September/October 2009

FEMA

On Call

Disaster Reserve Workforce News

Floods, Storms, Mudslides & Ice Jams Keep FEMA Busy

FEMA Video Specialist Daniel Llargues interviews an Eagle, Alaska resident.

FEMA Individual Assistance Specialists work with residents in the Gilbert, W. Va. Disaster Recovery Center.

Reservists Stephen Szmyr and Connie Mills talk to a local resident about mitigation outreach inside the Lowe's in Johnson County, Kentucky.

FEMA Housing Specialist Randy Edwards helps a candidate with paperwork for a newly-opened housing site in Taylorville, W. Va.

Reservist Lynne Carrier gives a Fargo, N.D. resident disaster information translated into Arabic.

Individual Assistance worker Matthew Chapman uses a GPS device to ensure a temporary FEMA home in Seaport, Texas isn't in a designated flood plane.

Deployment Snapshot -- 9/1/09

Total Reservists Deployed: 1,842

Texas 273	Louisiana 101
Kentucky 172	Alaska 96
Missouri 134	Arkansas 79

Sick Leave Policy Implemented

Administrator Fugate authorized an interim policy to provide Sick Leave Pay to deployed Disaster Reservists. It took effect in August.

Under the policy, Reservists can use sick leave for medical/dental reasons while deployed.

The interim policy authorizes FEMA managers and supervisors to approve sick leave for Reservists deployed at Headquarters, Regions, fixed-site facilities, field establishments, and/or at temporary duty sites.

Reservists earn one hour of sick leave for every 20 regular hours they are in a pay status, with a maximum of four hours earned each pay period.

Reservists must be in a deployed status and not on rotation. They must be scheduled to work during the period sick leave is requested.

Details are available from the Disaster Reserve Workforce Division (DRWD) web portal and DRW Liaisons.

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Produced by the Disaster Reserve Workforce Division

Blair Gately, Editor

DRW Liaisons Meet

The Disaster Reserve Workforce Division (DRWD) hosted a three-day workshop in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia last month with the DRW Regional Liaisons – to discuss their roles and responsibilities, provide updates on credentialing and recruiting programs, and obtain input on several topics.

During the three-day session, the Program Management, Deployment and Readiness Branch Chiefs each spoke about their current initiatives, including policies and directives, credentialing plans and recruitment efforts. In addition, Richard Drury and Shirley Schell from Human Capital gave a briefing on TALENTLink, FEMA's new automated recruitment system, and outlined how it will simplify and speed hiring and onboarding of new staff.

Anne Hogan, Region VII's DRW Liaison, said, "the conference was very beneficial for all liaisons to build trust and communication with each other and, just as importantly, with staff from headquarters." She said she looks forward to the new projects and successes that will follow the meeting.

Region I's representative, Michael A. Brown, said the liaisons and DRWD staff talked about program goals and priorities, as well as "methods to improve effective collaboration and communication between DRW Branches and Regions." He said the demands of cadre management in the Regions were a topic of concern.

"As a group, we collectively affirmed that liaisons have the

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Letter from Philip A. Nowak, Acting DRWD Director

Are You Ready?

The Agency-sponsored internet site Ready.gov sums things up pretty well:

Prepare. Plan. Stay Informed.

That is as true for you and me as citizens as it is for us as emergency management professionals.

The web site http://www.ready.gov/ is easy to navigate and has many tools you can use in your own personal disaster plan.

Are you ready?

One obvious response to the question is "Ready for what?"

While the 2009 Atlantic Hurricane Season has been far less active than 2008, FEMA is actively working other disasters. The front page of this edition features snapshots of you and employees like you assisting survivors and communities. They were ready.

Other Agency activities are not so easily observed, but are just as real. H1N1 Influenza is here and you have doubtless heard about the many efforts underway to meet the challenge.

Administrator Fugate says it is imperative that each and every employee has general knowledge and awareness of H1N1, and an understanding of preventive measures we can take to stay healthy. Information and resources on H1N1 are available at the federal government's web site http://www.flu.gov/

The Administrator's active sponsorship of Sick Leave is a most timely bit of added protection for Reservists. DRWD has issued guidance tailored to DAEs on issues such as lodging reimbursement if you get sick while deployed and have no remaining Sick Leave, and the use of administrative leave when an entire work site is closed. (Agency policy prohibits the use of administrative leave as a substitute for Sick Leave).

This edition features updates on issues of interest to <u>you</u> – Credentialing, our recent workshop with your DRW Liaisons, and personal deployment accountability. It also includes a number of articles by Reservists like you, recounting their field experiences.

