



International Association of Emergency Managers

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News Release

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IAEM Announces Recommendations for Improved Emergency Response

Falls Church, Virginia (Oct. 25, 2005) - Successful response to disasters ranging from hurricanes to terrorism requires serious teamwork. On the disaster team, it is the role of local government emergency managers to call the plays and provide the framework for the supporting roles of state and federal partners. In fact, for the play to work, we fully expect our state and federal partners – Department of Homeland Security (DHS) / Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) – to be in the right place at the right time with the right resources when the disaster response goes beyond our local capabilities.

The International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) believes now is the time for meetings with DHS / FEMA to discuss the game plan. “When we take the field in a disaster, we as local emergency managers, expect every member of our team to come equipped and ready for the game,” said Mike Selves, the association’s Government Affairs co-chair. “FEMA hasn’t been able to play up to their full potential the last few seasons.”

Now is the time to strengthen FEMA before another catastrophic event such as an earthquake on the New Madrid fault or multiple catastrophic events.

Restore FEMA to Independent Agency Status or Greatly Strengthen It

IAEM urges that the Congress and the Administration take strong steps to restore the holistic and coordinated ability of FEMA to act forcefully and effectively in preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. We believe that FEMA should be returned to its previous status of an independent agency reporting directly to the President with a director with cabinet-level status. Recent events demonstrate that the National Emergency Response System has not been improved by placing FEMA in DHS and diminishing its authority.

If this dramatic change is not possible then FEMA must be given significantly more resources, support and independent authority within the DHS.

As local emergency managers, we have seen FEMA in the best of times and the worst of times. We saw FEMA’s ability to respond decline in the late 80s and early 90s when the agency became less focused on all hazards emergency preparedness. After the Hurricane Andrew response in 1992, FEMA was rebuilt and strengthened. A director with expertise and experience in the field was appointed and reported directly to the President. FEMA was considered one of the best performing of all the Federal agencies and was a success story. **It became the agency our citizens expect and deserve.**

FEMA performed well in the response to the events of Sept. 11, 2001. When DHS was formed, we were told FEMA would be the cornerstone of the new department. However FEMA has suffered more than it has benefited and many consider it to be a shell of its former self. Many consider it to have been the piggy bank not the cornerstone.

Funds appropriated to FEMA by Congress have been redistributed to other functions in DHS. Personnel have been detailed to other functions and FEMA was under a personnel freeze for an extended period. FEMA has gone from being an agency that was lean to one that is greatly understaffed at the headquarters and regional levels. In a Wall Street Journal article, Bill Waugh, an emergency management professional at Georgia State University, stated “We reinvented the wheel when we didn’t need to and now have something that doesn’t roll well at all.” The proof is in the results.

Chairman Shuster posed the question, “Where does FEMA belong” in a hearing before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and Emergency Management. The answer given by two county directors of emergency management and a state director of emergency management and former Governor Bob Wise was unanimous—FEMA should be outside of DHS, independent, and reporting directly to the President.

[In addition to former Governor Bob Wise, the panelists at this October 6 hearing were Kent Buckley, president of the Mississippi Emergency Management Association and director of emergency management of Bolivar County Mississippi; Janice Kilgore, director of the Department of Public Safety of Escambia County Florida; and Albert Ashwood, director of the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management.]

Expertise in the Field Necessary for FEMA Leaders

FEMA leadership must have expertise in the field. “The lives of our citizens depend on it,” IAEM President Dewayne West stated. “I applaud the appointment of David Paulison as acting director of FEMA. He is an experienced leader who is highly respected by his peers. This was an encouraging step.”

Preparedness Function Should Not Be Moved Outside of FEMA in Reorganization

The links between the four phases of all hazards emergency management—preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation must be maintained. They are interdependent and all are vital.

“We are very concerned about the moving of preparedness functions out of FEMA as part of the Secretary’s Second Stage Review into a new directorate of Preparedness,” West said. “Preparedness is what emergency managers do every day in order to be able to respond. The separation of this function seems to be a further dismantling. We had hoped the secretary would heed the request of numerous Members of Congress to postpone this part of the reorganization until after the reviews of the Katrina response.”

West noted, however, that IAEM was very encouraged by the Oct. 21, 2005, nomination of George Foresman to be the Undersecretary of DHS for Preparedness. “George Foresman is a superb selection for this position. He has many years of experience in the field and is known for his vision and leadership,” stated West. “IAEM supports his nomination and looks forward to working with him on the challenges he will face.”

IAEM Calls for Establishment of Permanent FEMA Work Group

Every agency needs a reality check as they consider policies. IAEM urges the establishment of a permanent FEMA work group comprised of partners who are stakeholders in the emergency management process including active state and local emergency management practitioners. This would serve as a formal mechanism to enhance coordination and prevent further disconnect between the Federal, state, and local partners.

The International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) is a non-profit organization consisting of more than 2,700 emergency management professional from local, state and the federal governments, military, private industry, and volunteer organizations. IAEM has consistently promoted the goals of saving lives and protecting property during emergencies and disasters since its founding in 1952 as the U.S. Civil Defense Council.

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