

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Office of Inspector General

Audit of the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System



Office of Audits

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**Homeland
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Preface

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG) was established by the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (*Public Law 107-296*) by amendment to the Inspector General Act of 1978. This is one of a series of audit, inspection, and special reports prepared as part of our oversight responsibilities to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness within the department.

This report assesses the status of response preparedness achieved by the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System as a result of increased levels of funding made available for the System in a post-September 11, 2001, environment. It is based on interviews with employees and officials of relevant agencies and institutions, direct observations, and a review of applicable documents.

The recommendations herein have been developed to the best knowledge available to our office, and have been discussed in draft with those responsible for implementation. It is our hope that this report will result in more effective, efficient, and economical operations. We express our appreciation to all of those who contributed to the preparation of this report.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard L. Skinner".

Richard L. Skinner
Inspector General

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Abbreviations

DHS	Department of Homeland Security
EP&R	Emergency Preparedness and Response Directorate
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FRP	Federal Response Plan
FY	Fiscal year
OIG	Office of Inspector General
US&R	National Urban Search and Rescue Response System
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

*Department of Homeland Security
Office of Inspector General*

Executive Summary

The National Urban Search and Rescue Response System (US&R System) is a rapidly deployable federal source for first response to nationwide emergencies, including Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) events. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), a component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is responsible for administering the US&R System. After September 11, 2001, Congress provided substantial increases to US&R System funding. Federal preparedness funding for the US&R System reached a high of \$65 million in fiscal year (FY) 2004, or about 550 percent higher than FY 2001, but fell to \$30 million in FY 2005.

The objective of this audit was to determine to what extent DHS had achieved the US&R System's preparedness goals and to identify opportunities for improvement in US&R task force preparedness.

While the US&R System has made improvements, especially in WMD training and equipment preparedness, the task forces are falling short in achieving System objectives and standards in three primary areas of readiness: operational, logistical, and management. Systemic deficiencies existed for many of the operational and logistical readiness objectives.

Due to funding shortages and staffing constraints, FEMA did not monitor the task forces' compliance with grant agreement requirements or their achievement of US&R System objectives and standards for optimal task force response preparedness. FEMA also awarded equal grant amounts to each task force without evaluating individual task force readiness or financial needs and did not clearly define program goals.

The task forces did not achieve System objectives and standards because of delays in their hiring of full-time staff to administer day-to-day activities, budget constraints, and System management staff shortages. FEMA was unable to provide sufficient program analysis and oversight because staff levels never grew commensurate with the increased program funding and risk after FY 2001. Also, four hurricanes in the summer of 2004 and Hurricanes Katrina, Wilma, and Rita in 2005 further exacerbated the lack of management oversight by diverting staff to emergency response functions.

We recommended that FEMA take steps to improve the administration, funding, and oversight of the federally funded task forces. The recommendations remain unresolved pending receipt of a specific corrective action plan.

Background

In 1990, FEMA created the National US&R Response System to have a national rescue capability that would provide lifesaving resources to victims entrapped in collapsed reinforced concrete structures. In cooperation with other federal, state, and local agencies, FEMA achieved this national capability by integrating local emergency service personnel into task forces that were to be trained and equipped to respond to emergencies, including WMD events. When the system was initially developed, only a few states had a limited capability to perform this mission, and no resources were available for a national response.

In 1992, FEMA published the Federal Response Plan (FRP) that classified the federal government's response to disasters into 12 Emergency Support Functions, including Urban Search and Rescue for which FEMA had primary responsibility.

FEMA never intended to have an in-house rescue capability of its own, and recognized that the best sources for urban search and rescue knowledge and skills resided at the State and local levels. Therefore, the National US&R Response System was established as a federal—state—local partnership, based on Memoranda of Agreement and Individual Cooperative Agreements between FEMA and the Sponsoring Organizations for the task forces. DHS' December 2004 National Response Plan superseded the FRP, included three additional Emergency Support Functions, and specified that FEMA may activate the National US&R Response System for any actual or potential "Incident of National Significance."

