

Department of Homeland Security **Office of Inspector General**

FEMA Deployed the Appropriate Number of Community Relations Employees in Response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee





OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
Department of Homeland Security

Washington, DC 20528 / www.oig.dhs.gov

May 31, 2013

MEMORANDUM FOR: Stephanie Tennyson
Director (Acting)
Office of External Affairs
Federal Emergency Management Agency

Robert J. Fenton
Assistant Administrator
Response Directorate
Federal Emergency Management Agency

FROM: John V. Kelly 
Assistant Inspector General
Office of Emergency Management Oversight

SUBJECT: *FEMA Deployed the Appropriate Number of Community Relations Employees in Response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee*

Attached for your information is our final letter report, *FEMA Deployed the Appropriate Number of Community Relations Employees in Response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee*. We incorporated the formal comments from the Office of Policy, Program Analysis and International Affairs in the final report.

The report contains no recommendations.

Consistent with our responsibility under the *Inspector General Act*, we are providing copies of our report to appropriate congressional committees with oversight and appropriation responsibility over the Department of Homeland Security. We will post the report on our website for public dissemination.

Major contributors to this report are Kaye McTighe, Director; Adrian Dupree, Audit Manager; Scott Wrightson, Audit Manager; John Woo, Auditor-in-Charge; Ayana Henry, Program Analyst; Aaron Naas, Program Analyst; and Joshua Wilshere, Auditor.



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Please call me with any questions, or your staff may contact Kaye McTighe, Director, Office of Emergency Management Oversight, at (202) 254-4100.

Attachment



Background

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) deploys staff and resources to assist in disaster response and recovery efforts. This includes establishing temporary Federal multiagency coordination centers, known as Joint Field Offices (JFOs), to facilitate field-level activities near the incident site. The FEMA Administrator appoints a Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) to manage the JFO's operations. JFO staffs do not manage on-scene operations; they support on-scene efforts and carry out disaster response and recovery programs. At each JFO, the FCO strives to minimize costs by closely managing FEMA Disaster Assistance Employee (DAE) staffing levels.

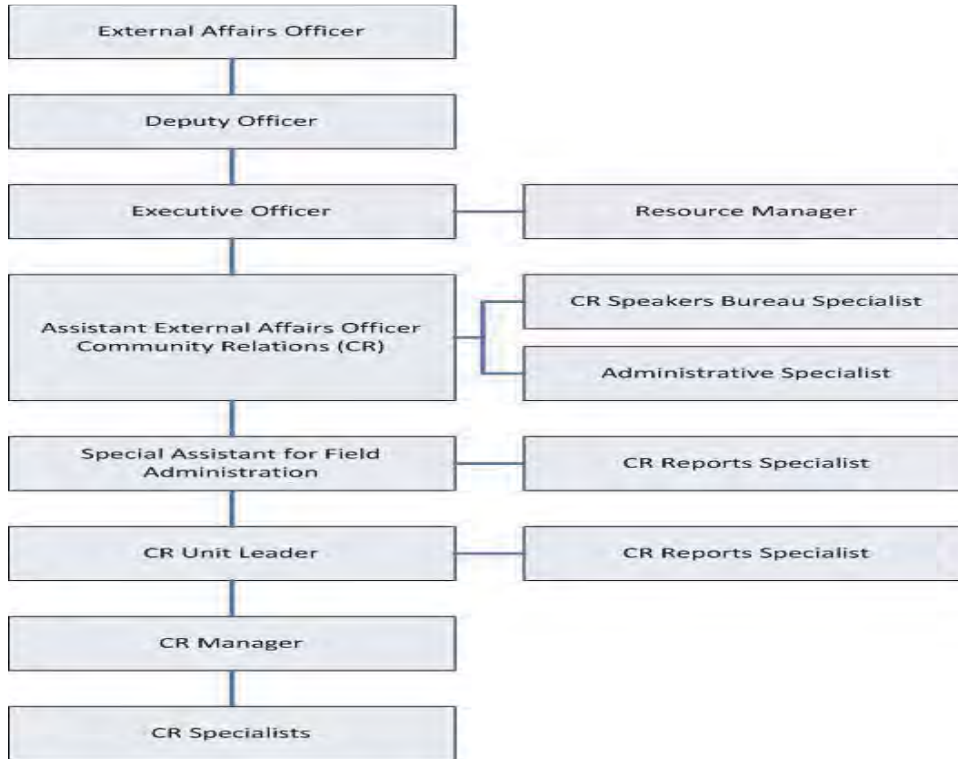
In late August 2011, Hurricane Irene made landfall in Puerto Rico and again over eastern North Carolina's Outer Banks. While traveling up the Atlantic coastline into Vermont, Hurricane Irene caused at least 34 fatalities and disrupted power to more than a million people. In the first 2 weeks of September 2011, Tropical Storm Lee, a slow-moving storm, struck many of the same areas affected by Hurricane Irene and caused severe local flooding, including floods of historic proportions. The two events resulted in 21 major disaster declarations spanning 14 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. In response, FEMA opened 12 JFOs and deployed more than 5,060 DAEs.

