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Introduction

Thank you. It is a pleasure being here with you.

As leaders in your cities and communities, I know that you are focused on preparing your city for any event. As we are here in the Gulf Coast and Hurricane Season is fast approaching, we have been focusing on storms. But the planning and preparations that all of us make for this season will serve us well whatever disaster we might face.

I don't have to tell you that we have been lucky the past two hurricane seasons. While Dean and Erin among others were serious storms that did serious damage – especially here in Texas – we have not faced the major landfalls that most predicted. We can't rely on luck every year.

Yet one of the things I am most proud of, within FEMA and with many of you in this room, is that we haven't just been sitting around waiting for the next disaster, we have spent the time getting better at what we do. We have spent the time getting better at what we do...together.

I am happy to say that teamwork and commitment has been evident over the past year, and that FEMA remains dedicated to working with you as an “engaged partner.” Over the past year, we have all worked hard to stand together.

Improved Disaster Operations

So what exactly have we been doing? At FEMA the answer is: a lot.

Since I joined FEMA just over two years ago, we have focused on expanding our capabilities and strengthening our organization. Look at some of the reforms already in place.

Greater emphasis has been placed on Pre-Scripted Mission Assignments that help us to facilitate rapid response, as well as to standardize development of mission assignments prior to and during disaster operations. In 2006, FEMA started with 44 Pre-Scripted

Mission Assignments with 2 Federal agencies. Today that number is 223 with 31 agencies. As you can see, the federal government is standing together to support you.

On the ground, we are stronger with our new Incident Management Assistance Teams – or IMATs. Each IMAT is composed of 15 professionals, specially trained and designated to be the first federal responders on the ground. They will be ready support the state within 12-hours, coordinate federal activities and provide initial situational awareness. Two regional and one national IMAT will be fully operational for this hurricane season.

Our new Logistics Management Directorate is working closely to develop a supply chain that is in sync with the private sector. Just last month they hosted the first ever National Logistics Coordinator Forum that included government, non-profit organizations and private sector participants in the discussion. Already we can better track our resources and thus improve our coordination. We also have contracts and inter-agency agreements that will improve our capabilities in providing supplies and services, base camp support, evacuations and transportation.

I was amused to see a report recently that criticized the federal government because local businesses provided supplies to disaster areas in their communities faster than government did. That's exactly what should be happening...and what we are supporting. The private sector is part of the solution.

Our operations capabilities are improving every day. But it doesn't stop there. We are also all involved on the ground as you and your communities work to rebuild.

FEMA now has 60 Mobile Disaster Recovery Centers that can be deployed on-site at a disaster to help people get the support they need. FEMA continues to work with you and our federal, state, and voluntary partners to build a robust system for evacuation, sheltering and housing, including our collaboration with the American Red Cross to implement the National Shelter System. We've established a National Emergency Family Registry and Locator System and a National Emergency Child Locator Center to help those displaced find their loved ones. We have a new policy to help those with pets. And we are focused on streamlining and improving the housing and individual assistance programs.

We've made it easier for the American people to stand with their neighbors by facilitating their generosity through the Aidmatrix system – which directs donations made nationally to where they can do the most good on the ground. We also have the Citizen Corps Program with over 2300 state and local Citizen Corps Councils that bring government and community leaders together to involve all sectors of the community in all-hazards preparedness planning, mitigation, response and recovery. I encourage you all to work with these Councils so that alerts and warning systems, evacuation and shelter plans are

developed and promoted with strong community participation. We've also focused on strengthening our relationships with the faith-based community, who often play a large role in helping during a disaster with charitable donations and volunteers.

Each improvement has already made a difference. I saw them in California when the wildfires displaced thousands, and I saw them recently on the flooded plains of the Midwest. In each case, FEMA personnel were on the ground, earlier than ever, standing with those in need, and helping them to get back on their feet.

In fact, since March of 2003, FEMA has responded to 402 major disaster and emergency declarations that included floods, tornadoes, winter and tropical storms, landslides and mudslides, earthquakes, droughts, typhoons and hurricanes. In responding to these, FEMA has provided direct material and financial assistance to well over three and a half million individuals across the nation.