Currently, 28 task forces operate in 19 States with the heaviest concentration of 8 task forces in California (see Appendix B). Task force responses are intended to be primarily for rescues from structural collapse, but also include other activities such as the recovery of personnel lost in the Columbia Shuttle disaster. From its inception to the present, the task forces have responded to over 20 events, usually in a standby status for such events as the Olympics, and reconnaissance for possible victims in collapsed structures from hurricanes. The Oklahoma City Federal Building bombing in 1995, the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in 2001, and Hurricane Katrina in 2005 represent the most intensive task force responses to date. Twenty-six of the 28 task forces responded to the attacks of September 11, 2001, and all 28 task forces deployed to the Gulf Coast area in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in August 2005.

The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, as amended by Public Law 106-390, authorizes task force activities. The

strategic plans for DHS and FEMA contain other criteria relevant to the US&R System as follows:

- The DHS Strategic Plan for 2004 includes an objective to provide robust all-hazard response capability from different resources, including urban search and rescue. Further, according to the plan, integrated logistical support will ensure a rapid and effective response and coordination consistent with national incident command protocols.
- According to the FEMA Strategic Plan for FYs 2003 – 2008, emergency responders of all kinds must increase their capability if the country is to deal effectively with terrorist attacks. The plan recognizes that FEMA is specifically responsible for ensuring an effective response to the use of weapons of mass destruction on United States soil.
- The 2004 DHS Strategic Plan includes risk management as an integral part of its implementation. The Plan recognizes the need for ongoing risk management assessment, and directing resources toward those priority threats and vulnerabilities based on potential consequences and likelihood of an event occurrence.

Results of Audit

Attainment of US&R System Objectives and Standards

The seven task forces we reviewed improved their operational, logistical, and management readiness posture during FY 2003 and FY 2004, but shortfalls in achieving US&R System objectives and standards continued to exist. Notable improvements included task forces' acquisition of WMD training and equipment. For many grant agreement goals and US&R System standards, however, systemic readiness deficiencies continue to exist, especially in the operational and logistical areas.¹

Operational Readiness. Six of the seven task forces fell below 50 percent of US&R System standards for operational readiness established by FEMA. FEMA defined operational readiness as the availability of a rostered complement of completely trained, exercised, qualified personnel and disaster search canines, immediately ready to deploy. A full complement for a task force roster consisted of 210 members with 19 different specialties and 12 canines. Although a task force team deployed to a major structural collapse normally consisted of 70 members and 4 canines, a full 210-member roster was intended to provide depth, in recognition that not all members would be immediately available for deployment. Furthermore, a full 210-member roster

¹ We considered an issue to be a systemic deficiency if it existed at five or more of the seven task forces audited.

becomes an increasingly essential component of operational readiness in order to achieve FEMA's goal of maintaining a second task force response capability during a single event.

Using the US&R System standards, five of the seven task forces we reviewed rated themselves below 50 percent for operational readiness, including one task force that rated itself at 13 percent. We confirmed these results and, in addition, identified a sixth task force that was below 50 percent after adjustments were made for rating and data errors. Following are examples of deficiencies in this category:

- Task force grant awards required multi-day, full-scale, operational readiness exercises that simulated all phases of a disaster or a national incident as an objective to be achieved prior to June 1, 2004. Task forces either did not conduct the exercises or did not require an adequate number of team members to participate. Task force staff acknowledged the importance of conducting these exercises so that members can practice together as a team on activities they may not perform on a day-to-day basis, thereby becoming familiar with the equipment they may need to use on a deployment.
- Some task force members had not received all the training required by FEMA, including WMD training and functional or specialty training based on the member's position description. For example, while logistics specialists are required to attend functional or specialty training, six of the seven teams audited either had no members or an inadequate number of staff who had attended the requisite course. Specialty training is usually provided directly by FEMA through a private contractor.
- To be completely qualified and deployable, task force members must meet all the requirements for deployment, including meeting all training requirements, satisfying medical evaluation and immunization requirements, being available, e.g. not on vacation, injury, etc. During site visits to the seven task forces, we determined that: (1) mandatory training requirements were not met; (2) medical and immunization requirements were either not met or the information was not available to the auditors due to confidentiality concerns; and (3) member availability information was lacking because the task force did not continuously update the members' status as to vacation, injury, etc. task force managers use their discretion when deploying members who are not rated as completely qualified.
- Rostered canines did not meet all of the US&R System requirements, were not available in adequate numbers, and were not immediately available for deployment. Some canines had not completed Type II training; did not

have medical certifications or records supporting their deployability; and were not available for exclusive task force use.

