



FEMA

April 17, 2012

MEMORANDUM FOR: All FEMA Employees

FROM: Richard Serino
Deputy Administrator

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Serino", with a horizontal line underneath.

SUBJECT: Change and Opportunity in Our Disaster Workforce

Craig and I have had the opportunity to speak with many of you over the past two years, either while visiting our regional and Joint Field Offices (JFOs), or while at Headquarters. Many of you have consistently expressed similar concerns about how we, as an agency, can improve the way we recruit, train, deploy, and retain an effective disaster workforce. To date, the program has survived on the strong sense of mission among many of our Disaster Assistance Employees (DAE), which is apparent whenever you visit a JFO. Craig and I recognize that our DAEs have overcome challenges in the current disaster workforce framework, including how we manage, train, and take care of the people who take care of our Nation's disaster survivors. In a variety of forums over the past several years, you've shared with us your concerns and ideas about what it will take to make the future disaster workforce even more effective. We have listened to these concerns, and now, it is time to begin making those changes together.

Today, April 17, 2012, I will conduct an employee town hall meeting from Frankfort, Kentucky, broadcast nationwide to all of our Regional Offices, JFOs, and headquarters by webcast—advancing the transformation of our disaster workforce and establishing the FEMA Reservist Program. Beginning no later than **June 1, 2012**, and proceeding cadre-by-cadre, we will begin offering DAEs the opportunity to seek new appointments in the Reservist Program by applying for specific incident management positions within the FEMA Qualification System (FQS). We are committed to a simple, expeditious, and fair application and selection process, the details of which we will announce no later than May 15, 2012. As we select and appoint existing DAEs to become Reservists and fill specific incident management positions in the new program, we will assign these employees to nationally managed cadres, which will replace all Regionally based cadres by the end of this year.

We recognize that, unlike the military model, FEMA's Reservists are the primary resource for disaster response and recovery positions, filling up to 80 percent of all Joint Field Office (JFO) positions. Accordingly, we must treat FEMA Reservists as primary resources. In particular, by **July 1, 2012**, FEMA will:

- Consider and manage all Reservists as “national assets.” This means we will: (a) centrally manage Reservist cadres at the national level; (b) assign each Reservist a primary, and up to three secondary, FQS positions; (c) pay Reservists based on their primary position in FQS (however, we will exempt or “grandfather” pay for DAEs who transition to the Reservist program before the end of 2012); and (d) deploy Reservists in their FQS positions wherever and whenever necessary and appropriate for Stafford Act mission accomplishment. Going forward, the Region in which a

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Reservist resides will not be a factor in hiring and will be only one of several factors in managing deployments.

- Establish a goal and policy to deploy all Reservists a minimum of once a year with the length of the deployment depending on operational needs. A deployment will be, on average, approximately 30 days in length, but may be longer. This will ensure *all* Reservists have the current incident response experience and demonstrated performance required by FQS. We are currently completing a wage analysis to assist us in aligning pay and pay grade distribution with the knowledge, skills and abilities, and the incident management responsibilities of each FQS positions.
- Begin providing Reservists required FQS training, utilizing a portion of annual deployment days and allowing Reservists to complete some mandatory training, at a flat compensation rate, from home.
- Upon their first deployment, issue Reservists and authorize them to retain mission appropriate mobile communication and computing equipment. This will ensure they are mission capable immediately upon checking into a disaster and have continuous access to the FEMA network and FEMA email, if they choose, regardless of deployment status. Accepting this equipment does *not* oblige a Reservist to do FEMA work when not deployed; but it will save time and money while enabling increased connectivity.
- Create a Reservist Ombudsman program with new positions at Headquarters to advocate at a senior level on behalf of Reservists.
- Memorialize these changes by comprehensively revising FEMA Instruction 8600.1 (Disaster Assistance Employee Program).

We have heard your concerns and are instituting these changes to address the challenges that we all have identified in the disaster workforce structure. Although there may be some period of adjustment, it is important to recognize that these improvements are necessary to appropriately define staffing levels, identify critical skills needed to achieve our mission, and address the needs of our primary resources for disaster response and recovery. Additionally, we are aggressively identifying and pursuing options to allow Reservists to obtain federal health benefits and some level of preferred hiring status for permanent full time positions within FEMA after an appropriate period of satisfactory service. Completing these actions will likely require changes to laws and policies outside FEMA's control, but we have committed ourselves to finding a way to accomplish these essential and important goals. We ask for your patience as we work through this positive transformation.

We will make these changes together. We hope our DAEs choose to transition to the new Reservist Program and we aim to make the choices clear and the process easy. Senior leaders will continue to visit the Regions and JFOs throughout the transition, and we will continue to provide regular updates and information on the Employee Information and Resource Center at www.fema.gov/employees. We need and welcome feedback and suggestions from cadre managers and the work force on the way forward. To assist with questions regarding the disaster workforce transformation initiative, we have set up a call center that you can reach at 1-855-377-FEMA (3362) from 9 a.m. - 6 p.m. (EDT) Monday - Friday. We also encourage you to let us know what you think by submitting your thoughts, suggestions, and feedback to the FEMA Employee Communications mailbox at FEMA-Employee-Communications@fema.dhs.gov.