

David Paulison
Administrator, FEMA
Florida Catastrophic Disaster Planning Workshop
Orlando, FL
June 17, 2008

Introduction

I am pleased to be here with others in the emergency management community who are focused not just on the challenges we face today, but also on the challenges we may face in the future.

Since I took the reins at FEMA over two years ago, we have been building a New FEMA that is leaning forward, better prepared, more nimble, responsive to state local and local issues, and focused both on current and future needs. The results of our expanded focus and new capabilities can be seen in our response to recent floods and tornados and, on a wider scope, in FEMA's response last year to the California wildfires and to Hurricane Dean. In each case, FEMA has been on the ground early, working hand-in-hand with our partners at every level of government as well as in the private sector.

I would like to discuss some of FEMA's reforms and look at the scalable systems and plans that will guide our actions when another catastrophic event occurs. All of us at this conference know that catastrophic events are inevitable. That is why we must all make plans today.

I know that you are focused on preparing your communities for any event. 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.

Improved Operations

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. In a large-scale event, it will be crucial to have a coordinated response and this is one step towards that goal.

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. We also have contracts and inter-agency agreements that will improve our capabilities in providing supplies and services, base camp support, evacuations and transportation.

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. And we are focused on streamlining and improving the housing and individual assistance programs.

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.

Improved Planning and a Culture of Preparedness

Our response will only be as good as our planning and preparedness.

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.

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: debris removal, commodity distribution, evacuation, sheltering, interim housing, medical needs and fuel capacity along evacuation routes.

This month we 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.

FEMA's approach is to provide flexible, scalable interim housing assistance that can be adjusted to the range of requirements generated by a disaster. The 2008 Disaster Housing Plan can expand to employ the full range of interim housing options and capabilities. FEMA may, in close coordination and collaboration with the state, provide interim housing to eligible disaster victims when they are either unable to quickly return to their homes, or are unable to quickly secure permanent housing.

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. 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.

As we look at all of the reforms put in place – both operationally and in planning – it is clear that the nation has learned from the events of recent years and built a stronger emergency management system. Simply put: we are all better prepared.

Catastrophic Planning - Specifics

As this week we are here to focus on catastrophic planning, let me take a few minutes to discuss on our specific actions and preparations in this area.

The National Response Framework defines a catastrophic disaster as a sudden event immediately overwhelming existing capabilities and which results extensive casualties and evacuees. National resources will be needed to support response and recovery efforts.

FEMA has initiated a proactive, forward leaning, geo-specific Catastrophic Disaster Planning Initiative designed to ensure that FEMA and its partners plan and prepare for an appropriate, timely, and efficient response to a truly catastrophic disaster.

As part of the Initiative, we are partnering with the State of Florida to address a Category 5 Hurricane that could potentially place most of the southern portion of the State under water for 30 days and impact as many as 7 million people. In addition to the Florida

project, there are planning projects for earthquakes along the New Madrid Seismic Zone and in California.

This initiative will help further the development of the National Preparedness System by developing detailed site-specific, geographically-based, and operationally-focused Federal, Tribal, State, local and private sector plans; will improve overall prevention, protection, response and recovery capabilities at all levels of government, and bolster Tribal, State, local, private sector and critical infrastructure planning activities.

An important component of this initiative is geographic-specific Catastrophic Disaster Planning managed by the Disaster Operations Directorate. This aspect of FEMA's Catastrophic Disaster Planning is focused specifically on earthquake planning in the New Madrid Seismic Zone States; hurricane planning in Florida, and earthquake planning in California. The effectiveness of this geographic-specific planning is its grass-roots, bottom-up approach, involving the participation of all levels of government and the private sector.

As you may have heard, with the implementation of the geographic-specific Catastrophic Disaster Planning initiatives over the last few months, it has become increasingly apparent that because of their size, complexity, and evolving requirements, the funding may fall short of actual requirements.

As a result, the Disaster Operations Directorate has initiated an internal review of all of its Catastrophic Disaster Planning contracts and expenditures for FY 2008. Based on the results of the review, all planning activities and tasks for the remainder of this Fiscal Year, through September 2008, will be reexamined and, as necessary, reprioritized to ensure that through this period the mission critical activities can continue.

FEMA remains committed to Catastrophic Disaster Planning, to ensuring its capability to prepare for and respond to all disasters, and to being a good steward of taxpayer dollars.

Conclusion

Just a few short years ago, FEMA's plans were based on sequential failure. When cities or counties were overwhelmed, they asked state government for help. When the state was overwhelmed, it came to us. Then we acted. That old paradigm is a thing of the past. It just didn't work.

Today, we are committed to developing an engaged partnership with you that begins long before a disaster hits and this commitment will result in cities and communities working hand-in-hand with FEMA and your other federal partners. FEMA is not there to replace

or take over from your people on the ground. Today we pledge to work with you to plan for, mitigate against, respond to and recover from a disaster in a partnership of which you can be proud. I ask for your help as we move forward...together.

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