Like my reference to Ready.gov, use this newsletter to come up with your own answer to the question:

Are you ready?

Program Management Branch

Layne Smith, Branch Director

PM Update

I'd like to express a huge "thank you" to FCO Doug Mayne and his great team at the Anchorage, Alaska JFO for their gracious hospitality and support of my visit in early August. It was an eye-opening, educational experience seeing how the JFO worked to address and resolve issues created by the flooding of several remote villages. Doug's team met every challenge with dedication, determination, and some very innovative solutions to help people whose homes and villages were damaged or destroyed. I appreciated getting the chance to observe an incredibly dedicated group of individuals at work.

Speaking of dedicated individuals, the Policy Section continues to work toward consistency and standardization of Disaster Reserve Workforce administration. With the issuance of a sick leave clarification and guidance memorandum, specific instructions for recording and approving Reservist sick leave should help supervisors and managers better account for this benefit. Additionally, the Human Capital Division will soon publish procedures on requesting re-crediting of sick leave earned during previous federal employment.

Finally, the Systems Section is rapidly moving forward with plans to provide a maintenance and back-up plan for the Agency's deployment system, as well as analyze and identify the capability of our current systems and the requirements for a follow-on system to ADD. It is exciting to get involved in implementing change and innovation.

FEMA Celebrates 30th Anniversary; Long-time Reservists Recount Experiences, Part 2

As FEMA celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, "On Call" is featuring remembrances of long-time Reservists. This is Part 2.

Barbara Iles, a Region VIII Individual Assistance Reservist, Deputy IA Branch Director in Region VIII, has worked more than 200 disasters. She started work in 1976 when the Teton Dam in Idaho collapsed.

"My family was from Shelley, Idaho and I was living in Denver," she said. "When the dam collapsed, I flew over on a weekend to see my sister, who was working in a Ramada Inn as the head housekeeper. She introduced me to a guest who was staying there who was working as a contractor winterizing mobile homes that HUD had set up for the disaster victims. This person she introduced me to eventually became my husband and I became a disaster follower."

John Ellis, a Region VI Individual Assistance Reservist, began working for FEMA in 1983 in Hammond, La. – at the age of 20.

"It was a lot of fun, he said, "we'd head over to Bourbon Street after work and watch the people who were visiting from all over."

His longest deployments were two years in Houston in '02 and '03 and a year in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina.

Ellis says when he first began working for FEMA, there was no national deployment system.

"Reservists worked for the Regional Office and only went outside that area when another region needed help. In the 1980's I worked only in Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas, but in the last several years I've worked from Virginia to California, as well as in New York, North Carolina, New Mexico and Oklahoma."

Josie Arcurio, now a CORE employee in Region IX, has been with FEMA and its predecessor agencies since 1977. For 29 of those years she was a Reservist.

She started her career as a Reservist with Region III when her hometown of Johnstown, Pa. flooded in 1977. Her first disaster assignment was Mobile Home Controls Specialist in support of the Mobile Home Group Site operations.

Arcurio has worked in nine of 10 FEMA regions, including the Caribbean and Pacific Islands and the territories of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, and Palau. She has overseen the delivery of disaster relief assistance in more than 100 major federal disasters and emergency declarations throughout her career. Her most recent disaster deployment was Hurricane Gustav in 2009.

"Some of my most memorable assignments have been in the Pacific Islands, where I enjoyed the diversity and traditional customs, as well as the challenges of responding to disasters in remote conditions,"she added.

Pat Moser, a Region IV Reservist, began working for FEMA's predecessor, FDAA, when a tornado hit

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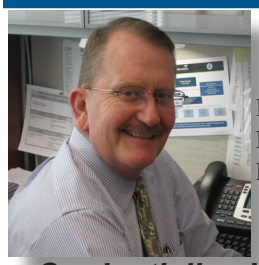
Readiness Branch



Paul Geiger, Branch Director

Credentialing Web Site

We have made the recently approved cadre specific plans available to you online!

In order to keep you informed of the changes taking place, we have made some changes to the Disaster Reserve Workforce Credentialing website. When accessing the portal you can now view the most up-to-date FEMA Agency-Wide Credentialing Plan, as well as individual cadre credentialing plans, which are available online for your convenience.

In order to access the internal portal you must have a user name and password. To acquire this information please contact your cadre manager or DRWD Liaison for assistance.

Once online you may read through your cadre's specialized credentialing plan, which will help answer many of your questions.

Thus far, five cadre specific credentialing plans are available; Contracting and Acquisition, DFTO, Logistics, Public Assistance and Security.

