

News Release

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Local Emergency Managers Take Issue with DHS on Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG)

(Falls Church, VA – February 21, 2006) “Our members have been through the worst natural disaster in U.S. history...many literally risking their lives to do their duty. To hear federal officials say our efforts are not in the national interest is very frustrating.” This was the reaction of Kent Buckley, President of the Mississippi State Civil Defense/Emergency Management Association who, along with other representatives of the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), has been surprised by recent statements by DHS representatives which, they believe, seriously mischaracterize the nature and importance of the Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG).

EMPG is a long-standing federal program which provides assistance to state and local personnel who do emergency planning, training, exercising and inter-disciplinary coordination. The program was recently cut by approximately \$13M in the DHS 2007 budget proposals. These cuts came even after the glaring failures of coordination and collaboration during the Federal, state and local response to the catastrophic events along the Gulf Coast. Buckley pointed out that the program had been seriously under-funded for years and required significant additional funding just to catch up. “This was always supposed to be a 50% federally matched program, but in my state we’ve been lucky if we got a 20% federal match.”

When asked recently in congressional hearings about the rationale for the EMPG cuts, Secretary Chertoff responded that the department preferred not to fund personnel and indicated that doing so was not “a federal interest”. He further stated that “traditionally” the Federal government did not fund personnel.

In response, Michael Selves, IAEM President-Elect and Director of Emergency Management and Homeland Security for Johnson County, Kansas, noted that at the same hearing these remarks were made, the Secretary prominently displayed a copy of the National Plans Review requested by Congress and the President. “The information and analysis contained in the NPR was due to the efforts of hundreds of (EMPG-funded) state and local emergency managers involving thousands of man hours – how is that not a Federal interest?” Selves asked. “Unfortunately, it appears there’s a striking lack of understanding within DHS as to what Emergency managers do. We are in a people- intensive business -- we’re supposed to be the ‘honest brokers’ who bring all the disciplines together to prepare for and to meet the crisis” he concluded.

Robert Bohlmann, IAEM Government Affairs Chairman, E.M. Director in York County, Maine, stated, “To imply that the funding of personnel under EMPG is not a traditional function of the Federal Government is astonishing given that the EMPG program has been in existence since the 1950s. If that’s not a tradition, I’m puzzled as to what is.”

In addition to IAEM, the National Emergency Management Association (comprised of state emergency management officials), the National Association of Counties and numerous state emergency management associations have protested the proposed cuts.