Logistical Readiness. Based on US&R System standards, five of the seven task forces visited rated themselves 70 percent or below for logistical readiness in their June 2004 self-evaluations. We concluded that all seven task forces should be rated below 70 percent but we could not confirm the exact logistical readiness for the other two task forces. FEMA defines logistical readiness as the availability of a complete equipment cache² as well as other logistic resources needed to support immediate deployment. Following are examples of deficiencies in this category:

- None of these task forces performed comprehensive physical inventories or maintained perpetual inventory records of cache equipment to confirm the amount of inventory on-hand at the self-evaluation reporting date. The task forces generally based their evaluations on piecemeal inventories taken at various times of the year and did not always apply correct accounting procedures when reporting deficiencies. For example, one task force did not count a line item as deficient if one or more of the quantity required was on-hand even though the required quantity was not. After conducting partial inventories, staff merely adjusted the Cache Management Inventory System database to reflect the on-hand quantity, but the historical records did not reflect what and why adjustments were made or what the on-hand quantity should be.
- All but one of the task forces visited were significantly deficient in their historical record keeping to show that required maintenance of major equipment items was performed on a regular basis, ensuring an ongoing state of readiness. Further, the task forces had not performed the required maintenance, per the equipment manufacturer, for some of the items. In order for a cache equipment item to be ready for deployment, it must be properly maintained. Based on our observations, at least six of the seven audited task forces did not meet US&R System standards for a minimum rating in this category.

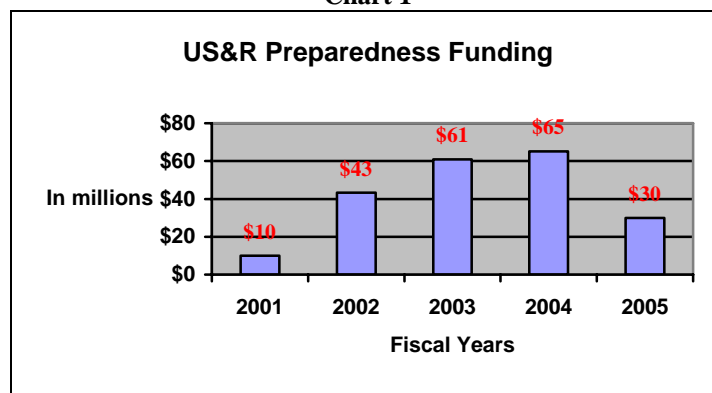
US&R System Oversight, Funding, and Staffing

From FY 2002 to FY 2004, Congress appropriated \$152.4 million for US&R System task force preparedness, a significant increase over prior years' funding, (See Chart 1). The funding increase was intended to improve the task forces' capability to respond to emergency events, including enhancing WMD equipment and training. After providing funding to improve the WMD

² An equipment cache is a compliment of tool, equipment, and supplies stored in a designated location for deployment with a task force.

capability, Congress appropriated \$30 million in FY 2005 to maintain the task force readiness. During the period from FY 2002 to FY 2004, the US&R System program managers within FEMA did not adequately monitor or oversee the task forces' compliance with preparedness grant requirements, or determine whether the task forces achieved US&R System readiness objectives and standards. Additionally, FEMA did not perform an independent financial assessment of task force funding requirements before establishing grant agreement goals, nor did they request the task forces to determine whether grant awards were adequate to meet the readiness objectives and standards. Finally, DHS and FEMA did not authorize the staffing increases needed to accomplish the increased System responsibilities subsequent to FY 2001.

