

Testimony of  
W. Craig Fugate  
Administrator  
Federal Emergency Management Agency

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## **I. Introduction**

Good Morning, Chairwoman Landrieu and Members of the Committee. I am Craig Fugate, Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak here today. I look forward to discussing the preparations that took place before Hurricane Isaac made landfall, the coordinated response that took place during the storm and is continuing today, and the recovery efforts that lay ahead.

Tropical Storm Isaac formed in the Atlantic late on August 21, 2012 and continued westward into the Caribbean before turning northwest across western Haiti and eastern Cuba, passing west of Key West, Florida and moving into the Gulf of Mexico. Isaac became a Category 1 hurricane early on Tuesday, August 28. The hurricane's center made landfall along the southeast Louisiana coast at 6:45pm Central Daylight Time with sustained winds of 80 miles per hour and gusts extending outward from the center up to 185 miles, primarily affecting the coastal areas of Southeastern Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. The storm moved slowly back towards the Gulf Tuesday night before making a second landfall in Southeast Louisiana early on Wednesday, August 29. Tremendous storm surge reaching estimated heights as high as twelve feet in coastal and riverine areas and rainfall amounts estimated between seven and fourteen inches with isolated maximum amounts estimated near 20 inches inundated much of Louisiana, southern Mississippi, southern Alabama, and the western Florida Panhandle. Tens of thousands were ordered to evacuate.

In the days leading up to landfall of Hurricane Isaac, FEMA worked with the whole community to support our citizens and first responders as they prepared. It is clear the authorities given to FEMA in the wake of Hurricane Katrina contributed to increased readiness and improved response throughout the storm. By leaning forward, the agency was able to support a prompt, coordinated response effort while effectively understanding the needs of survivors and planning for future needs.

## **II. Preparations for Isaac**

Long before Hurricane Isaac made landfall, FEMA was coordinating and collaborating with whole community partners to plan and prepare for a hurricane event. The state of Louisiana and FEMA's Regional office have worked closely to develop catastrophic, worst-case scenario hurricane plans which were developed to be flexible and scalable for incidents of lesser magnitude. Emergency managers at all levels work together to review, update, and validate the

Joint FEMA Region VI Louisiana Hurricane Operation Plan annually through planning workshops, table top exercises (TTX) and drills that foster relationship-building and decision-making that proves essential for response in disasters. For example, in May 2012, Federal, state, and local partners completed a Rehearsal of Concept (ROC) drill and a two-day exercise combining a TTX with a functional exercise that simulated an air evacuation of survivors from the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport.

In the days immediately before Isaac reached the Gulf Coast, FEMA worked with whole community partners to stage resources that would support response efforts that began as soon as conditions were safe. The agency's success coordinating these resources and the response efforts to follow were due largely to the lessons learned following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Congress enacted the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (PKEMRA), which enabled FEMA to improve our processes in order to more efficiently and effectively provide services to the communities we serve.

PKEMRA required that FEMA "develop an efficient, transparent, and flexible logistics system for procurement and delivery of goods and services necessary for an effective and timely response to natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters and for real-time visibility of items at each point throughout the logistics system." Recognizing the need to improve logistics capabilities, FEMA elevated logistics from a branch-level operation to a full directorate with the creation of the Logistics Management Directorate (LMD). LMD is now organizationally aligned with and fully integrated into response and recovery operations, enabling them to provide efficient, transparent, and flexible logistics capability to ensure an effective and timely response to disasters. This improved capacity was evident in the prompt procurement, delivery, and dispersal of goods and services supporting response and recovery efforts following Hurricane Isaac.

In addition to creation of the LMD, PKEMRA spurred creation of FEMA's Incident Management Assistance Teams (IMATs), who plan, train, and exercise with state and local partners to prepare for all hazards. The IMATs are FEMA's first responders for all disasters. They arrive on-scene early and work to establish Interim Operating Facilities (IOFs) before Joint Field Offices are established to manage response operations. IMATs also support the Unified Coordination Group (UCG), which brings together senior leaders who represent the interests of Federal, State, local, and tribal governments in an effort to promote effective coordination and planning across entities. In response to Hurricane Isaac, IMAT teams deployed before the storm made landfall. Teams were positioned at the state Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and were directly involved in nearly every aspect of response efforts.

