July/August 2009

FEMA

On Call

Disaster Reserve Workforce News

Introducing Craig Fugate;

FEMA Administrator Discusses Disaster Workforce

FEMA's new Administrator, W. "Craig" Fugate, emphasized the importance of FEMA having a trained, credentialed, and prepared Disaster Reserve Workforce — in a recent interview with "On Call."

"I want to make it clear from the top down, whether you are a DAE, CORE or PFT, you are a FEMA employee, and should be recognized and respected for your experience and skills," he said.

Fugate talked about the Disaster Reserve Workforce Division's (DRWD) role in transforming and professionalizing the Reservist workforce through standardized training and credentialing — to make FEMA more effective.

"Some of our most experienced employees are in the Disaster Reserve Workforce," he noted. "I would like to see typing of Reservists by qualifications and experience, leading to upward mobility."

"Having been a state person -- there is no clear way to differentiate new people and old hands and experience levels at a Joint Field Office. We need to build upon skill sets and recognize people so that when an employee is a Type 1 everyone knows they're a Subject Matter Expert and have been credentialed."

"I want to recognize experience," FEMA's Administrator continued. "Experienced staff increase their capabilities over time and that needs to be measured and reflect Subject Matter Experts' knowledge. There also needs to be better equity among all FEMA staff. Sometimes, the smartest person in the room, the Subject Matter Expert, may not be the permanent, full-time staff member."

Switching to the topic of recruiting Reservists, Fugate said, "FEMA never has been and never will be staffed by a permanent,

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Fugate's Florida Experience

Before coming to FEMA, Craig Fugate served as Director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM), coordinating disaster response, recovery, preparedness and mitigation efforts with each of the state's 67 counties and local governments.

In recent years, he has focused on FDEM's preparedness and planning for the future.

During his years at FDEM, Fugate served as the State Coordinating Officer in Florida for 11 Presidentially-declared disasters and the management of $4.5 billion in federal disaster assistance.

In 2004, Fugate managed the largest federal disaster response in Florida history as four major hurricanes impacted

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Administrator Approves Holiday Pay for Reservists (Details on Page 3)

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Produced by the Disaster Reserve Workforce Division

Blair Gately, Editor

Fugate

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structured staff in the field. A trained, experienced, and ready workforce is what we need to be and offer."

He said he recognizes the strains and demands on the existing Disaster Reserve Workforce. "There is a lot of emphasis on hurricanes, but we have potentially more catastrophic events, like earthquakes, that would place serious demands on our existing workforce," he added. "We have to expand."

One of Fugate's strongest messages to employees is that they need to be personally and professionally prepared for disasters.

"My overall message is we have to be in a constant state of readiness," he said, noting that FEMA doesn't know when the next disaster will be, but will need to be able to move quickly. "The workforce needs to be constantly ready, have a family plan in place, be ready to deploy and be gone for an extended period of time with little notice."

Just one day after he took office in mid-May, Fugate held a Town Hall meeting and stressed his preparedness message, telling employees, "We are all emergency managers."

He shared his priorities for FEMA – "meeting the needs of survivors" (noting that we should not refer to survivors as victims), taking care of the team and first responders – ensure they have what they need to do their job, and "back to rule # 1 – meeting the needs of survivors."

Fugate said he is happy to be a part of the FEMA team and is looking forward to "getting to know and work with each and every employee, and working as a team to help those who look to us for assistance."

Letter from Philip A. Nowak, Acting DRWD Director

The 2009 Hurricane Season is here. Hurricanes are among the most dramatic and potentially deadly weather events. Winds can cause tremendous devastation, toppling trees and power lines and undermining weak areas of buildings. Homes, businesses, public buildings, roads and power lines may also be damaged or destroyed by floodwaters.

But as our new Administrator is quick to note, the issue for emergency managers like you and me is not focusing on the hurricane season or the "disaster season."

The issue for us is the **next** disaster – whatever that is, whenever it happens.

While FEMA delivers a continuous message for Americans to prepare themselves, we need to ask ourselves whether we ourselves have done what we need to do. For many FEMA employees -- whose mission is to prepare for, respond to and help others recover from disasters – the answer is that some of us may not prepare ourselves or our families as well as we should.

Does your family have a communication and evacuation plan? Consider these tips:

-- Identify a family meeting place if you become separated from each other. Choose a place in a building or park outside your neighborhood. Make sure every member of the family knows where to meet.

-- In case family members do get separated, ask an out-of-state relative or friend to be the family's contact.

