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**Introduction**

Thank you. It is a pleasure being here with you again. As a former firefighter, I have a lot of experience taking direction from your members. But more importantly, I know that 9-1-1 operators are often first responders: the first person who talks to a disaster victim, the first person whose voice they hear promising help, the first person aware of the situation.

Last week, when storms and tornados struck around Washington, DC, the television reported that hundreds of calls had been received over a two hour period by 9-1-1 as people reported touchdowns, damage and injuries. You are truly on the front lines in any emergency and I appreciate all of your hard work.

While FEMA is often in the headlines – probably more often than we would like – we know that we can not do it alone. We are committed to building strong relationships, what we call “engaged partnerships,” with first responders, government agencies at all levels, and with organizations such as NENA and the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials, as we all work to build a robust emergency management system that supports the entire country.

I am particularly excited about the recent Memorandum of Understanding we have signed with NENA and the National Emergency Managers Association that allows for states to support each other by deploying emergency operators through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact. Increasingly we are looking at how we can help coordinate activities and resources and this agreement recognizes the important role you play and the need to get you additional support during a disaster. I am pleased that we were able to formalize this relationship.

At FEMA, we have been focused not only on our own reforms and preparations, but on how we can help you in your efforts to be ready.

As we officially entered Hurricane season last week, it is worthwhile to look at some specifics.

## **Improved Operations**

To begin with, FEMA has focused on expanding our capabilities and strengthening our organization.

We have placed greater emphasis 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.

On the ground, we are stronger with our new Incident Management Assistance Teams – or IMATs. They will be ready support you in the state within 12-hours, coordinate federal activities and provide initial situational awareness.

Our new Logistics Management Directorate is working closely to develop a supply chain that is in sync with the private sector. Already we can better track our resources and thus improve our coordination by leveraging new technologies and communications capabilities. 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 know that NENA and your membership are also leveraging new technologies to strengthen your systems and I appreciate the time and resources you are putting into strengthening your own systems.

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.

Each improvement has already made a difference. Today, when disaster strikes, FEMA personnel are on the ground, earlier than ever, standing with those in need, and helping them to get back on their feet. I don't need to tell the people in this room that response time matters. FEMA has greatly improved our response time by leaning forward and engaging earlier than ever before.

### **Improved Planning and a Culture of Preparedness**

Any response will only be as good as our planning and preparedness within FEMA.

When I joined the agency, 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.

FEMA just issued our 2008 Disaster Housing Plan which sets out our approach to working with states, local communities and individuals with disaster housing needs during this hurricane season.

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. I understand that you use a similar tool to review the Public Safety Answering Points that 9-1-1 offices use to make sure there are no gaps in your system and I commend you for your work in this area.

FEMA has also placed a renewed effort on training and to providing training to first responders across the country through our on-line and classroom courses. You are also engaged in this area and the NENA Education Course on Disaster Planning is worth highlighting. As the old saying goes, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

Of course, our own plans and reforms are only part of the picture.

### **Improved Support For Our Partners**

We recognize that no matter how prepared we are FEMA can not do it alone. FEMA is committed to supporting you, too, so that we are all better prepared.

President Bush and Secretary Chertoff have been committed to strengthening FEMA. This year, they proposed a \$9.7 billion FEMA budget that is the strongest in FEMA’s history. This is to your benefit, as well. Nearly a quarter of FEMA’s budget – roughly \$2.2 billion – will go to state and local grants. 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.

Of particular note, Secretary Chertoff recently stressed the availability of FEMA's grant programs that can be used to provide funding for enhanced telephone notification systems – better known as Reverse 9-1-1. FEMA and DHS recognize the importance of communications before a disaster and are making resources available to the states to strengthen operational capabilities in this area.

### **Looking To The Future: Transition**

Speaking of preparing for the future...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 have a robust transition plan in place for the change in Administration next January. FEMA has experienced and qualified people who will be ready to "hold down the fort" and I have named one of our career Regional Administrators, Nancy Ward, to serve as our Senior Career Transition Officer to help facilitate the transition and potentially serve as Acting Administrator. 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**

As you can see, FEMA is learning from our past and looking to the future. But we can not do it alone.

Government – even with the Federal, tribal, State and local governments working perfectly in sync – is not the entire answer. All Americans need to be part of the emergency management process. 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 are ready to help those in need.

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