

United States Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
April 20, 2006 Hearing

Good morning, Madame Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is Kenneth Horak. I am the Acting Regional Director, Region I, of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). On behalf of FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), I would like to thank you for the opportunity to brief you today on FEMA's efforts with regards to hurricane planning and readiness in the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. This discussion will include FEMA's general authority to mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters of all types, FEMA's role and activities in emergency planning in Rhode Island, and FEMA's specific activities associated with preparing for the 2006 Hurricane Season.

Living in the "Ocean State," Rhode Islanders have certainly witnessed their share of hurricanes. For example, some long term residents of Rhode Island can even still recount, and others, noting watermark plaques on certain buildings, are reminded of, the catastrophic unnamed 1938 Hurricane. The Fox Point hurricane barrier completed in 1966, located at the mouth of the Providence River is an ominous reminder of the 1938 Hurricane and Hurricane Carol in 1954. Hurricane Bob in 1991 was one of the more recent destructive hurricanes to have hit Rhode Island.

FEMA's Role and Statutory Authority to Support State and Local Governments

FEMA derives its primary authority from the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, P.L. 93-288, as amended. This act provides the authority for mitigating the effects of natural and manmade disasters, through awarding grants to states; assisting in preparedness and readiness planning with our Federal, State, local, federally recognized tribal and private sector partners; coordinating the Federal response; provide recovery assistance; and establishing the role of the Federal Coordinating Officer. With the transfer of the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) to the Department of Homeland Security in 2003, FEMA also acquired the authority to activate NDMS to meet the medical needs of the victims of an emergency.¹

Through FEMA's mitigation grant programs -- Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM), Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) and the post-disaster Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), FEMA provides funds and technical assistance to develop State and Local Mitigation Plans (LMP), which assess the communities' risks and vulnerabilities and propose mitigation solutions to reduce those risks. Mitigation planning should be included as part of a community's overall planning effort. By having an LMP, communities have a better understanding of their risks and an awareness of the infrastructure and properties vulnerable to those risks, and can apply for mitigation funding when it is made available under the mitigation grant programs mentioned. Mitigation grant programs are funded on a 75 percent Federal and 25 percent State or local cost-share basis.

¹ The Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Act of 2002.

For example, following Hurricane Bob, Rhode Island used FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funds totaling \$308,000 to repair a pump at the Fox Point Hurricane Barrier, to acquire communications equipment and generators for critical facilities, and to initiate a nationally recognized local mitigation planning process for Rhode Island cities and towns. These initiatives will benefit Rhode Island's preparedness for hurricanes well into the future.

The role of FEMA, the Department of Homeland Security and other Federal, State, local, tribal and private sector partners is further outlined in the National Response Plan (NRP), the nation's all-discipline, all-hazard plan for establishing a single, comprehensive framework for the management of domestic incidents.

FEMA and DHS' new Preparedness Directorate coordinates initiatives that include planning and technical assistance for State, local and tribal governments, and provide support to National Incident Management System (NIMS) implementation and the National Emergency Management Baseline Capability Assessment Program. Further, FEMA operates the Emergency Management Institute (EMI), a national training center for emergency planning, exercise design, and incident command operations for Federal, State, local, tribal and private sector individuals.

FEMA Region I Support and Coordination Activities

FEMA's Region I, which includes Rhode Island, continually supports all-hazards emergency response planning and is acutely aware of the importance of catastrophic emergency response planning. Because of the relatively small size of the New England States, Region I has encouraged a regional, rather than a State-by-State, approach to disaster planning and response. Our designated staging areas, such as Westover Air Force Reserve Base in Massachusetts, support contingencies throughout New England. Other backup staging areas in each New England State have been developed for use, if needed.

This regional approach was validated at the Catastrophic Continuity of Operations/Continuity of Government (COOP/COG) Planning Conference held during the first week of April 2006. Representatives from FEMA Regions I and II, and the States represented by these Regions, developed common planning priorities. We have provided each New England State with a reference compact disk, which includes regional plans and documents to encourage integration across State lines. Our States also actively support coordination across the Canadian border.

There are numerous examples of coordination, including the following:

- FEMA Region I staff members are attending the FEMA-U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Senior Leadership Seminar and a meeting of the National Emergency Response Teams (ERT-N) this week to coordinate activities for the upcoming hurricane season. The Region will convene a meeting to brief the New England

States on information distributed at this conference in an effort to ensure consistent FEMA-State operations. Additionally, Region I plans to schedule a briefing for Congressional staff representing our States on FEMA's "concept of operations" for this hurricane season.

