

Oral Statement of
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Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and
Emergency Management

“The National Response Framework”

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Good morning, Chairwoman Norton, Ranking
Member Graves and members of the subcommittee.

I am pleased to be here today to discuss the Draft
National Response Framework – known as the N.R.F
– which was released recently for additional public
comment.

The NRF is the next generation document that FEMA, DHS and our federal, state and local partners will use when responding to both natural and man-made disasters.

When adopted, it will replace the existing National Response Plan that has been in place and active since 2004.

It is altogether fitting that we take up this topic on September 11th.

As we honor those who lost their lives on that terrible day, we remember why those of us in emergency management and the first responder communities come to work every day.

Despite the risks and long hours, men and women involved in every level of response across the country are dedicated to saving lives and protecting our nation.

On that fateful September day, many of our colleagues lost their lives rushing into danger – not away.

As the bible teaches, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

Truly, these men and women showed their love for their fellow Americans on that day.

[pause]

It is important to note that even as we work to streamline and update this document, we have robust and effective plans in place – and they have worked.

While we are always working to improve our ability to serve the wider community and address hazards of all shapes and sizes, our existing system was sufficient for the relatively small events we've faced this year.

In our response to the first storms of the hurricane season, most notably Hurricane Dean, and in our response to flooding in the heartland, storms in the northeast, tornadoes around the country and other events, our existing plans and the implementation of changes based on the lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina resulted in a strong response.

This is not the FEMA of a just a year ago. We are leaning forward, working hand-in-hand with our partners at every level of government as well as in the non-profit and private sectors, and providing improved services for the American people.

The new Framework will help us to institutionalize these reforms and improvements.

The Draft NRF incorporates numerous comments we've received throughout the process and is based on the real-world experience of thousands of Americans involved in emergency management.

Many comments addressed the same key issues and are addressed in this document.

The result is an NRF that is user friendly. It is focused on the basic facts you need available at your fingertip while providing the additional materials needed in its companions – still available but not overwhelming to the average user. It is a framework that is accessible to everyone involved in a crisis, and easily referenced when time is of the essence.

This ease of use is critical as the NRF is designed to guide the all hazard response all across America.

It is built upon the flexible, scalable and adaptable coordinating structure of the National Incident Management System – or NIMS.

The NRF aligns key roles and responsibilities across jurisdictions: linking all levels of government, private sector business and nongovernmental organizations. It is intended to capture specific authorities and best practices for managing incidents that range from the serious but purely local, to large-scale terrorist attacks or catastrophic natural disasters.

Keep in mind that the NRF was written for two distinct but vital audiences – senior leaders and day-to-day practitioners.

Its clear, simple style makes the serious work of incident management understandable to those that provide executive directions, including federal department or agency heads, governors, mayors, tribal leaders and city managers who are not the “operators,”

while its annexes and related documents (including the on-line National Resource Center) provide added resources to emergency management practitioners, such as first responders and health professionals, explaining the structures and tools routinely used at all levels of government.

The NRF also identifies and clarifies national incident response doctrine – and not just at the federal level.

It retains the same core principles NIMS in which first responders from different jurisdictions and disciplines can work together better to respond to natural disasters and emergencies, including acts of terrorism.

The NRF presents core principles more clearly and includes them in a newly described Response Doctrine that lays out how we will respond.

These core principles are:

- Engaged Partnerships
- Tiered Responses
- Scalable, flexible and adaptable operational capabilities
- Unity of effort through a unified command; and
- Readiness to Act.

Additionally, the NRF draws focus to preparedness. Effective preparedness is a crucial precondition for a successful response. The NRF encourages a higher state of readiness by drawing a sharper focus on the value of preparedness activities that improve responses across all jurisdictions.

Such activities include planning, organizing, training, equipping, exercising, and applying lessons learned. Mastery of these key tasks supports the unity of effort that is instrumental in all our efforts to save lives, protect property and meet basic human needs.

In conclusion, let me simply state that this draft of the NRF is at a stage where additional review and comment is needed by the stakeholders at all levels of government and the public and private sectors. Those comments will be taken to heart so that when the final NRF is released it will truly assist in guiding the conduct of all those involved in an all hazards incident management.

By joining elected and appointed officials with dedicated practitioners, NGOs and the private sector, applying common NIMS principles, adhering to response doctrine and being better prepared, we can respond more effectively to incidents and best serve our communities and the nation.

Thank you for your time today and for your continued interest and leadership as we all work together to improve our nation's plans and coordinated actions during any event on American soil.

I look forward to continuing to work with you in the months and years to come.