

**Written Statement of
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**“Ensuring Effective Preparedness and Response:
Lessons Learned from Hurricane Irene and Tropical
Storm Lee”**



FEMA

**Before the
House Committee on Homeland Security,
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response,
and Communications**

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Introduction

Chairman Bilirakis and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, my name is MaryAnn Tierney and I am the Regional Administrator for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region III Office. It is an honor to appear before you today on behalf of FEMA to discuss our response and recovery efforts in Pennsylvania before, during, and after Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee. In my testimony today, I will discuss our successes, challenges, and lessons learned from these two disasters and FEMA's ongoing efforts to apply lessons learned to improve the way we do business.

Response and Recovery Efforts in Pennsylvania

FEMA worked closely with state officials before, during, and after Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee to prepare and then assist the affected communities and individuals. This included ensuring FEMA representatives were on scene with the appropriate state and local officials prior to Hurricane Irene's impact, which began late on August 26, 2011. We also provided continued support to state and local officials during response and recovery operations.

Days before Irene made landfall, FEMA pre-positioned numerous Incident Management Assistance Teams (IMAT) along the Eastern Seaboard to coordinate with state, tribal and local officials to identify needs and shortfalls affecting potential disaster response and recovery efforts. In Pennsylvania, the IMATs had pre-designated support staff ready to be deployed to assist operations at the FEMA Initial Operating Facility (IOF) as soon as they were needed. FEMA also strategically staged resources in several locations before Irene's landfall in order to be able to react quickly to the storm's eventual track. For example, the necessary equipment and work space—located in the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) building—was ready prior to the staffing of the facility. This enabled FEMA to promptly support the Commonwealth's request for federal assistance, including the activation of six National Urban Search and Rescue Teams.

FEMA also deployed Community Relations (CR) Teams to assist with response and recovery. CR Specialists build working relationships among FEMA and our partners at the state and local level. In Pennsylvania, once the Presidential Disaster Declarations were announced, these CR teams were on the ground within 12 hours, making contact with individuals, businesses, community leaders and local officials to assist them in dealing with the events. CR Specialists were also deployed to support Disaster Recovery Centers (DRC) and assist with the closing of shelters.

Currently, there are two active Emergency Declarations, one which was signed by President Obama on August 29, 2011, due to Hurricane Irene, and the second, which he signed on September 8, 2011, due to Tropical Storm Lee. Both Emergency Declarations authorized FEMA to provide Emergency Protective Measures including Direct Federal Assistance under the Public Assistance program to the counties identified by Governor Corbett.

In addition, there are two active major disaster declarations, one which was signed by the President on September 3, 2011, in response to Hurricane Irene, and the second which he signed

on September 12, 2011, in response to Tropical Storm Lee. The major disaster declaration issued for Hurricane Irene authorizes Individual Assistance for eleven counties, Public Assistance for fourteen counties and Hazard Mitigation for the entire Commonwealth. The major disaster declaration issued for Tropical Storm Lee authorizes Individual Assistance for twenty-eight counties, Public Assistance for twenty-five counties, and Hazard Mitigation for the entire Commonwealth.

Given the wide area of the Commonwealth affected, FEMA worked with state emergency management officials to quickly conduct Preliminary Damage Assessments (PDA) to get federal disaster assistance approved as fast as possible. From August 30 to October 7, 2011, FEMA, working with state and local officials, performed PDAs for 39 counties in Pennsylvania. Subsequent to the declarations, FEMA has worked to obligate the funding to eligible communities and individuals. This is especially crucial for Public Assistance construction projects like road repair, which, if not completed in the next couple of months, will not be able to commence until spring of 2012 due to winter conditions.

To support this effort, FEMA currently has 600 employees working in the Joint Field Office (JFO) and in the affected counties to respond to the needs of the citizens and the local governments. Our PA staff is working diligently with the PEMA to prioritize local government projects and support the writing of the project worksheets. Since the initial declaration for Hurricane Irene, Commonwealth officials have worked with county Emergency Managers to schedule and conduct Applicant Briefings, where local officials in all designated counties learn about available assistance and eligibility requirements. FEMA also supported PEMA staff at applicant Kickoff Meetings. At these meetings, each applicant's needs are assessed and a plan for the repair of the applicant's facilities is prepared. There are 1,057 Kickoff Meetings scheduled in the months of October through December and to date, 697 have been completed. The Commonwealth is expecting between 1,500-2,000 applications, which will result in the writing of approximately 6,000 project worksheets.

FEMA is working closely with the Commonwealth to prioritize assistance to those communities most in need of immediate assistance. For example, we are working to increase our knowledge and awareness of local conditions by leveraging the information local officials have to increase the speed with which we can provide them the money they need to repair and rebuild. As of November 16, 2011, we have obligated \$921,840 for Tropical Storm Lee, and we are continuing to work with the Commonwealth to swiftly approve and award projects for Hurricane Irene.

In addition to the Public Assistance program, a combined total of 30 counties have been designated for assistance through the Individuals and Households Program (IHP), part of the Individual Assistance program, for both disasters. IHP provides housing assistance and grants for other serious, disaster-related needs through financial assistance or direct housing assistance. Housing assistance includes temporary housing (rental or temporary housing unit), repair and/or replacement assistance. IHP also authorizes FEMA to construct permanent housing under certain circumstances, in cases where alternative housing resources are unavailable, or other forms of FEMA temporary housing assistance are not feasible or cost-effective. As of November 16, in response to both major disaster declarations, a combined total of \$126 million has been provided to individuals and families in Pennsylvania through the IHP program.

