing I saw was another rainstorm coming and they weren’t there, because I asked them to, if nothing else, get those. It occurred Monday. This was Thursday, and whatever little things they had. And by the way, I do want to congratulate, because when you do get there, your people are very conscientious and they are really hard-working. I have nothing but praise.

But somehow, we need a better system that reacts much quicker. If the Mexican government can beat us and take care of it and get to the chase, my God, what is wrong with our picture?

Mr. POWERS. We try to counsel the state. For example, on the Eagle Pass, we provided hygiene kits. I personally approved that on Saturday afternoon. We did not have a declaration.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. On the Saturday a week after? But on Thursday, what I witnesses also, and I don't have any experience in this except my other two experiences—and I apologize, I am going out of the time—but I am walking the scene. I am walking the scene. I am seeing these people go through the mud and stuff looking for little pictures. And I know how important that is for someone who has lost somebody's lives, to find a picture.

And I am also seeing the Red Cross going and giving food. These people don't have any gloves. This is after Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. This is the fourth day out there; no running water out there. So you know they are not cleaning their hands. They don't have gloves, and this is 4 days after the disaster.

Those are I would presume things that automatically ought to be done from the very beginning. I just figured, look, you have to get some gloves for the people because they were giving out hot dogs, and they needed the food, and they needed water to drink, but I knew that they were going to be dirty, because they were out there working. So basic stuff like that.

And on the Mexican side, I went and toured it. They were lined up to get tetanus shots earlier, and they had taken care of most of them by then. They had a mobile unit to provide prescription drugs and medicines. For rural America, that we don't, number one, anytime you know that 300 homes have been destroyed, you are going to find 300 homeless people, because in rural communities you don't have the housing. In an urban area, you do. In a rural community, you can cut to the chase and figure out that you are not going to have housing for 300 families. That is an easy assessment to make by any rocket scientist.

So you also can look at in terms of looking at some of those basic needs. So somehow we have to get you down there a lot quicker. If somehow you can come back and have some suggestions to us, because what you have there is not working.

Mr. POWERS. The system as it is currently set up requires the states to invite the federal government in, and invites having us just march into their state. As long as that particular piece is in there, our hands are somewhat tied in that we cannot just tell the governor we are coming in anyway, unless it is to save lives. We can do that to save lives, but just for the response after a disaster, we have to wait for an invitation.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Yes, and I understand that. I realize the importance of local control, Mr. Chairman. But there are some states that are more equipped than others, and somehow maybe we need to come by and be close by and see how we can educate. Or maybe we need some response teams that allow that process to occur, because there are some states that would say, "No, we are willing to take care of it."

By the way, the people were there. The Red Cross was there. The Salvation Army was there. Do they get reimbursed for that later?

Mr. POWERS. No, we do not reimburse them.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Okay. Because I know they were there, and what was surprising, some of the dialog that was going on, because anytime someone is telling me what a great job they are doing, you know, I am going to judge it based on what the people are telling me. In this case, if you compare what happened in Eagle Pass on

our side versus what happened in Guerra Negros on the Mexican Side, it is day and night. It is day and night.

I don't know whether we are looking at who is going to get the contract to clean up or who is going to pay for what as a number key issue. I understand that is important, too. I realize it, but maybe you can give some thought to how do we correct this situation so that we can cut to the case right away and be responsive. Because after living on those sites, the first 2 or 3 days are okay. After a week, it gets old. It gets old. Thank God in those communities, you have a lot of relatives, and they go live with their relatives. But in some of the communities, you might not have that same kind of support.

The other one that occurred prior to me being a congressman, when I was out there campaigning, in El Paso, the same thing. It took 14 days for the president to react. Maybe there is a way that after the governor calls it, that you guys can react right away.

For example, if you have a president that reacts, and you might have one that doesn't, but we could have a situation where the governor calls it, then automatically react, and then you can always say, "You know what? It is not to that level, but they need our assistance," and then come back; versus not going in there until 14 or 15 days later, when it is no longer an emergency. Somebody else has done it.

