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**Statement for the Record**

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**Before the**

**Committee on Homeland Security**

**Joint Subcommittees on Management, Investigations, and Oversight;  
and Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response**

**United States House of Representatives**

**Strengthening FEMA's Regions**

**June 4, 2007**

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## INTRODUCTION

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

My name is Major Phil May and I am privileged to serve as the Region IV Administrator for the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In this role, I oversee FEMA's all hazards efforts in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

As the primary FEMA representative and coordinator to a disaster prone region, I oversee the development, implementation and execution of all FEMA Region IV programs and initiatives, and have planning and operational oversight of special projects related to building a strong, capable, and responsive Region. My goal is to help Administrator Paulison build a new FEMA that will be the Nation's preeminent emergency management and preparedness organization by ensuring FEMA Region IV has a robust infrastructure and all the appropriate resources, in terms of people, operational systems, planning and assessment tools, training, exercises, and equipment. In addition, I work to foster the necessary relationships before disasters strike across the full spectrum of emergency management on all levels of government, the private sector, non-profit, and non-governmental entities.

In keeping with the guiding principle of the new FEMA, we are leaning further forward to deliver more effective disaster assistance to individuals and communities impacted by a disaster. We call it "engaged partnership." That is the FEMA you saw in the tornadoes that struck Florida in January and Georgia and Alabama in March tornadoes, as well as the Nor'easter that flooded areas of the New England States and last month in Kansas where the community of Greensburg was devastated by a tornado.

In those disasters you witnessed a FEMA that became an engaged partner with the State within minutes of the disaster, rapidly deploying operational and technical experts to the disaster site. You also witnessed a proactive FEMA that led the charge by ensuring an effective Unified Command with other Federal agencies, and State and local officials, working together to help a devastated community.

These actions were taken by a well-led, motivated, and professional FEMA workforce that has embraced and enhanced the vision and reality of a new FEMA.

As many of you are aware, on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Climate Prediction Center released its 2007 Atlantic Hurricane Season Outlook. NOAA scientists projected a 75 percent chance that the Atlantic hurricane season will be above normal. This prediction includes 13 to 17 named storms with 7 to 10 becoming hurricanes, of which 3 to 5 could become major hurricanes of Category 3 strength or higher. NOAA's prediction is in line with the Colorado State University prediction, which predicted 17 named storms, including 9 hurricanes, of which 5 are expected to be major hurricanes.

Accordingly, FEMA is leaning forward as we prepare for an active 2007 hurricane season. Engaging our tribal, local, State and Federal partners in more thorough and informed hurricane planning; building FEMA's operational capabilities for a more effective response and recovery; and amplifying our stance on hurricane readiness will put FEMA in good standing to meet whatever challenges unfold.

## **BACKGROUND**

FEMA has learned much from the 2005 hurricane season and the damage that was inflicted on the communities and families of the Gulf Coast. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have served as a catalyst for major changes in federal policy, approaches, and the relationship between DHS-FEMA, the private sector and at all levels of government.

The Department appreciates the tools given to us in the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA). PKEMRA codifies and expands FEMA's regional office structure and strengthens our all-hazards operational framework and coordination capabilities. The ten Regional Administrators provided for in the Act report directly to the FEMA Administrator. The statute also provides for the creation of Regional Advisory Councils and new regional incident management assistance teams.

The Regional Advisory Councils will provide valuable advice and recommendations to each Regional Administrator on regional emergency management issues and identify weaknesses or deficiencies in preparedness, protection, operations, assistance, and mitigation for State, local and tribal governments based on their specialized knowledge of the region. We hope to make selections for the Regional Advisory Councils later this year. Additionally, the Act calls for the establishment of regional emergency communications working groups, which would report to Regional Administrators and advise them of emergency communications concerns and issues. This new structure will help to facilitate and further enhance our national and regional based evacuation and catastrophic planning efforts.

## **STRONG REGIONAL LEADERSHIP**

As Administrator Paulison previously testified before your Committee, FEMA has staffed each Region with an Administrator who possesses an extensive background in emergency management. Collectively, all ten Regional Administrators possess over 300 years of experience in preparing for and responding to disasters. Three of the ten Administrators, including me, are career senior executives. Having career staff in three of the Regions will ensure continuity of best-practices from administration to administration. I am pleased to report that all 10 Regional Administrators are on board and prepared to meet the needs of their respective regions.

## **ENHANCED REGIONAL COORDINATION**

### *Regional Advisory Council*

FEMA has worked diligently to fine tune the appropriate framework to establish the Regional Advisory Councils. The charter for the councils is presently under final review by the FEMA Administrator. These councils will advise the Regional Administrators on all aspects of emergency management and will comprise representatives from State, territorial, local and tribal governments. The councils will also identify any geographic, demographic, or other characteristics specific to any State, territorial, local, or tribal government within the Region that might make preparedness, protection, response, or mitigation more challenging. Finally, the councils will advise the Regional Administrators on any weaknesses or deficiencies in preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation within the regional area of responsibility that should be addressed. These Regional Advisory Councils will significantly improve communication between the multiple levels of government and give Regional Administrators the critical insights to address the needs of the communities in which they serve.

