

FEMA Media Teleconference Call for Gustav

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PARTICIPANTS: Harvey E. Johnson, Jr
Rear Admiral Brian Salerno
Bill Irwin
Armond Mascelli
Brigadier General Donald Fick
Dr. Kevin Yeskey

ABBREVIATIONS: [U/I] = Unintelligible
[PH] = Phonetic Spelling

Speaker

Transcription

FEMA: Thank you. And I want to thank everyone for participating this afternoon with FEMA in the news briefing on Federal preparations for Gustav. I'll run down the format of who will report out which will be followed by a section of Q and A*. First we will have Rear Admiral Brian Solerano, Assistant Commandant for Marine Safety, Security and Stewardship, the U.S. Coast Guard. Followed by Armond Mascelli, the Vice President of Disaster Services for the American Red Cross. We will then have Brigadier General Donald Fick, Acting Director, Joint Staff of the National Guard Bureau. Followed by Bill Irwin, from the U.S. Army Corp. of Engineers and Rear Admiral

Christopher Kolvin[PH], an Operations Officer for U.S. Northern Command. FEMA's Deputy Administrator, Admiral Harvey Johnson, who is running a little behind will report out briefly near the end. We'll go ahead and get started for today with the United States Coast Guard.

Rear Admiral Brian Solerano:

Yes. Uh, good afternoon. Uh, well, the Coast Guard is at heightening alert. Um, and as we go through the next several days uh, the types of activity that will take place will include coordination with the commercial operators and the uh, potentially affected port areas to uh, to prepare those port areas and minimize the likelihood of damage. We will relocate Coast Guard aircraft, vessels and boats that are within a projected path of the storm, uh, locate them in ... in a location that will uh, keep them out of harm's way until the storm has passed so that they will be in position to quickly move in behind the storm and begin our normal post storm activity including search and rescue.

Uh, we are mobilizing special teams uh, from our Deployable Operations Group to work with interagency uh, response efforts. That may include at range from law enforcement capabilities, hazardous materials response and planning efforts in ... in command centers. Beginning this weekend we will over fly uh,

areas uh, of projected impact uh, prior to the storm's arrival so that we can identify any areas that might be of particular interest, that might be a focus of pre-storm preparation or ... or post-storm emphasis.

We anticipate this will be very dynamic couple of days working with our interagency partners and with the uh, at the Federal, State and local level. I'll stand by for any questions.

FEMA: We have Armand Maselli, Vice President of Disaster Services for the American Red Cross.

Armand Maselli: Um, good afternoon. Uh, the Red Cross is working with uh, it's government partners, in particular uh, local government, State government, Federal government uh, to ensure that uh, facilities uh, namely shelters are available for people um, if and when they need to evacuate. Uh, because of the uncertainty of the storm uh, we actually have uh, standing up field operations in ... in uh, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. And uh, those facilities are working with our local chapters, who are in turn working with uh, local emergency management offices uh, regarding evacuation plans. And ... and making sure shelters are available.

Uh, in addition to that uh, based on experience, we're bringing in uh, additional supplies and equipment. I actually started that uh, on uh, Tuesday to make sure that if it's needed to augment what's on the ground there, that that stuff is available.

And that includes things like emergency response vehicles that are trucks that we use to do uh, bulk distribution and mobile feeding if it's needed in an area. Things like cots and blankets and uh, personal hygiene kits. Uh, also we're working with a number of our partners, including the Southern Baptists uh, in terms of uh, after the storm um, uh, in terms that if there's going to be a need for feeding, emergency feeding because of ... of damage and power outage within the area uh, that uh, we'd be able to do that and uh, to start in a comprehensive way. So a lot of activity. Uh, again, a lot of this is scripted, a lot of it, frankly, based on lessons learned from uh, Katrina. Uh, in terms of looking at wide area that could be affected by a disaster and then what's needed in ... in those areas.

Uh, additional work is going on uh, with uh ... uh, uh, a number of the other volunteer groups within the area to make sure that we're coordinating information which uh, will be important uh,

after the storm lifts in terms of providing uh, additional services to people. Uh, I should mention and I know we will in likelihood get into evacuation, we have a uh, a website called uh ... uh, Safe and Well. It's actually a part of the uh, redcross.org – www.redcross.org that people when they decide to evacuate they can uh, go on that website and uh, leave messages or information for loved ones.

We are a very mobile population here in the United States. Uh, we have family uh, friends and relatives and loved ones that live across the uh, country. So when people evacuate uh, a lot of times relatives don't, may not know where they're going or if they're safe and well. So what we're touting is that uh, either before folks evacuate or if they get to the destination area, that they do access that website. There is a process that uh, will protect them from the uh, uh, the hazard degree of anonymity so they don't need to worry about information with folks that they don't want information shared.

But we are uh, heavily encouraging that, that as folks leave and get to their destination, that uh, they go on the Safe and Well uh, Safe and Well site of our website so uh, folks can uh, determine

where they are.