The *Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act*, P.L. 93-288, as amended, authorizes FEMA to appoint DAEs as temporary Federal employees for up to 2 years. DAEs perform activities directly related to specific disasters or emergencies. FEMA deploys most DAEs to JFOs, where they provide administrative, financial, logistical, and program area support.

DAEs who perform community relations work serve as a personal resource and communications link with disaster survivors. As the first and sometimes only Federal responders that disaster survivors may see, DAEs provide the human link to bring disaster survivors into the assistance network established to help them in their recovery. Community relations personnel assess critical disaster survivor needs; ensure that disaster survivors have an understanding of and access to assistance programs; and help manage expectations of the local community and disaster survivors. The community relations workload is substantial and is often in communities with limited English proficiency or areas with large populations of the unemployed, low income, and elderly. FEMA policy requires that, as appropriate, community relations personnel start executing their mission either in advance of an event or within 12 hours of an Individual Assistance declaration. Figure 1 depicts the community relations organization at a JFO.



Figure 1. A JFO's Community Relations Organization



Source: FEMA.

Results of Audit

The number of DAEs deployed to perform community relations work in response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee was appropriate. FEMA generally managed the deployments in a manner consistent with achieving efficient JFO operations. We are not making any recommendations.

DAE Deployments for Community Relations Work Were Appropriate

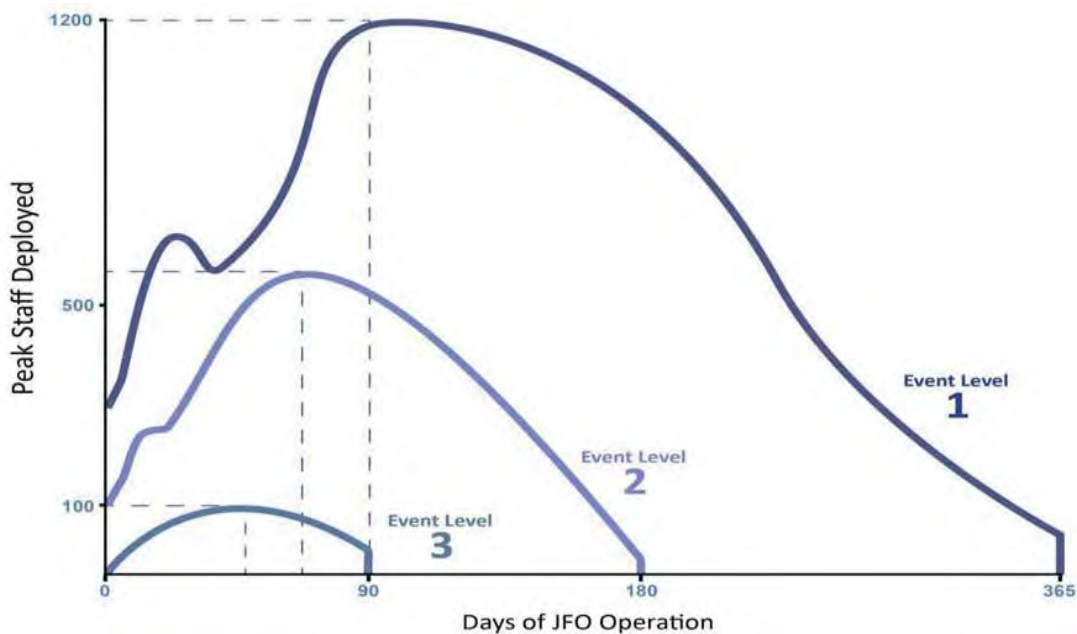
FEMA deployed a reasonable number of DAEs to perform community relations work, given the disasters' magnitude and number of people affected. Specifically, FEMA deployed more than 800 DAEs to perform community relations work in response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee. This amount is well within FEMA's JFO staffing level targets and compares favorably with the total number of DAEs deployed in response to the disasters.