Mr. POWERS. In the case of Eagle Pass, it took a few days before the declaration was requested. It was approved, I think, in 1 day.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Yes, 1 day for you, but for back home it was a week. The Mexicans were already offering work. So I told them, "Hey, get that help," and then when I announced in San Antonio that the Mexicans were coming to help us, then the president that same night did it. I don't have to do that. There is no need for us to be doing that, playing those games.

Mr. POWERS. Congressman, pardon me for interrupting, we do have to wait for the governor to submit the request to us. We can't unilaterally just do that.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. I apologize.

Mr. CUELLAR. No, you just now took your second line of questioning, but go ahead.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. What you just said is a little game that starts back and forth. My understanding was that the governor had called it earlier, and then I heard that FEMA said, well, they have to wait until they not only call it, but then they have to ask for a certain type of help. Is that correct?

Mr. POWERS. The damage assessment needs to be completed before the president can respond.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Let me tell you how that sounds, when you are on the border and you are reading articles that it is already taken care on the Mexican side. We are doing an assessment. That is how it sounds. When people are hurting, oh, no, we are doing an assessment 7 days after.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CUELLAR. Yes, sir.

Let me just follow up on what Mr. Rodriguez is talking about. I will give you 10 days from today to come up with an outline, going through the Stafford Act, going point by point saying, "There

is a disaster; this is the first step that takes place; this is the second point, the third, the fourth,” and then in between there, if you have any suggestions on how we improve the process.

I can understand that we might wait for the governors and all that, but there has to be something we can do to help the individuals that are on the ground. I am talking about the families that are up in the water. I know in my place, Laredo, we sent water supplies and the fire department did a great job in helping them. But there has to be a way, and I can understand that there have to be certain steps that we take, but I am just concerned about the bureaucratic steps that come into play.

What I am asking you is to go step by step and where we can effect some changes to help you. If you are constrained by certain statutory issues, then let us know what it is. I am looking at trying to streamline this for the process of trying to bring the assistance down to the people on a much faster basis.

Again, I can understand if there is something that constrains you, let us know, because certainly I think Mr. Dent and the members of the committee, working with a member who is on the Appropriations Committee for the Homeland Security Subcommittee, we certainly want to work with you to streamline it.

So I want to make sure you understand: 10 days from today, and I want you to include Congressman Rodriguez, and I just talked to Graig about this, and with Mr. Dent’s staff, to go step by step, tell us where we need to maybe make some changes, and tell us how we can streamline the process, simply because I want to have a better process on how we can do this, because it looks like time after time, we have a situation.

I can understand where, if you have a hurricane, you have a little bit of advanced notice. A tornado is a little different because it just happened. I have never heard of a tornado in Eagle Pass in that area, so it was something very new for us on the border. I had also asked to see if Mr. Jerry Moran can come in, but I understand that he is in Kansas right now on this same situation. I had asked Mr. Dent to see if we could get somebody also, because those are the two tornadoes that I can think of right now.

It is always good to have members who are facing that type of situation. They are on the ground. I would ask you as you do that, to include the committee staff on both sides, and Mr. Rodriguez, so we can come up with a response. But I would like to emphasize this, Mr. Powers, 10 days from today, I would like to have something in writing. And then after I get that, I would ask that we sit down again with the members of the committee so we can go over this on how we can improve this.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Chairman, will you yield?

Mr. CUELLAR. Yes, sir.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Let me also just—and I have nothing but praise. After you get in, you have some great people. I don’t want to take that away. I am not here to place blame. I just want to know how can we expedite this; how do we make it better.

I know you need more resources, too. That is part of the problem, because we have been having more disasters. Then what do we need to do. Do we need to establish more preparedness teams that are sent out automatically throughout the country or what?

So thank you very much. And I do want to thank you for what you do when you do get there. Okay? Thank you.

Mr. CUELLAR. Yes. Again, I emphasize what Mr. Rodriguez said. The committee is interested in how do we work together. That is what I want. I want to see practical solutions. I hate playing these games of "gotcha"-type of politics. Nobody is trying to do that.