### *Defense Coordinating Officers*

FEMA and the Department of Defense (DOD) have taken major strides to ensure that federal and military response is coordinated and seamless, especially at the regional level. DOD has assigned Regional Defense Coordinating Officers (DCO), supported by Defense Coordinating Elements (DCE), in each of FEMA's Regions to ensure military coordination at the Regional level. Currently, all 10 FEMA Regions are staffed by a DCO and support DCE.

### *Regional Communications*

Among the lessons learned after the 2005 hurricane season, none has been taken more seriously than the breakdown of interagency and intra-agency communications. Communication between the Federal government and our partners at the State and local levels is an integral part of emergency management. Over the past two years we have taken major steps to make sure this breakdown does not happen again.

In 2006, we completed the upgrades and renovations needed to create a state of the art National Response Coordination Center (NRCC). The NRCC is a central location where Federal agencies meet during a disaster to coordinate national response under the National Response Plan (NRP). In addition, we are completing assessments and upgrading our Regional Response Coordination Centers (RRCC), which are the regionally-based multi-agency coordination centers that perform a complementary role to the NRCC. Operating in each of the ten FEMA Regions, the RRCC provides situational awareness information, identifies and coordinates response requirements, performs capabilities analysis, and reports on the status of Federal disaster response operations.

During Katrina, we had a failure in our communications with people in the field – key element which needed for us to have situational awareness of what was happening on the ground –

coupled with substandard coordination with our partners across the Federal government. Both the NRCC and RRCC have a seat at the table for each of the 26 agencies that have roles under the NRP, as well as secure links to key offices around the country and the capability to bring State and local officials into the conversation.

One of the key lessons learned from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita was the need for a state-of-the-art national warning system. In 2006, FEMA's Office of National Security Coordination (now the Office of National Continuity Programs) focused on the multi-year task of building an Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS). Last year, we successfully completed the Digital Emergency Alert System pilot and worked with the Association of Public Television Stations deploying the system to all PBS affiliates around the country. In addition, FEMA helped in establishing two new Emergency Alert System Primary Entry Point radio stations – one located here in Mississippi and the other in Alabama – and 15 hurricane region stations were provided with satellite links to improve their communications during disasters. When this project is completed over the next five years, it will greatly enhance our nation's emergency communications capabilities.

Administrator Paulison has made communications and outreach to tribal, State and local officials a high priority for the Regional Administrators. Our expanded role in the regions will help us to build strong ties on the ground before disasters strike, so that we are not exchanging business cards in the emergency operations center.

DHS has provided true leadership for FEMA to lay the groundwork to build a more robust national communication capability. In January 2007, DHS issued the Tactical Interoperable Communication Scorecards. These scorecards assessed the maturity of tactical interoperable communications capabilities in 75 urban/metropolitan areas. They were developed by subject matter expert panels that reviewed documentation on current communications plans, exercises, and a self-assessment to arrive at consensus findings and recommendations for each region on how to best improve that region's communications capabilities.

Moreover, by November 1, 2007, each State and Territory must submit a Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan to DHS. The goal of this plan is to provide a strategic vision for how each State and Territory will achieve and further invest in statewide interoperability and communications.

In addition, DHS, in conjunction with the Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration in consultation with DHS will make nearly \$1 billion available to states and localities later this fiscal year through a Public Safety Interoperable Communications Grant Program, authorized by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 and amended by the Call Home Act of 2006. Through FEMA's disaster relief fund, an additional \$1.3 million has been made available for Mississippi for emergency communications equipment in Pike, Pearl River, Stone, Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson Counties. The money will be spent to install interoperability equipment, including repeaters on six South Mississippi communications towers.

Finally, each Regional Administrator has been provided a workgroup comprising representatives from all levels of government, whose primary objective is to advise the regional leadership on matters pertaining to emergency communications. The Regional Emergency Communications Working Group, referred to as an RECC Working Group reports to the Regional Administrator and advises him or her on all aspects of emergency communications. The Regional Managers, in turn, will share this advice on emergency communications with State and Local emergency managers within the Region.

## **HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS**

I know that Administrator Paulison has briefed you on FEMA's readiness for the Hurricane season from the National perspective; however, please allow me to expand upon a few of its components and talk briefly about what we are doing here in Region IV to prepare.

### *Enhanced Response Teams*

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 Incident Management Assistance Teams, or "IMATs." IMATs are 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 leadership in the identification and provision of Federal assistance, and coordinate and integrate inter-jurisdictional response in support of the affected State(s) or U.S. 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.

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 teams will subsume the existing mission and capabilities of the Federal Incident Response Support Teams (or "FIRSTs") and Emergency Response Teams (or "ERTs"). The mission and capabilities will incorporate similar leadership, emergency management doctrine, and operational communications concepts. The national-level and regional-level teams will eventually be staffed with a core of 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.

