

**Testimony of
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Before
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Good afternoon Chairman Collins and Members of the Committee. I am William Lokey, Operations Branch Chief of the Response Division of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). It is an honor to appear before the Committee today to discuss the activities of the National Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) System in the response to Hurricane Katrina.

FEMA appreciates your interest in this particular part of our response to this unprecedented disaster. I think we all recognize that the hurricanes of 2005—in particular, Hurricane Katrina—thoroughly stressed the capabilities of FEMA, as well as the Nation. Under very difficult circumstances, members of FEMA's US&R program rose to the occasion, working outside of the scope of their regular mission (although well within the authority of the Stafford Act). US&R provided guidance and leadership to state and local personnel and volunteers who were in organizing their first major search and rescue efforts. These efforts resulted in

save lives, plus provided necessary assistance and comfort to numerous citizens affected by this disaster.

Allow me to provide a brief overview of the National US&R System.

Experiences gained and awareness of response to major earthquakes in Mexico City and Armenia in the 1980's dramatically demonstrated the need for specialized urban search and rescue capability in the United States.

In March of 1989, hearings were held on the re-authorization of the National Earthquake Hazard Reduction Act (NEHRP) by the Subcommittee on Science of the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology. Following the Loma Prieta earthquake in October of that year, \$800,000 was provided to FEMA for one-time grants to accredited state and local search and rescue organizations for training and for the acquisition of special equipment and to develop specialized teams. Thus, the National Urban Search and Rescue System was born.

After 17 years and numerous activations to hurricanes and earthquakes, as well as the Oklahoma City, the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and other emergencies, there are 28 FEMA-sponsored national US&R task forces located throughout the

continental United States that are trained and equipped to handle structural collapse rescue.

The 28 teams are comprised of state local and non-profit organizations. These teams are based in their home states and communities. Except when deployed for federal activation, the team members and the teams themselves operate in their home states. One of the pillars of the National US&R system is that, in return for making these state and local resources available to Federal Government, the Federal Government provides resources and training that allow the teams to better serve their communities on a day to day basis.

Any of these national task forces can be activated and deployed by FEMA to a disaster area to provide assistance in structural collapse rescue, or may be pre-positioned when a major disaster threatens a community. When activated, a task force can be dispatched and en route to its destination in a matter of hours.

Each task force is comprised of 70 specialists and is divided into six major functional elements: search, rescue, medical, hazardous materials, logistics and planning. The task force may be divided into two 35-member teams, which allows

for the rotation and relief of personnel for round-the-clock search and rescue operations. This is a Type I task force.

The task forces also have the flexibility to reconfigure and deploy as one 28-person (Type-III) team to respond to small, primarily weather-driven incidents.

Requirements would be physical, technical and canine search and rescue in light, wood-frame construction. Such events typically include hurricanes, tornados, ice storms, and typhoons.

When the system responds, a management group called the Incident Support Team (IST) also responds to support the teams. IST provides command and control for supporting local and State rescue operations.

Some of the capabilities of the US&R task forces are:

- Physical search and rescue operations in damaged/collapsed structures;
- Operations in a known or suspected weapons-of-mass-destruction environment;
- Emergency medical care for entrapped victims, task force personnel and search canines;

- Reconnaissance to assess damage and needs, and provide feedback to other officials;
- Assessment/shut-off of utilities to houses and other buildings;
- Hazardous materials survey/evaluations;
- Structural and hazard evaluations of buildings;
- Stabilization of damaged structures, including shoring and cribbing operations; and
- A 62,000-pound equipment cache, configured to quickly deploy with the team.

Let me now provide a brief overview of US&R operations in Hurricane Katrina. I arrived in Baton Rouge on Saturday evening, August 27. Also with me was Richard Deir, the Emergency Response Team-National Emergency Services Branch Chief and an experienced person with Emergency Support Function-9. He began working with personnel from Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries, the National Guard, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and others on planning for potential Search and Rescue operations. Staff from IEM, the contractor who had worked on the Hurricane Pam planning, was also there to provide technical advice.