-- Be familiar with escape routes from your neighborhood. Plan several routes in case your normal route is blocked.

-- Don't forget your pet and pet care items.

Do you have a disaster supply kit? It should contain the following:

-- Water - at least one gallon daily per person for 3 to 7 days;

-- Food - at least enough for 3 to 7 days. Include non-perishable packaged or canned food/juices, snacks, and food for infants or the elderly;

-- Blankets and pillows; toiletries and hygiene items;

-- Clothing - seasonal, rain gear, sturdy shoes;

-- Medical supplies - first aid kit, medicines, prescription drugs;

-- Flashlight with extra batteries;

-- Cash - Banks and ATMs may not be open;

The web site www.ready.gov provides tips and checklists to help prepare for disasters. There is a page on the web site on how to involve children in the preparedness process.

Program Management Branch

Layne Smith, Branch Chief

Holiday Pay and Web ADD

I am glad to report that the National Finance Center made pay code changes enabling timekeepers to add webTA code 66, Holiday Leave, and code 31, Holiday Worked, to Reservists' webTA accounts. Deployed Reservists can now record their work time for holidays and administrative leave in certain situations in the same way as full-time employees. By rescheduling the regular work week for Reservists to Monday through Friday in those weeks when the observed federal holiday falls on Friday, Reservists are now eligible for pay for the full schedule of OPM-designated holidays.

This could not have happened without a tremendous amount of work from the Human Capital Division's Technology Branch and direct involvement and emphasis from the Administrator's office. Although the timing of these changes was extremely compressed, the outstanding effort in the field made changes work. Our next step is a governing Directive and Manual.

Speaking of technology; in spite of the hard work from a number of dedicated individuals, WebADD, is unable to meet Agency deployment and reporting requirements and will not be introduced as the follow-on system to the Automated Deployment

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FEMA Celebrates 30th Anniversary; Long-time Reservists Recount Experiences

FEMA celebrates its 30th anniversary this year and some Reservists have been with the agency almost that long. "On Call" asked long-time Reservists to recount some of their unforgettable experiences.

Region IV Individual Assistance Reservist Betty Roberson's most memorable deployment was when she spent three months in the Marshall Islands in the late 1980's. "I would not trade the experience for anything, but would not want to do it again," she said. "Being in such a different time zone, thousands of miles away from family and not be able to talk to them on a regular basis was the most stressful of all my deployments. We moved between the islands by boat or by Blackhawk helicopter – what a blast!"

Roberson and a roommate shared what she jokingly called "luxurious accommodations" -- a two-bedroom trailer with the toilet and shower in the middle. The furnishings consisted of a cot, a metal folding chair, a dorm size refrigerator on a small table, a sink and a metal locker to store clothing and other belongings. "So many good things happened, it offset the lodging," she said. "Best of all, was spending Christmas on the beach with our FEMA family and the invited Blackhawk crew. As we Femites know, our FEMA family is as precious to us as our blood family is."

Roberson added, "As the years passed and many, many disasters went by, it became a way of life and I wouldn't trade my job for any other. Each disaster was different – seeing old friends and making new ones and some applicants stayed in your heart from the moment you met them."

Judy Neal, a Region III Logistics Reservist characterizes her years with FEMA as "wonderful."

The first disaster she worked was in 1985, when tornados hit Pennsylvania. "I was assigned as a receptionist," she says. "I had never been exposed to destruction and death before and was shocked at everything I witnessed, including the reactions of two different families that had total differing reactions to losing a child. Their reactions went from one end of the spectrum to the other – hyper to stupor."

Neal continued, "One elderly lady came in the last day at the last minute to place an application. She informed me that 'that damn thing just picked me up and put me in a tree. It was over 24 hours before they found me.'"

Neal's last deployment brought her full circle. "I was again the receptionist, in 2008 for the Parkersburg, Iowa tornados. I was born in Parkersburg, West Virginia. Then a young man came to the reception desk and gave me his name. It was my maiden name! Then I knew I had come full circle."

FEMA 30 Years of Commitment

"On Call" will be featuring more stories from long-time Reservists this anniversary year. Send your contribution to FEMA-DRWD-Program@dhs.gov

Readiness Branch

Paul Geiger,
Branch Chief

Be Ready to Work -- It's Hurricane Season

With 2009 Hurricane Season here and the first tropical depression already blown by, the Readiness Branch would like to see all Reservists make themselves available for deployment.