## Gap Analysis

FEMA is employing a Gap Analysis Tool, which is serving as the basis for better understanding vulnerabilities in a more consistent manner. The Gap Analysis Tool was developed in coordination with the State of New York Emergency Management Office and the New York City Office of Emergency Management, and has been implemented to provide FEMA and its State and local partners in the hurricane prone regions of the country with a snapshot of asset gaps at the local, State, and National levels.

This initiative is a joint effort between State Emergency Management representatives and FEMA Regional representatives. The analysis consists of a series of structured discussions with local jurisdictions to better understand potential disaster response asset gaps in the critical areas of debris removal, evacuation, sheltering, interim housing, healthcare facilities, commodity distribution, communications, and fuel. The discussions provide an opportunity for local jurisdictions to ask specific questions of Federal and State officials and identify issues of critical concern to help long-term preparedness programs. We are confident that through these structured discussions, we will all be better prepared.

Specific gaps are determined by identifying a series of requirements in each critical area within each location and then subtracting the corresponding capabilities for meeting those requirements for each location. Although our initial use of this concept is being applied for the upcoming hurricane season, this process is applicable to all hazards and the goal is to build upon lessons learned and apply the tool to all locations for all hazards on an ongoing basis.

The new FEMA has made a conscious effort to focus broadly on all 18 hurricane-prone States, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and Territories to prepare for the 2007 Hurricane Season. Today, FEMA is working closely with each of the 18 state emergency management communities in hurricane prone states using a consistent set of measures and tools to evaluate strengths and vulnerabilities. We have people on the ground at this moment conducting these analyses with state emergency managers.

Modeling is also an essential element of FEMA's planning efforts for different circumstances and data sets. FEMA is coordinating with the DHS Science and Technology (S&T) Directorate to adapt modeling tools for the specific circumstances of large metropolitan areas. As the use of the Hurricane Gap Analysis Tool matures, FEMA plans to incorporate additional modeling capabilities to validate the data received and forecast needs based on different variables.

## Evacuation Planning Initiative and Coordination

FEMA is helping Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama develop a Gulf Coast Evacuation Plan that extends to adjacent States which host Gulf Coast evacuees. The purpose is to synchronize separate State evacuation plans to create a more jointly organized effort. Teams are engaging with each State, identifying requirements and capabilities, and then will develop a plan that integrates shelter planning with transportation planning. The result will be a timelier, better organized and coordinated evacuation by those with their own transportation and those who need assistance to evacuate by bus or air.

### *Catastrophic Disaster Planning Initiatives*

Using the Catastrophic Planning funding appropriated in FY06, Region IV, along with our sister Regions of V, VI, and VII, is developing scenario-driven workshops with each of the eight New Madrid Seismic Zone (NMSZ) States. The Workshop Execution Plan uses a bottom-up approach, where the states will take the lead and FEMA will provide guidance. The states clearly have taken ownership and are committed to working with each other, the FEMA regional offices, other Federal agencies, the private sector, and other stakeholders to create, as one state director noted, “the most comprehensive catastrophic response and recovery plan in our nation’s history.”

Over the next 12 months each state will conduct its own state-wide catastrophic planning workshop, tailored for its individual catastrophic planning goals and objectives, using a template provided by Innovative Emergency Management (IEM), our contracting firm. The Mississippi Emergency Management Planning Staff and the full-time FEMA-funded contractor are collaborating on developing a Workshop Execution Plan which will culminate in a Federal, State and local exercise during the second quarter of FY 2008.

We are also working with 13 southeastern Louisiana parishes (including the City of New Orleans), which were selected as the initial geographic focus area for FEMA’s “Catastrophic Planning” initiative, because of their vulnerability to hurricane disasters. Substantial planning activity for the 2007 Hurricane Season continues with the State of Louisiana and its parishes

In addition, FEMA is using scenario-driven workshops to enhance the State of Florida’s capability to respond to a Category 5 Hurricane making landfall in southern Florida. This is a two-phase project. Phase one focuses on developing regional response and recovery annexes, including evacuation planning, for the counties and communities surrounding Lake Okeechobee (in the event of a Herbert Hoover Dike failure) and will soon be completed. Phase two will address the effects of a Category 5 hurricane striking south Florida. The end product for phase two will be to standardize comprehensive catastrophic Category 5 hurricane disaster functional response and recovery plans for the State of Florida and responding Federal agencies. Phase two will be completed by September 30, 2008. These plans will also be used as planning templates for other large urban areas.

### *Regional Exercises and Training*

To further strengthen our partnerships, FEMA is actively engaged with State governments in joint exercises to prepare for the 2007 Hurricane Season. During the first week in May, FEMA tested the national incident management system (NIMS) and its response operations during an exercise called Ardent Sentry - Northern Edge, which depicted a Category 3 hurricane that struck Newport, R.I.

## **CONCLUSION**

I believe we have made real progress in strengthening FEMA's Regions as we embark on a new journey and 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 skills, a greater investment in our people, and new tools to ensure more effective emergency management at the national and regional level. Ultimately, the new FEMA we are creating will keep the American people safer than they were before and make our services more accessible by having more Regional staff and resources available in the field.

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