Uh, so I'll just stop there and ... and uh, I'll be available for questions.

FEMA:

Okay. Thank you very much. Next we have Brigadier General Donald Fick who is the Acting Director, Joint Staff, of the National Guard Bureau.

*Brigadier General
Donald Fick:*

Uh, thank you, Ashley. Good afternoon. As you may or may not know the uh, National Guard has a unique band-aid. Uh, we pre-position National Guard forces and capabilities to allow the Guard to respond in support of civil authorities to do four things: save lives via the evacuation and rescue, preserve or restore civil order, maintain or reestablish communications and ensure continuity of operations in government.

Today we have more than 400,000 National Guardsmen across the country who are available to meet any contingency. In the Gulf States region directly threatened by Hurricane Gustav, there are 65,000 National Guard soldiers and airmen available.

Many of our National Guardsmen are combat veterans whose cohesiveness under stress and other emergency response

learned skills are a forced multiplier for emergencies such as this.

This hurricane season our planning and preparation is rock solid because of the tight coordination with our Federal Interagency partners and the governors and state emergency management offices. We are much more prepared for a Katrina like hurricane than we were three years ago. Your National Guard is constantly applying lessons learned. We have more than sufficient troops available, more and better equipment and a wealth of experience. The National Guard Bureau began hosting bi-weekly VTCs with the hurricane states beginning June 5th which during this crisis is daily.

That allows the National Guard Bureau and the States to stay on top of the hurricane response. Congress and the Department of Defense have made a serious commitment to ensure that the National Guard is equipped for this mission. A mission that is as equally important here at home as the ones we're doing overseas.

The National Guard is the first military responder during domestic

emergencies when a civilian response capability has been stretched and additional assistance is needed. We are aware of Tropical Storm Hannah and are insuring we don't move equipment and supplies from one region to another when it may be needed in the very near future.

Time and distance equal American lives. The National Guard is already forward deployed all along the U.S. Coast and in nearly every zip code in America. The National Guard is superbly suited to do this mission. We have highly trained citizen soldiers and airmen who have the skills and capabilities needed for disaster response. That National Guard is well prepared. Thank you.

FEMA:

Okay, thank you so much, National Guard. Um, we're going to move next to Health and Human Services, Dr. Kevin Yesky[PH]

Dr. Kevin Yesky:

Good afternoon. This is Kevin Yesky from uh, Health and Human Services where our role is really to protect the public's health in these events. Uh, we've ... we've done a number of uh, different things in preparation for Hurricane Gustav uh, to include working with our interagency partners and our uh, state and local partners as well. Our regional emergency coordinators uh, are working with uh, state and local health departments and uh,

ensuring that we have liaison officers and representation in the state operation centers uh, as well as some of the other uh, operation centers that are ... that are uh, in ... in states.

Uh, this has been a uh ... a departmental activity. We have uh, many of our operating divisions like CDC[PH] and the Food and Drug Administration, uh, our agency, our Administration for Children and Families and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services involved in the response. For instance, our Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration is processing request from the Gulf states to permit the dispensing for medications for mental health patients. Our Administration on Aging is coordinating with state and local agencies in contacting homebound seniors and assisting state and local uh, personnel in delivering uh, shelf stable meals to homebound seniors uh, in communities that are expecting to shelter and place.

On the ... on the medical side we have activated our National Disaster Medical System. Uh, we will have medical personnel, including nine Disaster Medical Assistance Teams, 11 Medical Strike teams, and three Incident Response Coordination teams moving into Florida, Louisiana, Texas and Mississippi uh, to

augment state and local response capabilities into uh, perform missions like assisting with medical evacuations or augmenting medical care for uh, either damaged or uh, hospitals that were uh, receiving casualties.

Uh, we have uh, approximately 600 personnel deploying today and tomorrow with another 400 medical personnel uh, standing by on advisory. We have nine Federal Medical Stations each with a 250 bed capacity uh, on alert and ... and ready to move in. And our U.S. Public Health Service uh, Rapid Deployment Force Medical teams are activated and uh, moving in to the uh ... the uh, potentially affected areas.

We have caches of medical supplies and material moving into uh, places and areas that we anticipate a landfall today. And uh, I think I will conclude my comments there and uh, I look forward to your questions.

Guy McGuinn[PH]: Ashley, this is Guy McGuinn. Uh, may we change the order a little bit? We got a 1300 VTC to go forward. Admiral Coleman.

FEMA: You sure can.

Guy McGuinn: Great. Admiral Coleman from U.S. Northcom.

FEMA: Okay.

Admiral Coleman: Good afternoon, Ashley. I'm Admiral Chris Coleman, uh, the Director of Operations here at Northcom. Uh, our ... our mission at U.S. Northern Command uh, with uh, regard to uh, defense support civil authorities is to support the civil authorities. Uh, first and foremost uh, the uh, we support the state uh, through FEMA, through the uh, primary Federal Agency, which in this case will be FEMA. And we will work uh, in conjunction with that.

