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Private Sector Forum: The National Response Framework  
Washington, DC  
May 19, 2008

Thank you all for joining us here today. I am truly pleased to see such a positive response as FEMA works to include more voices and more participants in our effort to help all Americans prepare for, respond to and recover from a disaster.

When I was asked to lead FEMA my mission was clear: rebuild and strengthen FEMA's ability to plan, prepare and respond to disasters in the post 9-11/Hurricane Katrina environment. The new leadership at FEMA brought in experts to conduct assessments and incorporated the lessons learned into a new vision for the agency. The President, Secretary Chertoff and the Congress supported this effort and provided resources and other tools to make these improvements. This is a stronger and more capable FEMA, as our response to recent disasters has demonstrated.

As part of the New FEMA vision, we have worked to integrate the efforts of all partners – public and private, state, tribal, territorial or local – in a holistic approach that will strengthen the national emergency management system and improve the ability of our communities and our Nation to address disasters, emergencies, and terrorist events. This year, FEMA has teams standing by to be on the ground within hours of a storm or other disaster striking. FEMA has worked with vulnerable states to identify where they will most need support. We know that one size does not fit all, so our response will be tailored to their needs. We have improved our logistics and can get the supplies and resources to a disaster site more quickly than in the past. Earlier this year we released the new National Response Framework that will help FEMA coordinate our activities with our partners at every level of government, as well as with the private sector. Simply put: we are all better prepared.

The National Response Framework – or NRF – is the culmination of the lessons learned in recent years. It includes input and incorporates the thousands of comments received from our partners across the federal government, in tribal, state and local governments, from first responders, the private sector and the non-profit community.

The NRF takes into account the lessons we've learned and will continue to incorporate changes and reforms as we move forward. But with all of us working from the same

plan, changes and improvements will be systematic and not piecemeal as we move forward. The Framework is a living document. Many of you have contributed your thoughts and solid suggestions, and you continue to do so as we strengthen annexes and continue our work to develop strong, robust plans.

It is important to remember that all disasters are local, and everyone has a role. FEMA does not take over in a disaster. We work hand in hand with our partners to provide the consistent guidance and framework which everyone needs to succeed.

By working together we are making sure that during the next catastrophic event, the NRF is not on the shelf while people execute their own, sometimes divergent, plans. Rather, we have developed and will implement an integrated response system where all participants at all levels of government, private sector and nongovernmental organizations understand their role.

The NRF and its supporting materials will be an important part of all our activities during future disasters – both natural and otherwise. But no plan will be effective without the hard work of the people who execute it when called upon to act.

One of the overarching themes running through FEMA’s new Strategic Plan is building “strong partnerships that leverage capabilities and capitalize on public-private efficiencies.” To achieve this goal, FEMA must building better partnerships that place a renewed focus on engaging the capabilities and strengths of the private sector, law enforcement, health professionals and other essential communities.

At FEMA, we have established an office to work specifically with our partners in the diverse private sector to facilitate this coordination before, during and after a disaster. We set up this new Private Sector Office at FEMA to focus exclusively on opening a dialogue and building a bridge of collaboration and information sharing with organizations outside of the government. The Director of the Private Sector Office, Cindy Taylor, has years of experience both as a career FEMA employee and in the private sector.

The office has three main goals.

First, the office is dedicated to engaging with the private sector to learn from your best practices as we work to improve FEMA’s capabilities and capacities.

Second, the office will engage with you to connect the private sector to FEMA in the key roles you play in the many elements of disaster preparedness, protection, mitigation, response and recovery.

And third, the office is working with the private sector to improve information sharing by leveraging organizational communications capabilities. You are an important channel for information to your employees, your customers and your communities in general. We will pursue every avenue of communication to make sure the American people get the information they need before, during and after emergencies.

As part of their efforts, the Office of the Private Sector will play a vital role in the NRF's success. The framework emphasizes the private sector's prominent role in emergency management as an important part of the emergency management system.

We are building out the Private Sector communications channel within Emergency Support Function 15 of the NRF: External Affairs. The NRF is truly a national plan and describes in detail, both in the base plan and partner guides, how the NRF starts at the local level using NIMS principles to build a unified approach.

The NRF describes how the private sector interfaces with other response organizations during an incident and acknowledges the private sectors unique roles from an impacted organization to a response provider. In addition to the existing Private Sector Support Annex and Volunteer and Donations Management Support Annex, the NRF includes supplemental material including a private sector partner guide to further detail roles and responsibilities.

Additionally, we have worked with industry representatives to include language in the National Incident Management System, or NIMS, and that integrates the private sector as a full partner in incident management.

We are not done yet. Together we will continue and build upon efforts in several key areas: business continuity plans; plans that help you employees protect their families and get back to work (a key element of recovery is getting people back to work as quickly as possible); systems to help businesses and their organizations work directly with emergency managers, first responders and government to support mitigation activities, preparedness planning, disaster response, donations management, and recovery efforts; and the inclusion of the private sector in planning, training, and exercise activities (the resulting relationships and shared vision can only help to strengthen our nation's preparedness.)

It is the work and resources we expend on this planning now, before a disaster, which will pay dividends later in a faster recovery and a more resilient nation.

Government – even with the federal, tribal, state, territorial, and local governments working perfectly in sync – is not the entire answer. All Americans need to be part of the emergency management process. Americans must understand and take responsibility for

their role in disasters. We must continue to develop a culture of preparedness in America, in which every American takes personal responsibility for his or her own emergency preparedness. FEMA will be a partner with all of you as we move forward. We ask you to join us as we all prepare for the future and to help those in need.

Thank you. God Bless You. And God Bless the United States of America.