- Region I has a close working relationship with Rhode Island State officials and conducts proactive regional and incident specific planning. As an example, Regional staff has been providing extensive technical assistance to the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA) to develop their commodity distribution, which is the distribution of food, water, ice and other needed materials in the wake of a disaster. Region I will continue to respond to future requests for technical assistance to enhance Rhode Island's emergency management capabilities.
- The Region I Voluntary Agency Liaison (VAL) meets regularly with Rhode Island officials to provide technical assistance. An example of technical assistance includes guidance provided by the FEMA VAL to formalize the Rhode Island Voluntary Organization Active in Disaster (RI VOAD) in 1999 to become a National VOAD member with bylaws and plans.
- FEMA Region I chairs the Regional Interagency Steering Committee comprised of National Response Plan (NRP) Emergency Support Function (ESF) agency representatives. Meetings are conducted quarterly, often with the participation of State emergency officials, addressing issues such as an incident and hazard specific response and multi-agency coordination. Other common themes include the distribution of commodities including ice, water and meals, and restoration of power, water and sewer. Regular efforts are made to share information on capabilities available to assist in disaster response. At the most recent meeting in March, detailed presentations were given and discussions conducted on Lessons Learned from Katrina. Operations officer's meetings with State and Federal operations officers are also conducted regularly to coordinate specific issues such as commodity movement and State's concerns. Additionally, Region I conducts a monthly conference call with the States to ensure continuous communication.
- FEMA Region I provides National Incident Management System/Incident Command System (NIMS/ICS) compliant training and exercise opportunities, with a specific focus on joint, unified State/Federal operations. FEMA Region I has coordinated with the State of Rhode Island to train 32 Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) instructors.
- FEMA Region I will partake in the planning and performance of one of six regional tabletop exercises being conducted along the East Coast as well as along the Gulf Coast. These exercises are being conducted by the Office of Grants and Training in the Preparedness Directorate in conjunction with other Federal departments and agencies. This effort is to provide a forum to consolidate the lessons learned from after action reports and conferences. It will also facilitate a

process to validate the revised coordination and response plans addressing specific challenges that could arise if another catastrophic storm strikes during the 2006 Hurricane Season. The proposed series is to be completed no later than June 1, 2006.

- Two RIEMA employees have completed FEMA's Hurricane Readiness Workshop Train the Trainer. Numerous members of the Rhode Island emergency management community have completed online ICS training offered by FEMA. Rhode Island has been particularly active in conducting State exercises, including six full-scale exercises in the last two years. Rhode Island also hosted and participated in the OPERATION YANKEE, an operational preparedness exercise developed and conducted by FEMA and the Naval War College in Newport, R.I., held in 2003. The two-day event attracted over 200 participants, with Federal, State and tribal representatives, emergency management, law enforcement, security, health, medical, volunteer, and emergency services.

Protocols and Coordination in a Disaster: Chain of Command

As I have described earlier in this testimony, under the Stafford Act, FEMA is authorized to supplement the efforts and available resources of State, local governments and disaster relief organizations for an emergency or major disaster declared by the President. We can lean forward and move Federal teams, commodities and equipment to Federal facilities, but we cannot actually provide assistance under the law, unless the Governor asks, certifying that the event is beyond the State's capability and the President declares an Emergency or Major Disaster. Commodities and equipment that may be necessary and made available are pre-positioned in a number of logistics centers and mobile support locations, strategically placed across the nation.

The Stafford Act acknowledges the constitutional authority of the Governor to respond to incidents affecting Rhode Island through the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency, which incorporates the States' mutual aid system and principles of the ICS, and provides the structure through which State and local government agencies respond. RIEMA coordinates the overall management of an emergency to include requests for support and resources from other State agencies, other States under the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), and supplemental assistance from the Federal government. Internal training within Region I was conducted on the State's request process to streamline requests for assistance, and plans are in process to conduct this training with the States of Region I.

In order to assist Rhode Island and other New England States in expeditiously obtaining Federal assistance, Region I has prepared a new State Declarations Handbook and is planning a workshop to promote further familiarization with this process. This project is under final review at FEMA headquarters and is anticipated to be ready for this hurricane season. Additionally, a seminar was held by Region I for the New England states on declarations processing and available disaster assistance in January, 2004.

In advance of a hurricane, Region I follows existing protocols to activate the Regional Response Coordination Center (RRCC) including Emergency Support Function (ESF) personnel as appropriate, and to deploy the State Liaison Officer (SLO) and Emergency Response Team-Advanced (ERT-A) personnel to begin pre-landfall coordination with State emergency management officials to address life saving and life sustaining response requirements. The primary SLO for Rhode Island is a R.I .resident and has served in this capacity for 21 years to provide support during numerous emergency operations and exercises. The ERT-A will work with their State counterparts to assess State resource needs, and commodities may be pre-staged at the Federal staging area in anticipation of need. The RRCC works with the affected State to identify critical facilities such as potable water, power and sewage; and needs for assistance or commodities including evacuation, affordable and accessible housing, and food. This process is facilitated by the ESF leads, for example, the Department of Transportation provides transportation and evacuation support, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provides assistance with debris and other public works and the Department of Health and Human Services provides health and medical support.