As new credentialing plans are finalized they will be added to the website. Also, please take advantage of the other resources, including Credentialing and Migration FAQs.

More to come!

Call ADD every 30 days.
1-888-853-9648

Credentialing Opens Toll-Free Number

The Credentialing Branch now has a toll free number for credentialing and migration questions. They have begun sending out migration reports for the cadres that have completed their credentialing plans. Migration reports will continue to be distributed in a phased approach into 2010.

If you have questions, call 1-877-789-3362 between 0700 – 1700 ET Monday through Friday. You can also email the Branch at FEMA-DRWD-Credentialing@dhs.gov

DRW Liaisons

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most positive effect on FEMA field office program delivery through their support of DRWD program goals for the Regional Reservist," Brown added.

DRWD's acting director, Philip Nowak, said liaisons are viewed as the day-to-day Regional Points of Contact for all Reservist issues. He said many other Regional stakeholders also play a vital role in managing the Disaster Reserve Workforce, including Administrative Services Specialists, Regional Training Managers, Staffing Points of Contact and Cadre Managers.

"There a lot of moving parts in managing the Disaster Reserve Workforce, and we owe it to ourselves to make sure these parts work together as efficiently and effectively as possible," Nowak said. He is working with Management Directorate offices in the Regional Offices to set up a stakeholder group to better define the role of the liaisons.

Long-time Reservists

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Wichita Falls, Texas in 1979.

Her husband suggested she go to Sheppard Air Force Base, where the DFO was set up and where he was stationed, to volunteer.

"I met with Patti LaBrosse and she told me that they did not have volunteers, but would I be interested in a job? I guess you could say she changed my life."

Moser was hired in April 1979 as a Local Hire Clerk/Typist and later became a Personnel Assistant.

It was during that disaster that FEMA came into being.

Moser remembers what ensued with the formation of the new agency.

"All the stationery, franked envelopes, signs and banners had to be changed. It was a huge job. I had never seen a fax machine and soon I was in charge of sending faxes from Personnel to Headquarters. It took twenty minutes for one page to go. It spun around on a tube-like thing for what seemed like forever." She remembers the copying machine "taking up a whole room."

After her stint as a Local Hire, Moser became a DAE.

Her favorite deployment was to Albany, Ga. because it was her first chance to be a Lead and prove what she could do, but also because "we got to know Albany and got to see Jimmy Carter and I made some of my most memorable friendships there."

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

Deployment Branch

Tracy Haynes, Branch Director

Deployment Basics

All FEMA employees are subject to deployment and may be called at any time, particularly during large-scale or catastrophic events. With the exception of the Senior Executive Service, all FEMA employees must be deployed through the Automated Deployment Database (ADD) prior to travel.

DAEs cannot deploy until they receive a call from DRWD Deployment Branch personnel. Deploying without a call from the Deployment Branch subjects the employees involved to early release and other administrative actions.

Once deployed through ADD, all employees must formally check-in upon arrival at their destination and check-out upon completion of the assignment. While on assignment, all employees must report changes in duty-station locations, changes in contact information, and changes in lodging by calling the DRWD ADD deployment line at (888) 853-9648 and selecting Option 1.

FEMA's "Conditions of Employment" lists other requirements for Reservists. They must update their availability in ADD once every 30 days and must make themselves available for deployment at least 60 days each year.

Reservists' support of the deployment process is essential since every transaction impacts FEMA's execution of its mission.

Do NOT travel until officially deployed by ADD!

Tribal Deployment to Alaska Native Villages

Steven M. Golubic, FEMA Tribal Liaison

This deployment was not your ordinary Alaskan fishing, hunting, or cruise vacation most people envision when they think about Alaska.

This one was different in many ways. It was in response to the spring floods along the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers spanning hundreds of miles of Alaskan territory and affecting several Native Alaskan Villages, from Eagle, near the Canadian border, to Emmonak, along the Bering Sea.

The April ice breakup and snow melt created ice jams along the Yukon River, where ice floes as big as a house were pushed down river. Record high water added to the problem as ice jams in excess of 40 miles were reported. Homes and buildings were moved several hundred feet off their original foundations and many were turned into kindling wood.

Unlike many declarations, the April Alaska floods did not affect major cities or population hubs. Instead, those affected were Alaska Natives who live in very remote and small villages. Their historic buildings, cemeteries, sacred sites, homes, schools and communities suffered the effects of the ice and floods.

Many Alaskan Natives live by subsistence or "off the land" and do not have access to the conveniences of a Wal-Mart, Home Depot, grocery store or gas station. Some do not have electricity, city water and sewer systems, or paved roads. Supplies are few and must come from many miles away.