Chart 1



Oversight of Task Force Preparedness

From FY 2002 to FY 2004, FEMA provided only minimal oversight of task force preparedness to assure that grant agreement requirements and US&R System readiness objectives and standards were met. Prior to June 2004, FEMA did not perform any on-site operational reviews and made only one on-site task force grant financial review. Instead, FEMA usually only did summary desk reviews of information provided by the task forces, and did not examine in detail or follow up on information in submitted grant reports from the task forces, including financial status reports and performance reports. These reports provide financial data and other performance indicators as to task force progress toward meeting grant agreement goals.

On-site Reviews. FEMA had not scheduled any on-site operational readiness reviews and had scheduled only five on-site financial compliance reviews in FY 2004. These reviews could have provided FEMA a means to independently verify grant compliance, as well as to assess ongoing readiness. Task force staff often did not understand all grant requirements. Such issues may have been resolved during on-site reviews. For example, task force managers had conflicting understandings of grant terms and conditions terminology, such as the goal for conducting at least one multi-day full-scale

operational readiness exercise. Because task force managers interpreted this goal in various ways, most did not satisfactorily complete the goal by US&R System standards. FEMA planned to implement an on-site FEMA/Peer Evaluation program during the latter part of FY 2004 during which all task forces would be visited over a 2-year period of time. This was delayed in part due to the response requirements for the four Florida hurricanes during the summer of FY 2004. Further, FEMA planned to provide the task forces at least 30 days advance notice prior to on-site reviews.

Financial Status Reports. FEMA minimally reviewed summary information on the financial status reports due quarterly per the grant agreement, and did not follow up on "red flags" in the Financial Status Reports. The Financial status report provides the current and cumulative status of federal cash drawdowns and expenditures for the grant period. A lack of drawdowns or expenditures can be indicative of inadequate progress toward meeting the grant agreement goals and the need for a follow-up or site visit. Financial "red flags" in the financial status reports for US&R System delays included: (1) time lapses of five or more months between grant award dates and the first drawdowns, (2) performance period time extensions, (3) significant delays in the start of performance activities from the date funds became available, and (4) low expenditure levels for performance periods in effect for over one year.

Performance Reports. FEMA had not standardized a performance report format and consequently, with limited human resources, was unable to efficiently and effectively review and recognize issues contained in different task force report presentations. These semi-annual reports provide the current status of grant goal achievements, programmatic issues encountered by the task forces, and other information relevant to the US&R System mission. FEMA identified the lack of detailed review of performance reports as a major US&R System deficiency, saying the best they could do currently is spot-check for compliance. For two of the seven task forces reviewed, no records were available to support that performance reports were ever prepared, or any indication that FEMA followed up on this matter.

US&R System and Task Force Funding Needs

FEMA did not perform comprehensive financial assessments of costs required to achieve overall US&R System goals or detailed analyses of the task forces' funding needs to achieve grant agreement goals. The process of performing an in-depth analysis of task force funding needs would have clarified within FEMA, as well as with the task forces, a clearer understanding as to the expectations for each goal and the costs to achieve each goal within each task force.

Need for Additional Task Force Funding to Meet Grant Agreement Goals. FEMA allocated approximately 40 percent of the US&R System's funds to

task force grants, and awarded equal amounts to each task force to achieve the same goals without analyzing individual task force readiness status and cost structure for the FY 2002 through FY 2004 period. For example, some task forces had larger equipment caches than others, but all task forces received the same allocation for equipment purchases. Further, additional financial requirements, e.g., to perform more training, were often placed on the task forces subsequent to the grant award. Because FEMA provided equal amounts of grant funds and added requirements after grant awards, the amounts did not always reflect US&R System needs or provide the financial ability for task forces to meet additional US&R System requirements.

We did not perform a detailed analysis of the estimated funding required to meet US&R System standards. However, we reviewed selected categories of estimated costs in relation to the grant award amounts, such as task force staffing, and concluded that the grant award amounts were not sufficient for the task force to meet US&R System standards.³

Cost information obtained from the audited task forces showed a wide variance in funding requirements for specific categories. For example, one task force estimated about \$281,000 would be required annually to staff the four administrative positions recommended by FEMA while another task force estimated about \$471,000 annually. Previous grant awards only allocated an average of about \$250,000 for these positions during the entire grant performance period -- usually about 18 months. Task force coordinators also identified other categories of annual costs, such as full-scale exercises, were not adequately funded. The funds allocated for full-scale exercises varied significantly among the task forces.