We are just trying to say, how do we streamline and make the process better? Tell us how we can work together, Mr. Powers, but I would like to see a timetable on this 10 days from today, and see the response.

I know we have gone over the time. I will reserve my questions to another time, but I would ask Mr. Dent if he has any follow-up questions at this time.

Mr. DENT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few, and I will try to keep it pretty brief.

To Mr. ENDRIKAT AND MR. Prather again, do you believe that legislation is necessary to strengthen the urban search and rescue task forces and their role in assisting states and localities as they respond to an incident of national significance? Have previous administrative attempts been taken to strengthen these USAR task forces? If so, how did these turn out?

Chief ENDRIKAT. In relation to the legislation, Congressman, I think right now we exist under a few sections within the Stafford Act. That really allows us to respond, but it doesn't allow us to do some of the proactive things that we just heard from the congressman from Texas that are required to better support the people.

The way the legislation is right now, our program is statutorily, I believe, we are not fully funded, fully authorized, fully empowered to do the things that we are required to do. There have been some previous attempts that have never gotten to this point. We have never gotten this far before in discussing new legislation that would specifically authorize our system and fund it adequately.

Chief?

Mr. DENT. All right. I will move on to Mr. Powers again.

Several of FEMA's emergency response teams have a communications component to help reestablish communications where necessary and to achieve interoperability among emergency responders. Could you please discuss the communications capabilities of FEMA's emergency response teams?

Mr. POWERS. The MERS units that you talked about do have a very robust communications capability. They have the ability to restore local communications if the communications, for example, at the local police or fire department are wiped out due to the disaster, they have the ability to restore that communications using their equipment, until the real systems can be put back in place.

They have the ability to multiplex frequencies that allow responders from various agencies who operate on different radios, different frequency bands, different frequencies, to use their normal equipment and have the equipment multiplexed electronically that allows them to talk to another agency, another jurisdiction.

They have a limited ability to restore cell phone systems, to put up a temporary cell phone network that links into the national system, until the national systems can be put back into place.

They have the ability to provide the state EOC or the incident command with communications capability via satellite; video tele-conference capability; as well as other capabilities that can provide some limited access to the Internet and to the FEMA network, also via the satellite systems that they have on board.

They are available for the state and local responders, the state operations centers, to use if they so need.

Mr. DENT. Also, I just wanted to follow up again, too, the House and Senate conferees are eventually going to meet to discuss H.R. 1 and S. 4—those are the 9/11 commission recommendations and implementation legislation. They are likely to discuss a provision contained in the Senate bill that would establish a strategic technology reserve to pre-position or secure interoperable communications in advance for immediate deployment in an emergency or major disaster.

This technology reserve would be established and maintained by the Department of Commerce. It is my understanding that FEMA either already has such a capability or is in the process of establishing such a capability. Is this true? And do any of FEMA's response teams maintain reserve communications equipment?

Mr. POWERS. We do not have the capability that is described in that particular legislation. In fact, we were curious as to why the Department of Commerce was doing that instead of FEMA. But we know that the government operates in sometimes unusual ways. So we are hoping to integrate that into our disaster communications and emergency communications system once the equipment is procured.

Mr. DENT. Just very quickly, how would such a strategic technology reserve be maintained by the Department of Commerce? How would that interact with existing capabilities of FEMA's emergency response teams?

Mr. POWERS. I do not have an answer to that question right now, but I will come back to you with an answer.

Mr. DENT. Quickly to follow up, how would such a Department of Commerce capability be integrated into the incident command structure?

Mr. POWERS. I will again have to come back to you on that. We are still in the development stages of all of the mechanics of the deployment of the equipment.

Mr. DENT. Thanks.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CUELLAR. Thank you.

I want to thank all the witnesses for their valuable testimony and the members for the questions.

The members of the subcommittee may have additional questions for you, and we ask you to make sure you respond to them on a timely basis, in writing to those questions.

Again, I want to thank everybody for being here. We appreciate the work and the public service that you provide. I know that sometimes it is difficult, but we are all trying to work together to make sure we do our job together.

Having no further business, the hearing stands adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:42 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