Our office wants to remind you to keep the following items with you while you are deployed: First, your Cadre Managers contact information; they are here to support you. Second, your timekeepers contact information, in case you encounter a payroll issue. Lastly, please remember to keep your Government Travel Charge Card with you at all times and to voucher out every two weeks so that you don't encounter delinquency while deployed.

To show the strength of the Reservist Workforce we are going to need all hands on deck from the Reservists.

Thank you for your continued support of the DRWD mission. You are important for the success of FEMA.

Remember to call ADD every 30 days to update your status.
1-888-853-9648

External Affairs

Ike Web Site A First for Texas Disasters

To support FEMA's philosophy of open information, the JFO of 1791-DR (Ike) developed the first Texas disaster-specific website. It provides FEMA's state and local partners with access to lots of recovery information, including the latest news of the current disaster for survivors, editors of city dailies, small country weekly reporters, county officials and the taxpayers who make it all happen.

"Thanks to the cooperation of many specialists from all levels of FEMA and other agencies who pooled their efforts to bring immediate and user-friendly access to our disaster data," said Federal Coordinating Officer Brad Harris. "This collaboration is a model for what can be accomplished in the presentation of important information."

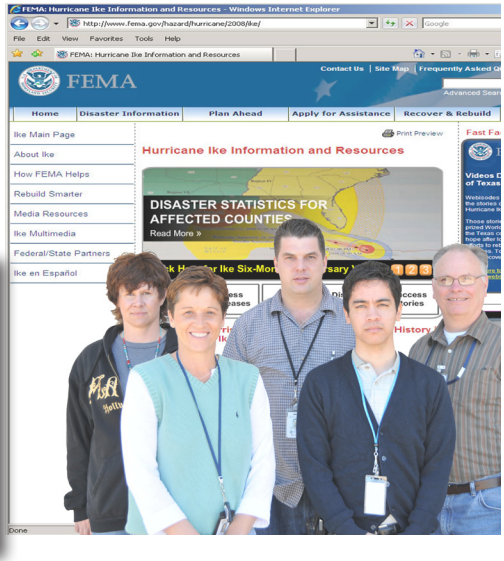
Active in the web project were FEMA's Planning, GIS, GIG, External Affairs, Communications and Support Branch and Mission Services Section and the U.S. Small Business Administration.

This is the first time a Texas disaster has launched its own web site. The web site for Hurricane Ike, www.fema.gov/ike, opens to Photos of the Week and a choice for the Ike Six-Month Anniversary Video. Next are buttons for disaster statistics, press releases, Ike multimedia, disaster recovery and success stories.

With a few clicks, a county official who needs to know the dollar amount for debris removal in his area has the latest information immediately. Editors needing a feature article can find a variety of subjects in the multimedia section. Homeowners with mitigation questions can refer to the success stories and hazard mitigation help sections for ideas.

Also prominent on the site are the weekly message from Federal Coordinating Officer Brad Harris; the Fast Facts widget; and options for hazard mitigation help and the Texas Community Resource Guide.

The Ike multimedia section contains 15 videos. Each video provides an inside look into various recovery projects and ways FEMA is working with the state and local partners to help Texas communities recover.



Web team members Christina Long, Julie Bradford, Sean Stonerock, Daniel Green and Gene McQuade joined other contributors to launch Texas' first disaster-specific web site.

Program Management Branch

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Database (ADD). The current ADD system will remain our primary deployment system for the near future. However, we are working with the IT division to develop a system that will leverage the investment in Web ADD and capitalize on the attributes of ADD and the Data Warehouse. Stand by for more information.

Finally, thanks to everyone who has signed up for DRWD's personal e-mail distribution list. If you haven't signed up yet, send your personal e-mail address to the DRWD mailbox with a subject line of "Personal E-mail Program." and we will add you to the list.

Mandatory Travel Card Training

The DHS Office of the Chief Financial Officer has announced the release of new on-line travel card training entitled "DHS "Travel Card Training." It is mandatory for all DHS travel cardholders.

The training course completion time is approximately 60 minutes and all cardholders must pass with a score of 80% or better.

This new course replaces the mandatory GSA on-line travel card training course and meets the DHS Travel Card Manual requirements for cardholders to be trained every two years. Instructions on completing the training course are available on the DRWD portals.

Fugate's Florida Experience

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the state in quick succession.

In 2005, Florida was impacted by major disasters when three more hurricanes made landfall in the state. Florida launched the largest mutual aid response in its history under the Emergency Management Assistance Compact – after Hurricane Katrina impacted the Gulf Coast states.