Need to Clarify US&R System Goals. FEMA and task force leadership did not always have a clear understanding of US&R System goals. For example, FEMA retained about \$49 million during FY 2003 and FY 2004, or about 39 percent of the total funding appropriated for the US&R System, to provide each task force with a second equipment cache conceptually for a second response capability. Some task force leaders believed this would require them to field two teams concurrently, while others believed their capability would need to be consecutive, deploying only one team in the field at a time. The difference in these two options represents a large difference to some of the task forces in their ability to staff the teams without adversely affecting the response capabilities of the members' home fire and rescue stations. FEMA acknowledged that there was some uncertainty as to the intent of the second cache, partially due to changes in FEMA senior management and also due to the reaction after the September 11, 2001, tragedies that additional response capability was needed without clearly defining how it should be achieved. The

³ US&R System grants awarded to the 28 task forces do not contain any cost-sharing provisions.

US&R System may have received more benefit from these funds if the goals had been more clearly defined.

US&R System Staffing

DHS and FEMA did not provide proportionate US&R System staffing increases to adequately manage increased System activities subsequent to FY 2001; FEMA staff levels remained at the pre-FY 2001 level. For the US&R System staff, this consisted of a total of eight persons including administrative staff, who were responsible for administering the preparedness activities as well as responding to emergency events. While this level was inadequate in general, it reached a crisis point during multiple responses, especially the four Florida hurricanes in 2004 and Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma in 2005. While staff at various task forces understood that the organization managing the US&R System in FEMA was understaffed, they expressed frustration that they did not receive timely, consistent, or adequate feedback on preparedness issues. US&R System managers proposed to senior FEMA management a doubling of staff to 16 persons for adequate management of its many activities.

Staffing History. Before the US&R System's March 2003 transition into DHS, the FEMA US&R Section Chief's legacy supervisor (U.S. Fire Administrator) said that the US&R System staff was authorized to double in size from 8 to 16 positions, but no increase in staffing occurred. Subsequently, along with the over \$60 million Congressional appropriation in FY 2003, Congress authorized funding for eight additional full-time positions for 1 year, but FEMA was unable to fill those positions. Thus, the staffing level for FEMA's US&R System has not increased to keep pace with US&R System activity increases that have occurred since FY 2002. Therefore, FEMA has been unable to oversee the System to ensure that the goals of "robust all-hazard response capability," and the capability to deal "effectively with terrorist attacks," as stated in the FEMA and DHS Strategic Plans, were achieved.

Composition of Staff. The US&R System's full-time staff consisted of a Section Chief, five program specialists, and two administrative positions. Two of the program specialist positions were not consistently filled due to extended illness of one specialist and vacancies not being filled timely. Consequently, to compensate for the unproductive positions, FEMA added four part-time contract personnel to assist in FY 2004 US&R System activities. Thus, FEMA's FY 2004 full-time staffing level remained at the pre-FY 2002 level and FEMA did not authorize additional full-time positions. That level was minimally sufficient for responding to emergencies and for setting basic task force guidelines but was insufficient to adequately monitor, analyze, and follow-up on task force progress in meeting US&R System objectives and standards for an optimal level of response readiness.

The US&R Section Chief has proposed doubling the present staff from 8 to 16. Unlike the present structure of the staff “wearing a number of hats,” this proposal contained specialty positions for staff having program management responsibilities, and those having response operations responsibilities.

Reasons for Task Forces Not Achieving Objectives or Standards

The task forces did not achieve System objectives and standards because of: (1) task force delays in hiring a full complement of administrative staff as recommended by FEMA; (2) budget constraints; and (3) US&R System understaffing within FEMA. These conditions negatively impacted the overall task force performance in assuring achievement of all grant goals and System standards at the levels defined by FEMA.