JFO Staffing Level Targets

The FCO and his or her staff are responsible for identifying and resolving any staffing overages. Excluding catastrophic or extremely large disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, FEMA defines different targets for three distinct event levels. The appropriate event level can be determined within days of a disaster declaration. It is based on the disaster’s projected total cost; levels of damage; amount of direct Federal assistance needed; level of coordination required among Federal, State, and local resources; and extent to which Emergency Support Functions agencies have been activated. For example, FEMA estimates that up to 1,200 staff would be deployed to a JFO in the aftermath of an Event Level 1 disaster such as Hurricane Ike. Figure 2 depicts JFO staffing level targets over time for the three different event levels.

Figure 2. JFO Staffing Levels by Event Level



Source: FEMA.

For most disasters, within 2 weeks of the event, the JFO will be starting up or already operational and more detailed staffing level targets can be developed. This is done by aggregating the staffing patterns from individual program areas and support functions. The aggregate profile is then compared with the profile of similar past disasters. Additional adjustments are made as more information becomes available. The following key factors influence staffing levels:



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1. Scale of assistance. A disaster's size and depth of impact will influence the number of applicants who need assistance and the nature of assistance required. For example, a multistate disaster such as Hurricane Irene will affect substantially more people than a tornado that destroys a few buildings in one small town. These factors will affect the number of staff needed.
2. Level of State participation in program delivery. Each FEMA region is different, and so are the States that comprise each region. States tend to have differing levels of resources available, approaches to delivering assistance, and staffing response efforts.
3. Number of assistance programs activated. The number of FEMA assistance programs activated determines program and support staff levels. Public Assistance staff levels are determined by the number of applicants and the number of anticipated Project Worksheets. Individual Assistance staff levels are determined by the number of applicants and whether there is a direct housing mission. Mitigation staff levels are determined by the amount of public outreach required and whether an affected community participates in the National Flood Insurance Program.
4. Transition points. During a JFO's operation, transition points denote when program areas can reduce staff. Staff associated with emergency work such as debris removal and emergency protective measures (EPM) are usually demobilized at the end of the incident period or response phase; all emergency work must be completed within 6 months of the declared disaster.¹²³ When the individual application period ends, reductions in Individual Assistance staff can begin unless there is a direct housing mission. Mitigation staff can be reduced when all eligible Hazard Mitigation Grant Program applicants have submitted their proposals. Reductions in Public Assistance staff should begin when all of the small and 90 percent of the large Project Worksheets have been written.⁴ Figure 3 depicts typical transition points from the initial staffing levels to points when the program areas can reduce staff.

¹ EPM eliminates or lessens immediate threats to life, public health or safety, or significant additional damage to improved public or private property.