PKEMRA also grants FEMA the authority to lean forward and leverage the entire emergency management team in response and recovery efforts, a tool we take advantage of regularly and employed early for Hurricane Isaac. The agency is permitted to take actions necessary to save lives and protect property by positioning emergency equipment, personnel, and supplies to support response to notice events like hurricanes. Despite the inherent challenges of predicting hurricane landfall or anticipating the full extent of its effects, FEMA worked with state and local partners to alert, deploy, and stage resources beginning August 25, 2012, three days before Isaac made landfall. FEMA pre-positioned over 120 truckloads of commodities carrying almost 1.7

million liters of water and 1.7 million meals, in addition to cots, tarps, blankets, generators, and other resources to support caches already staged by the state in preparation for the 2012 hurricane season. A total of 158 individuals from FEMA and other Federal agencies deployed in advance of the incident to support pending response and recovery activities.

In the 72 hours prior to landfall, the Louisiana Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOSHEP) EOC, as well as both FEMA's Region VI Regional Response Coordination Center (RRCC) and the National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) were activated to support pre-deployment activities and situational awareness. By request from the state, FEMA also activated the national ambulance contract, allowing the agency to stage ambulances and para-transit vehicles to support evacuations of hospitals and nursing homes prior to landfall. Search and rescue (SAR) resources from FEMA and other Federal partners were staged throughout the Gulf Coast.

### **III. Coordinated Response & Recovery Efforts**

When Hurricane Isaac made landfall on Tuesday, August 28, 2012, FEMA and other Federal Agencies had deployed personnel, pre-positioned commodities, and established state and Federal staging areas to stabilize the incident within 72 hours of landfall. State and Federal teams worked quickly to activate Points of Distribution (PODs), sites where survivors were provided with food, water, and other essential resources. Under the new National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF), two members of the Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinators (FDRC) cadre deployed almost immediately to hard-hit areas of Louisiana. These individuals were available to support the state's recovery leadership, and to monitor recovery impacts and issues in the aftermath of the storm.

By Friday, August 31, 33 PODs in 12 parishes were supporting survivor needs. Additional Federal resources were deployed to support medical shelters and other response activities, and approximately 300 Community Relations (CR) personnel were deployed and formed teams to provide disaster assistance information to survivors while conducting damage assessments and providing situational awareness. The pre-planning and coordination efforts between the state of Louisiana and FEMA's Regional Office enabled the state to respond rapidly through the State-led Disaster Housing Task Force (SLDHTF), a task force of subgroups that meet daily to identify issues while developing a comprehensive housing plan that continues to guide disaster housing recovery efforts. The SLDHTF also works with the Housing Recovery Support Function coordinating agency under the NDRF, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), to identify ways to leverage existing state programs using HUD-based programs like the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program and other funding mechanisms.

The authorities and guidance established in PKEMRA have also helped FEMA integrate the private sector into our preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. In 2007, in response to recommendations in PKEMRA, FEMA established a Private Sector Division (PSD) within the Office of External Affairs. The PSD helps to formalize FEMA's approach to private sector engagement by building bridges to businesses and other non-governmental organizations to develop meaningful public private partnerships and facilitate private sector innovation and networking across FEMA.

In August 2012, FEMA's PSD announced the creation of FEMA's first-ever National Business Emergency Operation Center (NBEOC). This new virtual organization serves as FEMA's clearinghouse for non-operational, two-way information-sharing between public and private sector stakeholders in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters. Throughout Hurricane Isaac, the NBEOC worked to coordinate, communicate, and collaborate with private industry to foster relationships, improve information-sharing and situational awareness, and engage key stakeholders who brought resources, capabilities, and expertise to bear during response and recovery efforts. The NBEOC was incredibly well-received during response efforts from private sector stakeholders who applauded the communication and coordination gained through the aggregation of multiple communications.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Isaac, FEMA's mobile outreach efforts have continued to simplify the process of identifying and applying for disaster assistance through DisasterAssistance.gov, a website established in 2008 to help survivors apply for FEMA Individual Assistance and find other forms of assistance. Between August 31 and September 18, 422,160 disaster survivors visited DisasterAssistance.gov to apply for assistance, update their information, and check the status of their application online. As of September 19, Hurricane Isaac survivors had submitted over 18,700 applications for assistance through smartphones, which allow survivors to apply for assistance and track submitted applications with the added flexibility of mobile access.

By constantly striving to support our citizens and first responders in efficient, streamlined ways, FEMA is working to fulfill the agency's mission while navigating the limitations of today's ever-strained economic environment. Following Hurricane Isaac, over 46 percent of registrants applying for Individual Assistance have opted to receive all correspondence from FEMA electronically. This option was made possible through the Electronic Correspondence (E-Corr) program, implemented on August 15, 2011. The program has helped FEMA to communicate with survivors in a convenient, efficient, and effective medium. In Hurricane Isaac alone, E-Corr is estimated to have saved the agency approximately \$405,000 on postage, printing, and envelope costs.