Delays in Hiring Full-Time Staff to Administer Day-to Day Activities. Six of the seven task forces audited did not hire sufficient staff to manage their day-to-day operations, which hindered their ability to achieve their grant goals and standards. Bureaucratic delays and budget considerations were primary factors in the staff shortages. FEMA included in the grant goals a recommendation for each task force to hire, a minimum, four administrative personnel: (1) Task Force Coordinator; (2) Administrative Assistant; (3) Training Coordinator, and (4) Logistician (Cache Manager). Each of the task forces is sponsored by a state agency or local public safety agency (sponsoring organization) that is responsible for the administrative management of their respective task forces, including personnel hiring. The sponsoring organization applied their normal agency rules in hiring that includes such activities as authorizations, funding obligations, qualification reviews, interviews, etc. that contributed to some hiring delays. In addition, task force leadership decided to defer the hiring of some administrative staff to leave more grant funds for some of the remaining goals. Finally, task forces were challenged in recruiting staff because they could not guarantee long-term employment to prospective applicants.

Budget Constraints. Task force leaders were reluctant to spend grant funds to fully achieve goals due to insufficient grant funds to cover all of the grant goals, and uncertainty over the amount of future funding. Task force coordinators for four of the seven task forces that we visited estimated annual funding needs greater than the current grant awards. The estimates ranged from about \$1.1 million to \$2.0 million, well above the FY 2004 funding of about \$950,000. While the remaining three teams had not met their grant agreement goals, they had not analyzed their annual funding needs. In some cases, task forces reduced costs by performing modified versions of some grant agreement goals, such as hiring fewer administrative staff than FEMA recommended.

US&R System Staff Shortage in FEMA. Due to delays caused by continuing resolutions during FY 2003, FEMA did not hire any temporary staff

authorized by Congress, and no subsequent new full-time positions were authorized or filled for the US&R System. After FEMA received authority and funding allocations from DHS to hire permanent personnel, the first priority of FEMA's Response Division Director was to fill vacancies instead of to create new positions. As a consequence, the US&R System staff was tasked with the responsibility beginning in FY 2002 of ensuring WMD preparedness for task forces and managing significant increases of grant funds, but they did not receive additional staff to assist in these activities. The perpetual staffing shortage became most critical when the US&R System staff was tasked with response requirements and had to delay US&R System planned activities such as on-site operational reviews. During the summer of 2004, the US&R System and its staff responded to four hurricanes, essentially one after the other. All full-time US&R System staff, including the Section Chief, was away from the office over 2 months performing emergency response functions, while their program management and preparedness responsibilities were essentially put on hold.

Conclusions

The task forces fell short of the grant goals and standards set by FEMA due primarily to their own administrative staff shortages and budget constraints, as well as FEMA's inability to provide adequate oversight of task force activities. This resulted in a lower than optimal level of readiness for the task forces, especially in the operational and logistical readiness areas. Based on the geographical diversity of the task forces that we visited, as well as other factors, such as significant variances in expenditures, the deficiencies noted in this report appear systemic and need FEMA's attention. Although the task forces have improved their state of readiness in some areas, the US&R System has not collectively attained the level of response capability envisioned in the strategic plans for 2003 and 2004. Further, FEMA has not performed a comprehensive financial assessment of task force costs structures and readiness status that could be used in prioritizing US&R System goals when funding is unavailable or inadequate. FEMA needs to assess and prioritize the US&R System in relation to other programs and provide sufficient staffing resources to assure that the task forces achieve grant agreement requirements and meet US&R System objectives and standards.

Discussion with Management. The President declared Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma as major disaster events between August 29, 2005 and October 24, 2005. As a result, FEMA was engaged in Gulf Coast response operations and unavailable to discuss our September 2005 discussion draft report until mid-December 2005. In response to that draft report, FEMA's Response Division opted to provide written responses and on January 25, 2006, commented on several areas of concern raised in our report.

The Response Division indicated it has (i) worked with the task forces to bolster their administrative staffs, (ii) identified a standardized management structure over the last several years, and (iii) identified and scheduled third party training for task force staff. While these efforts are commendable, they do not obviate the fact that additional improvement is needed since six of the seven task forces visited during our fieldwork were short of the staff needed to manage day-to-day operations and assure achievement of System goals and objectives. Further, the Response Division's comments do not indicate that administrative staffing shortfalls within the task forces has been remedied.