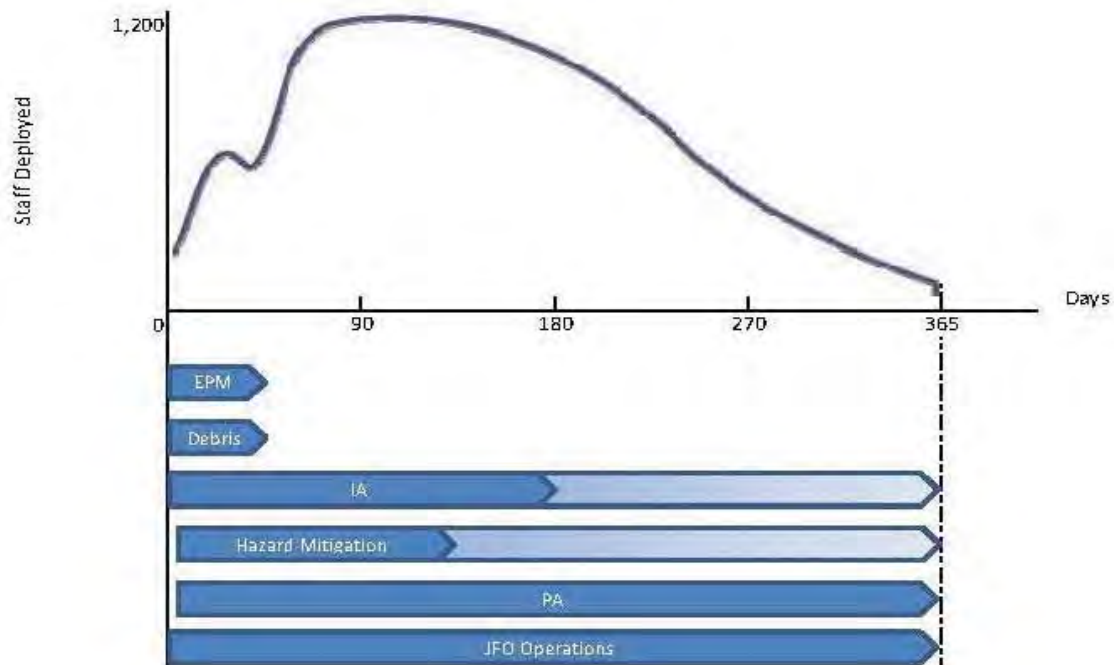
² Response begins when an emergency incident is imminent, or immediately after an event occurs and encompasses the activities that address the short-term, direct effects of an incident.

³ The time interval during which the disaster-causing incident occurs.

⁴ FEMA or the applicant documents the scope of work and estimated cost for a project on a Project Worksheet (FEMA Form 90-91); in 2011, small projects have estimated costs of less than \$63,900 and large projects have estimated costs of that amount or more.



Figure 3. JFO Timeline and Transition Indicators – Event Level 1



Source: FEMA.

Conclusion

FEMA deployed the appropriate number of DAEs to perform community relations work in response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee. We did not find sufficient evidence to substantiate the allegation that FEMA Headquarters deployed community relations personnel to a Joint Field Office that did not need them.

Recommendations

We are not making any recommendations.

Management Comments and OIG Analysis

FEMA concurs with the report and its conclusion.



Appendix A

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

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.

We initiated this performance audit from a complaint alleging that FEMA Headquarters deployed community relations personnel, many with insufficient training, to a JFO that did not need them. Our objective was to determine the extent to which FEMA deployed the appropriate number of DAEs to perform community relations work in response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee. To achieve this objective, we obtained FEMA DAE deployment data for August 2011 through February 2012 and analyzed the data to determine whether the number of deployments was consistent with FEMA staffing level guidance for achieving efficient JFO operations.

To validate the reliability of data, when necessary and practicable, we compared the data with source documents and other records independent of FEMA's Automated Deployment Database system, such as DAE travel authorizations and vouchers, JFO timekeeping records, and FEMA financial records. We believe, within the scope of this audit, that we can reasonably rely on the data.

