

## **Effective Aid Takes Time**

By R. David Paulison

**The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and its partners across the federal government have gone to extraordinary lengths to assist in the Gulf Coast's recovery from the hurricanes of 2005. Never before has the federal government committed so many resources to restoring an area affected by natural disaster.**

Consider the facts:

To date, President Bush and Congress have committed \$110 billion to finance the Gulf Coast recovery effort. FEMA has provided housing assistance to nearly 1 million families — the largest housing effort ever undertaken. Just last week, FEMA, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and our federal partners extended housing assistance until March 2009 for those living in travel trailers, mobile homes and apartments. FEMA has also provided more than \$7.8 billion to fund thousands of recovery projects.

Some argue that the federal government should waive the 10% match that states and local jurisdictions are required to put into projects. What they do not understand is that a fundamental tenet of the matching requirement is ensuring that every state and local jurisdiction has a financial stake in the decision-making process. This means decisions are scrutinized and prioritized to help those people who need it most.

**Given the monumental scale of this tragedy, the administration made a compassionate decision to provide supplemental funding to assist Louisiana in meeting that obligation. Anticipating the economic hardship caused by the hurricanes, the president secured additional funds from Congress, which included \$750 million to cover the 10% matching requirement.** Funding the state's matching requirement through this process ensures it has the funds and the incentive to prioritize spending.

As the Miami-Dade fire chief, I witnessed firsthand the excruciatingly slow recovery from Hurricane Andrew in 1992. But — with contributions from local, state and federal agencies and the private sector — we began a rebuilding process that took years. While Andrew touched only a few counties in Florida, Hurricane Katrina destroyed an area equal to that of Great Britain. The Gulf Coast will recover, but it will take time, perseverance and cooperation from the private sector and all levels of government.

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