The Response Division also commented that its US&R System Office has worked with the US&R Operations Group⁴ on developing an operational readiness evaluation process to assess operations, logistics, and program management readiness. The first phase of this process requires task force self-evaluation and the second phase involves on-site visits by several members of US&R System staff and task force peer evaluators. Once again, while these efforts may have a positive effect, we determined that six of seven task forces fell below 50 percent of the US&R System standards for operational readiness, and five of the seven task forces were rated 70 percent or below for logistical readiness. Further, we confirmed that self-evaluations were not always reliable and the FEMA/Peer Evaluation phase had been delayed.

In terms of operational readiness, we reported task force shortcomings regarding achievement of the requirements for rostered canines. FEMA's Response Division comments indicated that a comprehensive canine evaluation and testing process has resulted in significant advancement in the number of handlers and canines achieving certification. However, those comments did not specify what advancements have been made.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Director, FEMA:

- (1) Coordinate with each task force and their sponsoring organizations to ensure that they have sufficient full-time staff to administer day-to-day activities and to achieve and maintain System objectives and standards;
- (2) Obtain for each task force a detailed comprehensive analysis of grant funding needed to complete and maintain present and future grant goals and System standards; and
- (3) Develop and implement a plan for effective oversight of the US&R System, including on-site operational reviews.

⁴ All task force members – 12 functional work groups and 4 task force leaders' representatives.

Management Comments and OIG Analysis

Management Comments: On June 20, 2006, FEMA's Response Division Director responded to our May 25, 2006 draft report and indicated that the Division provided comments to our September 2005 discussion draft report on January 25, 2006 and that it had no further comments on the May 2006 draft report or recommendations.

Appendix C provides a complete text of the Division Director's June 2006 response to the draft report and the Deputy Division Director's January 2006 response to our earlier discussion draft report.

OIG Comments and Analysis: The recommendations above were intended to highlight the actions needed to successfully achieve US&R System standards, goals, and objectives. FEMA's Response Division comments recognize our general conclusion that the fundamental obstacles to achieving US&R System requirements are funding and staffing constraints. Because these obstacles were beyond the Response Division's ability to remedy, we directed the recommendations in our final draft report to the FEMA Director. The FEMA Director did not directly respond to the findings and recommendations in this report and the Response Division's comments merely upheld its earlier comments. More importantly, because the Response Division's comments neither indicated FEMA's concurrence or non-concurrence with the recommendations nor provided any specific information regarding actions planned or taken to effectively implement our recommendations, we consider the three recommendations unresolved.

Appendix A

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

The objective of our audit was to determine to what extent DHS had achieved the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System's preparedness goals after increased levels of funding were made available for the System in a post-September 11, 2001, environment.

We reviewed financial and program records and interviewed personnel at FEMA Headquarters and at selected task force sites. The seven task forces identified in Appendix B were judgmentally selected for site audits based on multiple factors, including geographical dispersion, amount of drawdowns, the number of issues reported in the after action report from the 9-11 attacks, and program referrals. The sample was intended to provide reasonable assurance that the results would be representative of the System as a whole. At the task forces, we interviewed task force management and other team members, reviewed record keeping systems and management reports, and performed judgmental samples of cache inventory, training, and management records to determine whether goals were accomplished. Throughout the audit, the OIG worked closely with US&R program managers.

Audit work was conducted between May 2004 and September 2004 and was performed under the authority of the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, and according to *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. Major OIG contributors to the audit are identified in Appendix E.