Uh, we will be able to provide resources as needed, uh, which we worked through our Defense Coordinating Officer and we have uh, two Defense Coordinating Officers assigned so far for this uh, uh, potential disaster. And one is uh, Colonel Bullet Young[PH] who is going to Louisiana. The other is Colonel Rick Jenkins[PH] who is going to Texas. Uh, and there is a possibility we will find more Defense Coordinating Officers for Mississippi, Alabama and/or Florida if needed.

But through those Defense Coordinating Officers working uh, through the uh, primary Federal Agency, FEMA, we uh, determined uh, requirements. And we fill those requirements uh, as needed. Uh, so far uh, we uh, we anticipate uh, that the State, local and Federal Agencies as supported by the State

National Guard as you just heard uh, General Fick uh, talk, the uh, the State National Guard has tremendous capabilities. And uh, we anticipate uh, that we may have to assist perhaps in search and rescue. We may have to assist in uh, medical transportation. However, in general, we're finding that the State, local and Federal agencies and the ... and the State National Guards are tremendously more capable than they were three years ago in Katrina.

And uh, we're hopeful that uh, we'll uh, not need our ... our Quick Response Force which is uh, currently Second Brigade Combat Team out of Fort Drum or are our Ready Duty Amphibious Response Groups which will be the U.S.S. Baton or U.S.S. Nassau uh, all on strings to if needed get them down there to the New Orleans area.

Uh, again, we think that this will be unlikely because of the uh, outstanding preparations between State, local, FEMA and uh, the National Guard. But we're standing by in case needed. Uh, I'm subject to your questions. Over.

FEMA: Okay. Thank you. Next will be the Army Corp. of Engineers.

Bill Irwin: Good afternoon. My name is Bill Irwin with the Army Corp. of

Engineers. The Corp. of Engineers is working on two fronts right now for the current uh, threat that we have in the Gulf and in the Atlantic. So one, we're working under FEMA under the National Response framework and providing support there. But we're also looking at the threats of the greater New Orleans hurricane storm damage risk reduction system in particular.

Uh, first of all, with regards to our FEMA support, the Corp. of Engineers has over 40 specialized teams that we have available and we're developing contingency plans right now to assist uh, FEMA in providing augmentation to the states for such things as temporary emergency power to critical facilities, temporary grouping, uh, the procurement of water and the delivery of water to the States if they require that. And we also are working with the EPA and other agencies to uh, look at the infrastructure after an event like this, to look at the water and wastewater infrastructure.

Also I'd like to mention the uh, greater New Orleans hurricane storm reduction system. With regards to this system, this system is stronger and better than it was prior to Katrina. But I do want to emphasize that the work, this is a work in progress. We have

uh, work that is underway that won't be completed until 2011. So limited protection is provided in some areas. So there are gaps in the system, but the system is stronger and better than ever.

An example, the vulnerability would be uh, some of the areas that the inner harbor can now and right now the Corp. of Engineers has uh, teams out that are uh, strengthening that area. They're putting out some temporary flood fighting uh, structures along an 1,800-foot section of that inner harbor navigation right now and that work will be completed tomorrow. I stand by for your questions.

FEMA: Okay, thank you Army Corp. We're going to have a report out from our Deputy Administrator of FEMA, Admiral Johnson. Thank you.

Admiral Johnson: Hi. And I know that you've been listening to a number of briefers here, so I won't repeat what they've said. Uh, let me just say that we just concluded a video teleconference. And it was longer than normal. It was about an hour and a half and normally we keep these at an hour. But in addition to have the whole Federal FEMA, we had Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, Florida, Texas and Louisiana. All of their emergency managers are on this VTC. And South Carolina

as well. And it gave us a chance to get a good sense of the readiness today and the plans for the upcoming several days in getting ready for not only Hurricane Gustav, but uh, Tropical Storm Hannah that could be a Hurricane by ... by Sunday.

Uh, we reminded each other that we have a National Response framework and that's what guides us on how we work with each other uh, with the States having the lead Federal support and how we provide support one to the other. Uh, we talked about the value of a chain of command and the value of staying with a game plan. We've all worked very, very hard over the last two years and planning and training and assessing and exercising and being ready for the next ... next uh, big hurricane. And Gustav is going to be it.

And I don't want to be uh, over confident, but I do want to be uh, somewhat pleased to see that there's capability in every single state that didn't exist two years ago. And remarkable improvements in the level of cooperation of partnership from state to state and in the respect and the uh, and the partnership between Federal and State – we're all in this, at the same pace, we're all in this together.

And so I trust that uh, as you've heard these reports that part of our objective is to instill confidence uh, in each other, confidence with the States and confidence with the American public that in fact uh, governments can work together in time of need and we're about to have that need arrive on our doorstep Monday night with Tropical Storm force winds and a hurricane making landfall in the Northern Gulf of Mexico, the Central Gulf of Mexico on uh, Tuesday morning.

*Q & A Unavailable