Since the beginning of these disasters, we supported the Commonwealth in opening 22 DRCs, with the first DRCs opening less than 72 hours after Tropical Storm Lee was declared a major disaster. A DRC is a readily accessible facility, staffed by Federal, State, local, and voluntary agencies, where disaster assistance applicants may go for information about FEMA and other disaster assistance programs, for questions related to their case, or for the status of applications being processed by FEMA. DRCs also provide individuals with information on Small Business Administration (SBA) and National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) assistance programs. We will continue to support the Commonwealth and its citizens in recovery efforts and identify lessons learned to increase the speed and effectiveness of providing assistance to disaster survivors.

Applying Lessons Learned to Improve Preparedness, Response and Recovery

As we have done in the past, we will continue to learn from our experiences to improve the way we do business. One of FEMA's top priorities is to provide temporary housing for disaster survivors. In the past, this effort has been hindered by an inability to quickly obtain quality housing for survivors. In April 2011, FEMA decided that going forward, only Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-regulated manufactured homes would be procured. These manufactured homes are built to HUD-certified standards and are the same as any manufactured housing units consumers across the country may purchase. Today, more than 7 million people throughout the United States live in HUD-regulated manufactured homes as their primary residence. HUD regulations for these units set stringent standards for construction materials and also require a health notice to be posted in the kitchen of each unit.

Understanding that the effects of winter weather could significantly delay the delivery of manufactured homes, PEMA requested FEMA move rapidly in meeting the housing needs of disaster survivors. Throughout the summer, FEMA has purchased 1, 2, and 3 bedroom mobile home units built to HUD standards to support ongoing housing missions and begin backfilling our inventory levels. However, as new units are being produced, FEMA continues to deplete our existing inventory of units comprised of tested Park Models and Mobile Homes, which meet the highest standard of quality. FEMA is also providing the same code compliant park models and manufactured homes that comply with the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards, the guidelines that ensure buildings and structures are accessible for people with physical disabilities.

We also continue to improve the way we coordinate with our emergency management partners, modifying our preparedness, response, and recovery strategies in light of lessons learned. This "Whole Community" approach recognizes that FEMA is only *a part* of the nation's emergency management team. In order to successfully prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards, we must work with the entire emergency management community. The Whole Community includes FEMA and our partners at the federal, state, local, tribal and territorial governmental levels, non-governmental organizations such as faith-based and non-profit groups, the private sector and industry, and most importantly, individuals, families, and communities, who continue to be our greatest assets and the key to our success.

We learned that our partners need to be more involved in our preparedness activities in order to maximize their effectiveness in response and recovery. Since 2005, FEMA has sponsored over 750 national, federal, regional, state and local direct support exercises in coordination with its partners. This September, we held a National Recovery Tabletop Exercise (Recovery TTX) in the Washington metropolitan area. This exercise involved the Whole Community, with over 200 participants from federal, state, tribal and non-governmental organizations. The Recovery TTX consisted of both plenary and breakout group sessions and focused on three planning horizons: short-term, intermediate, and long-term recovery.

This exercise was also the first opportunity to explore the applications of the National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) using a large scale, multi-state catastrophic disaster scenario. The NDRF defines coordination structures, leadership roles and responsibilities, and guidance for federal agencies, state, local, territorial, and tribal governments, and other partners involved in disaster planning and recovery. The NDRF reflects input gathered through extensive stakeholder discussions which included outreach sessions conducted by FEMA and the Department of Housing and Urban Development in each of the ten FEMA Regions, and forums held in five cities across the country. The final NDRF incorporates comments, lessons learned, and recommendations from discussion roundtables held with professional associations, academic experts, and more than 600 stakeholders representing federal, tribal, state, and local governments, as well as public and private organizations.

In Pennsylvania, we identified both best practices and areas for improvement in coordinating with our partners during response and recovery. From the earliest moments, FEMA worked closely with PEMA to identify obstacles or challenges to the response and recovery effort. Incorporation of Commonwealth staff on JFO, DRC, and PA teams greatly enhanced our effectiveness and local knowledge. Having clearly defined responsibilities allowed us to deliver services smoothly and efficiently. For example, the staging of commodities at Fort Indiantown Gap during the response phase was successful because the point at which responsibility switched from FEMA to the Commonwealth was clear and explicit.

With time being of the essence during the initial stages of an event, we should be moving as quickly as possible to engage other federal agencies in the response effort. In Pennsylvania, Mission Assignment requests—which are the means by which we task other federal agencies—were handled capably through regional office coordination, but we want to make this process even faster. We will do this in the future by imbedding a Mission Assignment Manager with the IMAT team to streamline and expedite the process of engaging our federal partners in response efforts.

Conclusion

FEMA is committed to improving its effectiveness in supporting its partners in the wake of disasters. A key way we can improve is by identifying best practices and lessons learned from our response to disasters and incorporating these lessons into our standards and guidance. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and am happy to answer any questions you may have.