Several additional FEMA teams may be activated, including the Agency's National Response Coordination Center Team, the Hurricane Liaison Team, and the five Mobile Emergency Response Support Detachments. FEMA headquarters may deploy an Emergency Response Team National (ERT-N) to supplement Regional staff, and may alert National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) and Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) to prepare for deployment. Once an event has occurred, the Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) team may deploy to determine critical needs or issues in the State. When a facility is available and prepared for staff, a Joint Field Office (JFO) would be opened to support the disaster response and recovery efforts. FEMA's Stafford Act recovery programs would be carried out throughout this process.

As part of this planning effort and consistent with the States plans and priorities, FEMA will continue to work with other Federal agencies, the State and other stakeholders to:

- Improve Federal support to the emergency management response capability of local, State and Federal agencies to rapidly respond to emergencies, major disasters, and other Incidents of National Significance.
- Ensure unified command and a unity of effort through rigorous adherence to the principles of NIMS. Region I is anticipating the designation by the Secretary of DHS of a Principal Federal Official and a Federal Coordinating Officer in advance of this hurricane season. Once those persons are identified, Region I intends to hold a briefing with the States and Regional staff to discuss concept of operations and ensure coordination.
- Streamline national level emergency contracting procedures and plan to ensure an adequate inventory of response and recovery assets are strategically pre-positioned throughout the country.

2006 Hurricane Season Improvements

The historic 2005 hurricane season challenged FEMA as never before. The agency supported the largest evacuation in U.S. history, coordinated the delivery of approximately four times the amount of water and two times the amount of ice delivered for all four Florida hurricanes combined in 2004, coordinated the rescue of 36,000 individuals with U.S. Coast Guard and FEMA Urban Search & Rescue teams and provided temporary housing assistance to an unprecedented 825,000 families displaced from their homes. While catastrophic Hurricane Katrina resulted in a record response from all levels of government, the lessons learned from FEMA's response will prove invaluable for the improvement of future major disaster responses.

FEMA approaches the 2006 hurricane season with a renewed sense of commitment and urgency to improve our service to the Nation by building on a solid foundation of experienced professionals and the lessons learned from last year's unprecedented disaster response activities. Techniques and technologies that were employed in the response to Hurricanes Rita and Wilma in the 2005 season to improve response coordination have been institutionalized. And, as a result of intensive collaborative analysis of response and recovery programs post-Katrina, FEMA is implementing multiple new measures designed to strengthen essential functions so the agency can more effectively respond to all disasters. These improvements are designed to supplement the experience and skills of FEMA employees with 21st century tools and technology - maximizing the agency's performance regardless of disaster size, cause or complexity.

Following are some examples of some of the national initiatives for improvement that will be in place for the 2006 hurricane season.

- Improving Federal coordination in the immediate response, by increasing the level of coordination with the Department of Defense (DOD). A Defense Coordinating Officer (DCO) and support staff are anticipated to be stationed at FEMA Region I by July to smooth and expedite the provision of Department of Defense support. The identified DCO has met with Regional staff and briefed the States at the recent Catastrophic COOP/COG Planning Conference. In addition, the Region maintains close coordination with the Regional Emergency Preparedness Liaison Officer (EPLO) staff. FEMA headquarters has been working with DOD to shorten the time from request to delivery of assets by pre-identifying military capabilities and developing the scope of work and cost information for support in communications, ground transportation, air transportation, medical support and search and rescue.
- Improving situational awareness and communications interoperability, through development of the DHS Secretary's Situational Awareness Teams; and augmentation of survivable and interoperable communications capabilities. Region I has actively coordinated with New England states to include Rhode Island on issues of communications interoperability. Emphasis has been placed on types of equipment, frequency management and cross-coordination of support capability in any operational situation.