Fugate began his emergency management career as a volunteer firefighter, emergency paramedic, and lieutenant with the Alachua County (Fla.) Fire Rescue. He then served as Emergency Manager for Alachua County and then was appointed Bureau Chief for Preparedness and Response for FDEM.

FEMA's New Mission Statement

In mid-June, Administrator Fugate issued a memo with FEMA's new mission statement:

"FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards."

Fugate said, "This mission statement describes our priorities as emergency managers and highlights the role we play as one member of the larger national response team – a team that includes our tribal, state, local, and federal partners as well as the private sector, faith based groups, and the general public.

Reservists Contribute to Kentucky Food Banks

At the Kentucky JFO, Jim Garret, Commonwealth Volunteer Agency (VOLAG) specialist; Susie Calvert, FEMA VOLAG specialist; and Darlene Collins, FEMA Federal Coordinating Officer Executive Assistant, pose with some of the 950 pounds of food and other items brought in by Reservists to help stock Kentucky food banks.

FEMA staff deployed to the JFO are working following two disaster declarations in the state. "FEMA has people from all over the United States working here," said FCO Kim Kadesch. "We appreciate the opportunity to make these personal contributions to people in need."

The donation by FEMA staff deployed to Kentucky is part of a nationwide "Warm up to Giving" food drive. Federal employees are asked to bring to their workplaces a total of four pounds of food per employee on the last Friday in the months of June, July and August.

Life in the Reservist Lane

Eva Clark, Region IV Reservist

In 2008, on a return trip from a deployment, I arrived in Atlanta for a 9:45 connecting flight back home to Mississippi. I was making my way to my next gate, on the other side of the airport. Then I saw a TV monitor showing flight information – my flight was now leaving from a different gate, in the opposite direction. I had eight minutes to spare, but the door was closed when I arrived. The attendant told me they close the doors 10 minutes before the plane is scheduled to take off, so I needed to book another flight.

The booking agent I called was not concerned about my dilemma. I was told that I could go to another gate and maybe get on an 11:00 flight or I could go to another gate on the other side of the airport and try for a 1:30 flight. I couldn't get a guaranteed flight until 4:30.

I did not want to spend my day running to gates all over that enormous airport only to be turned away again and again. My shoulders hurt from carrying and dragging luggage, my feet hurt, my head hurt and I was just plain tired!

I went to the first gate. That flight was booked and the attendant told me to go to the next gate. I begged her to get me home! I am normally a very calm and easy going person who gets along well with anybody, but I was really being tested! I dialed National Travel and I got an angel on the other end. Thank you!

I explained what had happened. She checked flights and there was an empty seat on the flight leaving from the gate where I was sitting. But when she tried to book it, it disappeared. Another seat popped onto her screen. She very quickly booked it and gave me the confirmation number. I was absolutely ecstatic!

I thanked her but she wouldn't let me hang up yet. She instructed me to go back to the counter and ask to have my name pulled up again. The attendant smirked and said, "I already told you, this flight is booked, and I don't need to try your name again." After I gave her my confirmation number, she couldn't believe it when my name appeared. "How did you do that?" she asked. I replied, "I have an angel on the phone that worked a miracle for me. Now your flight is booked and I am on it!"

The lady with National Travel was still on the phone and she was rolling with laughter.

Folks, trust in National Travel…they will get you home!

What's Your Story?

If you have a unique deployment experience you'd like to share, send an e-mail to FEMA-DRWD-Program@dhs.gov and we will consider it for an upcoming issue of "On Call." Please put "newsletter submission" in the subject line.

Edmonston Honored in Iowa

Congratulations to Russ Edmonston, who was External Affairs lead in Iowa from June 8, 2008 until he returned home in May 2009.

Before he left that deployment, the State Coordinating Officer presented him with a coin "presented by the Division Administrator" from the Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Department in recognition of his distinguished, valuable and highly valued service to the citizens of Iowa.

National Travel 1-800-294-8283
Remember, do NOT travel until officially deployed by ADD!

Useful Sites

External Affairs Initiatives, Activities and General Information for Reservists
http://www.fema.gov/pao/daeinfo.shtm
Emergency Management Institute, online Independent Study courses
http://training.fema.gov/IS/
Disaster Workforce task books and online assessment guides
http://www.learningservices.us/fema/taskbooks/index.cfm
DRWD latest news, FAQs and more. Enter your user name and password
https://portal.fema.gov