Appendix B
National Urban Search and Rescue Response System task forces

State	Sites Audited	Task Force Sponsoring Agency
Arizona		Phoenix Fire Department
California		L.A. City Fire Department
California		L.A. County Fire Department
California		Menlo Park Fire Protection District
California		Oakland Fire Services Agency
California		Orange County Fire Authority
California		City of Riverside Fire Department
California		Sacramento Fire Department
California	*	San Diego Fire Department
Colorado		Denver Fire Department
Florida		Metro-Dade Fire / Rescue
Florida	*	City of Miami Fire and Rescue Department
Indiana		Marion County Department of Public Safety
Maryland		Montgomery County Fire / Rescue
Massachusetts		City of Beverly Emergency Management Agency
Missouri		Boone County Fire District
Nebraska	*	City of Lincoln Fire Department
Nevada	*	Clark County Fire Department
New Mexico	*	State of New Mexico Department of Public Safety
New York		NYC Office of Emergency Management
Ohio		Miami Valley Emergency Management Authority
Pennsylvania		City of Harrisburg Fire Department
Tennessee		City of Memphis Fire Department
Texas		Texas A&M University
Utah		Salt Lake City / County Fire Department
Virginia	*	Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department
Virginia		Virginia Beach Fire Department
Washington	*	Pierce County Emergency Management Department

Appendix C Management's Response to the Draft Report

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
500 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20472



FEMA

JUN 20 2006

MEMORANDUM FOR: Richard L. Skinner
Inspector General
Office of the Inspector General

FROM: Glenn M. Cannon *GMC*
Director
Response Division

SUBJECT: Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) Response System Audit

The Response Division appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the OIG May 2006 draft report, *Audit of the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System*. In a memorandum dated January 25, 2006, to Mr. J. Richard Berman, Assistant Inspector General for Audits, the Response Division provided comments on several issues of concern raised in the OIG September 2005 draft report. The Response Division has no further comments on the May 2006 draft report or the recommendations provided therein. Additionally, there are no issues identified in the report that we believe should be excluded from release.

I hope this information proves helpful to you. Please contact me at (202) 646-3692 with any additional follow-up requirements or questions.

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Appendix C Management's Response to the Draft Report

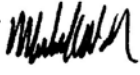
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
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FEMA

JAN 25 2006

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. Richard Berman
Assistant Inspector General for Audits
Office of the Inspector General

FROM: Michael W. Lowder 
Deputy Director
Response Division

SUBJECT: Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) Response System Audit

The Response Division received and reviewed the September 2005 Office of the Inspector General's draft report, *Audit of the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System*. I appreciate the opportunity to review and respond to your report. Below are my comments on several issues of concern raised by your report:

Standardized Management Structure: The US&R Program Office has been working in collaboration with the 28 national US&R Task Forces on bolstering their Task Force administrative staff. In the last several years, we have identified a standardized Task Force management structure consisting of eight managers (i.e. program manager, grants manager, cache manager, excess property manager, reimbursements manager, non-department member manager, medical manager and training manager). All 28 Task Forces now have this management structure in place and they work closely with the US&R Program Office. The Program Office has coordinated with the Task Force program managers and grants managers in identifying and scheduling third-party grants management training for these personnel. We have received excellent feedback from Task Force attendees at these classes.

Comprehensive Operational Readiness Evaluation Process: The US&R Program Office has worked in coordination with the US&R Operations Group (composed of the chairs of the twelve functional work groups and four Task Force leaders' representatives – all Task Force members) on developing a comprehensive operational readiness evaluation process. This process is comprised of an assessment of operations, logistics and program management readiness. The first phase consists of a self-evaluation of the 16 elements in these three sections. All Task Forces are required to report this information to the Program Office in June of each year. The second phase involves an on-site visit by an evaluation cadre comprised of several Program Office staff and three Task Force peer evaluators from other Task Forces. I believe the implementation of this evaluation program is already having positive effects on the program.

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Comprehensive Canine Evaluation and Testing Process: The US&R Program Office has worked with the US&R Operations Group and the Canine Subcommittee on developing and implementing a comprehensive canine evaluation and testing process for search handlers and canines for certification. Evaluation and testing events are scheduled and conducted on a monthly basis by different Task Forces throughout the calendar year. Since its inception, we are now experiencing significant advancement in the number of handlers and canines achieving certification.

I understand and appreciate the findings and challenges facing the US&R Program cited in your report. I concur that the fundamental obstacles to fully addressing these requirements is affected by lack of Program Office staff and inconsistent annual program budgets. The Response Division is aware of these needs and is striving to address them.

I hope this information proves useful to you. Please contact me at 202-646-3233 with any additional follow-up requirements or questions.

cc: Michael Komack, AR-FA-MP

Appendix D
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Appendix E

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