Before landfall, three task forces (one Type I and two Type III) and the Blue IST were staged at Barksdale Air Force Base in Shreveport, Louisiana. Two task forces (one Type I and one Type III) and the Red IST were staged at Meridian, Mississippi at Meridian NAS. Five additional task forces (two Type I and three Type III) were put on alert.

By the morning of August 30, eight additional task forces (three Type I and five Type III) and eight California Swift Water rescue teams were activated and en route to operations in Mississippi and Louisiana. On August 31, ten additional task forces (all Type I) were activated and staged to assist.

In Mississippi, task forces responded the morning after Katrina. FEMA US&R assets were engaged in search & rescue operations in Harrison, Hancock, Jackson, and Pearl River counties. This theater of operations stretched for approximately 85 miles along the Mississippi coastline. FEMA US&R assets and the USCG worked in close coordination in conducting these searches and developing corresponding documentation.

FEMA US&R task forces located 60 deceased victims in these operational areas. FEMA US&R task forces also located and treated three live victims (non-

entrapped). Medical treatment was given to 35 other civilians. A total of 15 task forces worked in Mississippi and demobilized on September 10.

In Louisiana, the task forces departed from Barksdale AFB after weather permitted on Monday afternoon, August 29, to Baton Rouge where they were briefed, had their radios programmed, and departed for the New Orleans area. Teams began arriving at the Sam's Club parking lot in Metairie that night. The teams met up with the USCG and representatives from the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Department who were leading Search Operations. There they were asked by the State to move the Base of Operations to Zephyr Field, about five miles from New Orleans. During this time the Louisiana State Wildlife and Fisheries Department was organizing boats for US&R use. When the boats were secured early Tuesday morning, August 30, rescue operations were launched.

The water rescue operations carried out in the New Orleans area may be one of the largest such lifesaving efforts in history. It was a local, state and federal team effort. Tens of thousands of people were saved or assisted in leaving the flooded area. FEMA US&R personnel accounted for 6,582 souls saved or assisted.

They also identified the locations of and helped to recover over 300 human remains, over 25 percent of the victims. US&R delivered food and water to and assisted an uncounted number of people in distress. Due to our disciplined training, doctrine and equipment, over 40 different teams from 19 states seamlessly deployed as interchangeable parts in this rescue effort. There were no serious member injuries in spite of continuous operations in a highly hazardous, contaminated environment.

Both Incident Support Teams were instrumental in working with state and local responders to establish unified command structures among the many diverse government agencies and with state and local Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) organizations in the first days.

With the assistance from FEMA logistics within 5 to 6 days, base camps were built from nothing that provided support to over 3,000 people and helicopter rescue/evacuation operations. Teams also assisted in the capping of approximately 40 gas mains.

It is especially important to note that water rescue is not part of the US&R mission, although they were somewhat equipped to do their collapse structure rescue mission in a water environment.

FEMA and US&R learned a lot from this event. FEMA had a meeting with task force leadership in December to review operations and begin work on improvements. A second meeting is taking place as we speak in Miami, Florida. I will be joining them tonight to continue the work on lessons learned and system improvements.

One of the more significant efforts US&R working on is the development of a five year strategic plan. Through a decision process developed in the early years of the program, US&R's goal is to define US&R's system and mission. The system was designed for rescue in collapsed structures. The ability to work in a weapon of mass destruction environment was added after the events of 9/11. US&R recently added limited capability to accomplish our mission in a water environment, such as providing personal floatation devices. .

Our goal is to work with the Task Forces, our State and local partners, to determine and recommend how US&R should operate when faced with water environments,

such a flooding in a collapsed structure (which we encountered at the World Trade Center.

These men and women of the US&R program represent the finest tradition of search and rescue in America. For the job they did, the risks they took, and the lives they saved, they deserve high praise.

Members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to be here today. I am ready to answer any questions you may have.