- Hiring, training and developing the two FEMA Incident Response Support Team (FIRST) teams to support the Federal response. These are small, rapidly deployable teams that can provide support directly to State, local and tribal governments on scene, providing technical advice, situational awareness, communications and assistance in requesting and employing lifesaving Federal assets. They intend to deploy within 2 hours of notification to be on-scene within 12 hours, and are a forward component of the ERT-A.
- Improving logistics and commodity preparations, by replenishing and restocking essential disaster commodities at logistics and staging areas, and working in advance with vendors. FEMA headquarters will have enhanced logistics support from the Defense Logistics Agency to ensure available stockpiles of emergency meals, water, tarps, plastic sheeting, medical equipment and essential pharmaceuticals.
- FEMA is actively improving the visibility of disaster assets and commodities from requisition to arrival at disaster locations, thus enhancing logistics management. FEMA headquarters is improving delivery of disaster commodities within States, and implementing a commodity tracking initiative, the Total Asset Visibility Project: Phase I, which will provide FEMA with an improved ability to manage its inventory of certain commodities and to track the location of trailers carrying commodities. Phase I will address commodities leaving the logistics warehouses in Atlanta, GA and Fort Worth, TX, regardless of where the disaster occurs.
- As part of the national evacuation planning initiative, we recognize that given the small size of New England, an evacuation in catastrophic disaster conditions would require close coordination among all of our states both for transportation routing and sheltering of evacuees. The experience gained by FEMA Region I, the State of Rhode Island, and the other New England States in housing and caring for Katrina evacuees has provided valuable experience. Rhode Island was one of two New England States which volunteered to formally shelter Katrina Evacuees, for which we would like to extend our appreciation. At peak, Rhode Island housed 206 people in 67 units. In addition to assisting with local sheltering needs, FEMA Region I deployed a large number of staff to the Gulf States in support of Hurricane Katrina, and learned many valuable lessons through that experience. We would also like to commend Rhode Island for the significant effort it has made over the past year to expand hurricane evacuation planning activities. FEMA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provided the state with the basis for this activity in 1995 with the publication of the State's Hurricane Evacuation Study and Map Atlas. These maps provided Rhode Island with a foundation for their new evacuation maps which have recently been made available to its citizens online.
- Strengthening our emergency medical response. In 1990, NDMS executed a Memorandum of Understanding with Rhode Island Hospital to serve as the sponsor institution for one of the nation's first ten Disaster Medical Assistance

Teams (DMATs). Designated RI-1 DMAT, the team has served with distinction in responses to many incidents, including natural disasters throughout the U.S.; avian influenza outbreaks in the southeast; the World Trade Center attacks in New York on 9/11/2001; the 2002 Winter Olympic Games in Utah; and a wide range of National Special Security Events. In its home state, RI-1 DMAT provided medical support throughout the recovery and investigation of the crash of EgyptAir flight 990 in 1999, and in response to the Station nightclub fire in West Warwick in 2003. The two National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) representatives in Region I have established close working relations with state and federal colleagues to ensure seamless support to State medical requirements.

- Strengthening our search and rescue response. FEMA headquarters continues to work with numerous Federal agencies including FEMA's Urban Search and Rescue elements, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Department of the Interior (Park Service) to agree on roles, responsibilities and available resources for structural collapse rescue, water rescue and wilderness rescue.
- Developing the 2006 Concept of Operations for Hurricane season: FEMA headquarters has been working with the primary and supporting ESF agencies in identifying the tasks that should be done starting 96 or more hours out, then 72 hours, 48 hours, etc. to ensure we have all Federal supporting and operational functions synchronized in the response. FEMA plans to activate more assets (teams and commodities) sooner and place them closer to anticipated landfall, while keeping them safe, though we recognize that with the variables of hurricanes this can be problematic.
- Improving customer service and expediting help to disaster victims, by improving shelter population management, and doubling registration capacity to 200,000 persons per day. We will also deploy mobile registration intake centers (MRICs), recognizing that many disaster victims may be stranded or in congregate shelters with no communications, and unable to register for assistance. We are also enhancing our identity verification process during registration to help improve our stewardship responsibilities while simultaneously reducing the delays associated with disaster victim identity verification.
- Expanding our home inspections capacity and improving the speed and suitability of temporary housing, and enhancing the debris removal process.
- FEMA plans to increase our disaster workforce and is training employees for disaster readiness. FEMA Region I is providing ongoing training to approximately 360 generalists from New England, New York and New Jersey throughout April to June.

And finally, as Federal, State, local and tribal governments become better prepared in anticipation of this hurricane season, it is vitally important that individuals and families also be prepared. New England has not had a significant hurricane event in many years,

potentially resulting in a lack of individual preparedness. I recognize that States generally hold public awareness campaigns at the start of hurricane season, and encourage that they continue that practice and encourage strong public awareness campaigns. FEMA Region I public affairs staff will coordinate with and support the States to ensure a unified message.

Of course, preparation for improved emergency management must be a consistent process. FEMA will continue to make other significant enhancements beyond this hurricane season to help further strengthen the Nation's preparedness and ability to respond and recover from disasters, whatever their cause. We look forward to continuing our partnerships with the State of Rhode Island, tribal and local governments, as well as the private sector, community organizations and individuals in identifying their roles and responsibilities. Together, we will strengthen our ability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, and recover from catastrophic events.

Madame Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.