

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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Introduction

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Bruce Baughman, Director of the Planning and Readiness Division, Readiness, Response, and Recovery Directorate, of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Director Allbaugh regrets that he is unable to be here with you today. It is a pleasure for me to represent him at this hearing on the role of the Department of Veterans Affairs in emergency response. My remarks will be brief. I will describe how FEMA works with other agencies under the Federal Response Plan framework and where the Department of Veterans Affairs – the VA – fits within that framework.

FEMA and the Federal Response Plan Community

The FEMA mission is to reduce the loss of life and property and protect our nation's critical infrastructure from all types of hazards. However, we are a relatively small agency; we do not "own" all the resources needed to fulfill that mission. Our success depends on our ability to organize and lead a community of local, State, and Federal agencies and volunteer organizations. We promote the ability of individuals, families, businesses, voluntary organizations, local governments, and States to manage the vast majority of emergencies in this country on their own. Under the auspices of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, we also provide a management framework and funding to bring the Federal Government's resources to bear when State and local governments need help with emergency or disaster situations, or when these situations involve a primarily Federal responsibility.

The heart of our response framework is the Federal Response Plan. The Federal Response Plan reflects the labors of interagency planning and coordination groups that meet as required in Washington and all ten FEMA Regions to develop our capabilities to respond *as a team*. This team includes 26 Federal departments and agencies and the American Red Cross, all signatories to the plan. The plan organizes departments and agencies into interagency functions based on the authorities and expertise of the members and the needs of our counterparts at the State and local level.

Currently, there are 12 of these "Emergency Support Functions": Transportation, Communications, Public Works and Engineering, Firefighting, Information and Planning, Mass Care, Resource Support, Health and Medical Services, Urban Search and Rescue, Hazardous Materials, Food, and Energy. Each has a primary agency – the agency with the most authority and expertise in that area – and supporting agencies that can provide additional relevant capabilities.

Since 1992, this Federal Response Plan framework has proven effective time and time again, for managing major disasters and emergencies regardless of cause – including the recent terrorist attacks.

FEMA's principal role under the Federal Response Plan is to manage the allocation of Federal resources to assist State and local governments. Where there is a valid need, we try to find the best way to provide the right resource to the right place at the right time. The Federal Government is not *always* the best source – there may be resources available commercially in the area or from a neighboring State government. When the Federal Government is the best source, a department or agency may be able to provide what is needed under its own authority and with its own resources. If not, FEMA issues a mission assignment and provides for reimbursing the costs associated with the mission. If a mission falls within the scope of an Emergency Support Function, FEMA assigns it to the primary agency for that function; the primary agency may then task its supporting agencies.

The Department of Veterans Affairs within the Federal Response Plan Framework

Since FEMA's concern is resource allocation, we want to have as large a pool of available resources as we can. We recognize that as one of the nation's largest healthcare providers, the Department of Veterans Affairs has substantial assets – including medical facilities, medical staff, and pharmaceuticals – and we are pleased to count the VA among the signatories to the Federal Response Plan. Within the Federal Response Plan framework, VA is a supporting agency under ESF #8, Health and Medical Services. The Department of Health and Human Services is the primary agency for ESF #8, and would subtask VA for health and medical missions as appropriate. I defer to both organizations to discuss their work under ESF #8 and the National Disaster Medical System in more detail.

I should note that VA's role in the Federal Response Plan does not end there. VA is also a supporting agency to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under ESF #3, Public Works and Engineering, committed to making its facilities engineering personnel available if needed. VA is a supporting agency to the American Red Cross under ESF #6, Mass Care, to provide medical supplies, food preparation, and facilities if needed to support shelter operations. VA can support the General Services Administration under ESF #7, Resource Support, with procurement and distribution, including technical assistance on procuring medical supplies and services. VA has made a commitment to supporting Federal Response Plan operations in whatever way they can, and we at FEMA appreciate it.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my remarks. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or the Committee may have.