To gain an understanding of the basis for the complaint and circumstances surrounding the deployment of DAEs to perform community relations work, we interviewed officials from FEMA's Office of Federal Disaster Coordination; Office of External Affairs; Incident Workforce Management Office, FEMA Region II; and New Jersey and New York JFOs. To the extent practicable, we corroborated FEMA officials' assertions with copies of email traffic. We also reviewed the results of prior audits and FEMA after-action reports.

To gain an understanding of the policies and procedures governing DAE deployments in response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee, we interviewed FEMA officials and reviewed the following documents: FEMA Operations Order #16-2011; FEMA Operations Order #18-2011; FEMA Instruction 8600.1, Disaster Assistance Employee Program; JFO Activation and Operations Interagency Integrated Standard Operating Procedure; JFO Activation and Operations Interagency Integrated Standard Operating Procedure Appendixes and Annexes; Emergency Support Function #15 Standard Operating Procedures; FEMA External Affairs, Cadre Management – Standard Operating Procedure; FEMA Region III Activation / Deployment Standard Operating Procedure;



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FEMA Deployment of FEMA Personnel memorandum; FEMA 1-99 Director's Policy – Disaster Cadre Guidance and Direction memorandum; FEMA Temporary Suspension of Disaster Reservists' Deployment Limits memorandum; FEMA Implementation of the National Incident Management System and Incident Command System during Response and Recovery Operations memorandum; and FEMA's *Achieving Efficient JFO Operations Guide*.⁵

We conducted this performance audit between March and November 2012 pursuant to the *Inspector General Act of 1978*, as amended, and according to generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our conclusions based upon our objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our conclusions based upon our objectives.

⁵ The FEMA Administrator issued the guide in November 2010. It establishes a standard, operational, JFO-based definition of administrative costs; identifies the primary components that escalate JFO administrative costs; defines the distinctions and provides a methodology for determining event levels; provides a method for using event levels and key factors to determine a JFO-specific target administrative cost percentage and staffing profile; provides strategic management decisions and specific tactical actions to control costs and develop an overall JFO cost management approach; provides parameters and methods for monitoring, measuring, and evaluating administrative performance; and increases transparency, responsibility, and accountability with respect to cost.



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Appendix B
Management Comments to the Draft Letter Report


U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20472



FEMA

APR 08 2013

MEMORANDUM FOR: D. Michael Beard
Assistant Inspector General
Office of Emergency Management Oversight

FROM: David J. Kaufman 
Associate Administrator for
Policy, Program Analysis and International Affairs

SUBJECT: FEMA's Response to OIG Draft Report: "FEMA Deployed the
Appropriate Number of Community Relations Employees in
Response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee" - For
Official Use Only - OIG Project No. 12-116-EMO-OIG.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) appreciates the opportunity to review and respond to the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) DRAFT REPORT: "FEMA Deployed the Appropriate Number of Community Relations Employees in Response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee" - For Official Use Only - OIG Project No. 12-116-EMO-OIG.

Your objective was to determine the extent to which FEMA deployed the appropriate number of Disaster Assistance Employees to perform community relations work in response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee.

FEMA policy requires that, as appropriate, community relations personnel start executing their mission either in advance of an event or within 12 hours of an Individual Assistance declaration. We deployed more than 800 reservists to perform community relations work in response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee, given these disasters' magnitude and number of people affected. This amount is well within FEMA's staffing level targets and compares favorably with the total number of reservists deployed in response to the disasters.

OIG determined that FEMA deployed the appropriate number of employees, given the disasters' magnitude and extraordinary circumstances. This report has no recommendations. FEMA concurs with OIG's Draft Report and its conclusion.

Again, we thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to OIG's draft report. Should you have any further questions regarding our response, please do not hesitate to call Gary McKeon, FEMA Chief Audit Liaison, at 202-646-1308.

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Appendix C

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Should you be unable to access our website, you may submit your complaint in writing to: DHS Office of Inspector General, Attention: Office of Investigations Hotline, 245 Murray Drive, SW, Building 410/Mail Stop 2600, Washington, DC, 20528; or you may call 1 (800) 323-8603; or fax it directly to us at (202) 254-4297.

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