Rebuilding cannot be delayed due to the extremely short construction season. The two most common means of supply delivery are by river barge or air cargo. Even the mail can take weeks to arrive.

Responding to an Alaskan disaster is difficult in the interior of the state. Cell phones and Blackberrys don't work because there is no coverage. Native villagers usually communicate by VHS radio, unless they are connected to a local phone provider.

Logistics plays a major role because FEMA field staff usually must fly to the remote villages, and coordinating the charter flights is a major task. FEMA staff members are required to carry a survival pack in the event they cannot make it back to the joint field office in the city. In some villages, the FEMA staff must sleep in community buildings, tents, or campers.

Did I mention the bears? During one of our visits to Stevens Village, north of Fairbanks, we came across a village elder whose task for the day was to walk through the village looking for the grizzly that was seen in the area. The elder was carrying a rifle and was prepared to defend the village if necessary.

As I said, this wasn't your ordinary disaster because things are different in Alaska. We all need to be prepared for an unusual deployment. You never know what is around the bend of the river when you are in the interior of Alaska. It could be the grizzly looking for its next meal and not the nearest Starbucks.

Life in the Reservist Lane

Joe A. Serbia, Region IV Reservist

I was getting ready for a deployment and my wife came in and inquired about the way I was packing. "Lots of people roll their clothes when they pack," I said defensively.

"No, I meant why are you packing the wrong suitcase?" she said. I hadn't realized I was packing a small bag that 's not adequate for long trips.

She looked at me and asked, "Are you sure you work for FEMA?" I ignored her.

A while later, I was searching for a missing sock. I had five-and-a-half-pairs; She found it, of course. There came the look again.

"Did you pack your other suitcase?" she asked. "No, I didn't unpack it from the last deployment." I got the look again "And people depend on you to be organized?" she asked.

I didn't answer because I was busy wondering how it is that my wife can make me feel like an eight year old with that look.

"Do you have your paperwork in order? She asked.

I couldn't find my passport, but she wondered why I needed it to go to Kentucky.

"No, I don't need it, but I was checking it the other day and I thought I put it in my briefcase." She found it of course, but not where I thought I put it. "Are you sure you work for FEMA?" Again with the irritating question.

The ride to the airport was uneventful. I refused help with my luggage at the departure terminal and waddled over to the check-in with my three overstuffed bags. My e-ticket was hanging precariously from my lips. I couldn't put the bags down without some contorting maneuvers and so I leaned forward and dropped the ticket on the counter.

The woman behind the counter picked it up gingerly and started checking me in. "How many bags Sir?" She inquired, "Three." I said. "All right sir, that'll be $140.00." "What?" I asked. "The third bag…" She said mechanically "…costs $100.00 to check in."

I winced "Miss, the bag and all its contents aren't worth $100.00."

"Why don't you re-pack it into another bag?" She asked. I settled for re-packing it into my other suitcase.

"And you work for FEMA, Sir?" She asked when I returned with my two bags. I studied the context in which she was asking before responding, unsure if it was an accusatory inquiry. "Sometimes." I responded meekly.

The rest of the trip was marginally bearable, but without incident. I ran a mental checklist over and over again as I processed my way through the deployment sequence; vehicle, rental, hotel check-in, call ADD, check-in at the JFO, gather my equipment. I developed a plan and prepared my lists of actions, applicants and plunged into my work like a warrior ready to do battle. I dialed my first applicant and listened until someone picked up – "Hi, this is Joe, and I work for FEMA…"

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.

West Point Cadet Interns with FEMA

As part of a summer intern program, West Point Cadet Peter Rome spent three weeks visiting the Region VII office and a Joint Field Office in Missouri.

Rome, class of 2010, is from Fayetteville, N.C., and is carrying on a family tradition. His father is a retired first sergeant.

While at the JFO in Jefferson City, Mo., Rome learned how FEMA responds to disaster declarations. He also attended a Public Assistance applicant briefing, and participated in a Congressional visit.

The internship provided Rome with an opportunity to understand the role FEMA plays in disaster management, along with how the military interacts with FEMA in everyday relations and during incidents.

"I was surprised to see that there was an Army component to FEMA, and how similar the different components are to the Army" said Rome.

At the Region VII office, Rome participated in a three-hour simulated earthquake COOP exercise.

"Most people understand not only their own jobs, but also how their job fits into the big picture," said Rome.

West Point Cadet Peter Rome works with Planning Section Chief Sandra Sunde at the Jefferson City JFO.