#### **IV. Looking Forward**

FEMA opened the first Hurricane Isaac Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs) on Saturday, September 1, providing survivors with resources and information about FEMA and other disaster assistance programs. As of September 19, 27 DRCs in Louisiana and sixteen in Mississippi continue to support survivor needs. Survivors in Louisiana have filed 182,683 registrations for disaster assistance, and survivors in Mississippi have filed 19,936 registrations. FEMA has approved nearly \$67.1 million in assistance for qualified homeowners and renters in Louisiana and \$9.1 million for qualified homeowners and renters in Mississippi. More than \$7.6 million in Public Assistance funds have been obligated to help affected communities recover. In addition, as of September 18, nine business recovery centers had been opened by the Small Business Administration (SBA), which had approved low-interest disaster loans totaling over \$1.4 million. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has granted the state's request for the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (DSNAP) benefits for eligible survivors, allowing more than 86,000 households to receive over \$36 million in benefits.

In addition to providing disaster assistance, PKEMRA laid the foundation for FEMA to provide those affected by disaster with additional funding through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), which provides grants to states and local governments to implement long-term hazard mitigation measures after a major disaster declaration. Prior to PKEMRA, the total amount of HMGP money allocated to disaster-affected areas was determined by calculating 7.5 percent of total disaster grants whose sum was less than or equal to two billion dollars. PKEMRA amended the Stafford Act to allow HMGP funding to total 15 percent of total disaster grants for disasters two billion dollars and under. The practical application of this modification means the communities and individuals affected by Hurricane Isaac may receive twice as much financial support through this grant program following the disaster.

While significant resources have supported response and recovery throughout Hurricane Isaac, FEMA's investments in mitigation in the years following Hurricane Katrina undoubtedly saved lives and money during this most recent disaster, and will continue to support recovery through the coming weeks and months. In the years since Hurricane Katrina, FEMA has worked to support preparedness efforts in the Gulf Coast and across the Nation through programs like the HMGP and the Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP), which have been strongly supported by this Committee. In 2007, a \$96.9 million HMGP grant, one of the largest in history, was provided to elevate homes devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. By 2009, FEMA had provided \$23.5 million to help all 64 of Louisiana's parishes and 17 other entities create detailed hazard mitigation plans, a requirement to qualify for the HMGP that only four jurisdictions in Louisiana had satisfied before Hurricane Katrina.

Since Fiscal Year 2007, the HSGP has provided nearly \$315 million to the state of Mississippi and more than \$428 million to the state of Louisiana to fund a range of preparedness activities including planning, organization, equipment purchase, training, exercises, and management and administration. These activities continue to improve resiliency throughout the Gulf Coast, and contributed significantly to successful response and recovery efforts during Hurricane Isaac. As of September 19, 2012, FEMA has obligated almost \$1.1 billion in Louisiana and over \$280 million in Mississippi through the HMGP since Hurricane Katrina.

Immediately following Hurricane Isaac, FEMA Hazards Performance Analysis (HPA) field staff deployed to support response and recovery efforts, and to assess several sites where post-Katrina mitigation funding was utilized. Property acquisition sites where homes once stood had been converted into green spaces, and although surrounding areas suffered flood damage, the green space required no repair. Other sites were observed in neighborhoods with a mix of elevated and non-elevated houses. All non-elevated houses appeared to have suffered damage, but those structures elevated with funding from FEMA's HMGP appeared dry, even where flooding depth reached three to four feet. These observations by FEMA HPA staff, though limited, are reflective of the types of life- and cost-savings during Hurricane Isaac that were made possible by investments following Hurricane Katrina.

## **V. Conclusion**

As we move forward with response and recovery activities in the aftermath of Hurricane Isaac, FEMA continues to collect and analyze lessons learned and after-action reports. FEMA

personnel are actively tracking and assessing the implementation and application of PKEMRA legislation throughout Hurricane Isaac, gathering information which will be used to further improve disaster management in the future. We will continue to improve our response and recovery efforts by making use of the enhanced authority granted to FEMA by PKEMRA, and will continue to wisely invest in resources and programs that will support our citizens and first responders.

Thank you Chairwoman Landrieu, for providing me this opportunity to appear before you today to discuss preparations that took place in advance of Hurricane Isaac, the coordination that occurred throughout the storm, and the recovery efforts that remain in-progress. I look forward to answering questions you or other Members of the Committee may have.