Before Disaster Strikes: Planning and Preparedness

Our response will only be as good as our planning and preparedness.

When I joined FEMA, we had few full-time operational planners. Today we have hired and continue to hire operational planners at the FEMA Headquarters and Regional levels to improve our ability to perform sophisticated operational analyses, analyze trends and plan for the response to ongoing and future events.

Our plans incorporate a Gap Analysis review. Last year we rolled out this tool to identify what was needed where. We use a consistent set of measures and tools to evaluate strengths and vulnerabilities in seven critical areas: debris removal, commodity distribution, evacuation, sheltering, interim housing, medical needs and fuel capacity along evacuation routes. There is no doubt that the 2007 Gap Analysis efforts prepared us to better support the States during Hurricane Dean and Tropical Storm Erin.

In another example of planning making a difference for us all, FEMA's Risk Analysis Division is using the Flood Map Modernization to focus on filling flood hazard data needs and expanding and improving utility and accessibility of the flood hazard and risk data.

All of these efforts are being done in conjunction with the National Response Framework. Training is critical to the implementation of the NRF in the NIMS environment. While the NRF provides the Framework for response, it clearly must be understood and rehearsed through exercises by Federal components; Tribal, State, and local governments; and private sector as well as nongovernmental organizations. All

stakeholders need to know how the Nation's response structure works and their roles and responsibilities.

These reforms and plans would not be possible without the full support of President Bush and Secretary Chertoff, who have been committed to strengthening FEMA. This year, they proposed a \$9.7 billion FEMA budget that is the strongest in FEMA's history.

Much of our budget goes not to us but to you in the form of state and local grants. I know you see the impacts of these resources every day. In fact, nearly a quarter of FEMA's budget – roughly \$2.2 billion – will go to state and local grants. Another \$1.9 billion will go to mitigation projects. And the Disaster Relief Fund will receive another \$1.9 billion. When all is said and done, just about 10% of our budget will go to FEMA for our operations – the rest is focused on our efforts on the ground.

Over the past five years FEMA and DHS have provided over \$23.8 billion for state and local projects through our disaster grant programs and an additional \$2.5 billion in fire fighter grants. With more than \$26 billion provided to our partners across state and local government and involving non-profit and private sector elements, we have provided grants that are directly helping to improve our nation's preparedness for any disaster.

Looking To The Future: Transition

You may have heard, this is an election year. When Hurricane Season concludes, we will not have our normal moment for review and reflection. We will need to maintain our readiness while undergoing a transition of Administrations.

We are developing a robust transition plan for the change in Administration next January. The initial focus has been on filling the career deputy slots with experienced and qualified people who will be ready to "hold down the fort" until the next President chooses their leadership team for FEMA. I have named one of our career Regional Administrators, Nancy Ward, to serve as our Senior Career Transition Officer to help facilitate the transition for FEMA senior leadership and potentially serve as Acting Administrator in the event that no Administrator exists.

We are also working across FEMA's components and Regions to develop simple, useful, and uniform means to transfer knowledge, experiences, and lessons learned to the new leadership. We will provide actionable guidance on the workings of critical functions such as the disaster declaration process, activation of the NRCC, grant processes and other activities that our stakeholders depend upon. We will not leave you standing alone during this transition.

Conclusion

Just a few short years ago, FEMA's plans were based on sequential failure. When you in the cities or counties were overwhelmed, you asked your state government for help. When the state was overwhelmed, they came to us. Then we acted. That old paradigm is a thing of the past. It just didn't work.

Today, we are committed to developing an engaged partnership with you that begins long before a disaster hits and results in cities and communities working hand-in-hand with FEMA and your other federal partners. FEMA is not there to replace or take over from your people on the ground. Today we pledge to work with you to plan for, mitigate against, respond to and recover from a disaster in a partnership of which you can be proud. I ask for your help as we move forward...together.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.