

STATEMENT

OF

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BEFORE

THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND MANAGEMENT EFFICIENCY  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

**“EXAMINING DHS’S MISPLACED FOCUS ON CLIMATE CHANGE”**

SUBMITTED BY:

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## **Introduction**

Chairman Perry, Ranking Member Watson Coleman, and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Roy Wright. I am the Deputy Associate Administrator for Insurance and Mitigation at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

In my capacity, I oversee FEMA's work in hazard mitigation planning and grants, the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), and activities to help build community resilience across the Nation. These areas cover a vast mission space and an array of programs important to securing the nation against the many threats we face.

FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure we, as a nation, continue to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards. To continue to accomplish our mission in the years to come, FEMA is working collaboratively with stakeholders across the whole community to ensure the United States is preparing and planning for both current and future risks. These future risks include a wide array of changes, including shifting demographics, aging infrastructure, and the possibility for increases in number and severity of extreme weather events.

It is important to note that climate change is just one of many future risks we plan for, but one that could significantly alter the types and magnitudes of hazards impacting communities and the emergency management professionals serving them. Accordingly, consistent with FEMA's focus on enabling disaster risk reduction nationally, we are supporting state, local, and tribal governments with efforts to prepare for the impacts of climate change through adaptation, which means planning for the changes that are occurring and expected to occur.

## **The Stafford Act**

The Stafford Act sets the statutory framework from which we manage our role in mitigation and address future risk. The Stafford Act stipulates that post-disaster mitigation activities must "substantially reduce the risk of future damage." This law mandates that FEMA address future risk and helps ensure federal taxpayer dollars are used responsibly given the possibility of changing conditions.

Additionally, the Stafford Act requires actions by communities to address future risk by requiring state, local and tribal governments to develop plans for hazards, risks and vulnerabilities in their respective jurisdictions. State, local and tribal mitigation plans are required to include the "probability of future hazard events" occurring in a given jurisdiction. Also, the plans must contain a mitigation strategy that speaks to reducing or avoiding the long-term vulnerabilities the hazards pose. Without this future look, a community cannot adequately prepare to mitigate against future loss of life and property.

The Stafford Act also requires future risk be considered when addressing minimum standards for public and private structures. Recipients of federal assistance must meet a certain threshold in terms of the standards and codes being employed during construction. Further, FEMA is

authorized to provide funding to applicants for eligible, feasible, and cost-effective activities that have the purpose of reducing or eliminating risks to life and property from flood hazards and their effects in accordance with Section 203, Pre-disaster Hazard Mitigation.

### **FEMA's Work to Reduce Future Risk**

In accordance with our statutory requirements, FEMA is working closely with the emergency management community to adapt to a wide array of changing risks in order to build greater resilience in communities across the Nation.

The DHS Climate Action Plan, which carries out direction in the President's Executive Order, *Preparing the United States for the Impacts of Climate Change*, includes a focus on ensuring resilience to disasters. FEMA, along with every Department or Agency with relevant authorities, is directed to provide tools and data, facilitate climate resilient investments, and build climate adaptation knowledge and capacity nationwide.

Recently, we have also taken a series of steps to address the future risk of flooding. This is vital because we know that floods damage our public health and safety, as well as our economic prosperity. In fact, between 1980 and 2013, the United States suffered more than \$260 billion in flood-related damages.

Earlier this year, President Obama signed Executive Order 13690, *Establishing a Federal Flood Risk Management Standard and a Process for Further Soliciting and Considering Stakeholder Input*, as a flexible framework to increase resilience against flooding and help preserve the natural value of floodplains. This new resilience standard will help ensure taxpayer dollars are well spent on infrastructure that can better withstand the impacts of flooding and help communities bounce back faster from disasters. Since flooding is the most costly and commonly occurring hazard in the United States, the standard will protect both public and Federal investments.

Additionally, following Hurricane Sandy, FEMA worked with its federal partners through the Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force to ensure that all federally funded rebuilding projects undertaken as part of the recovery from Sandy meet a single government-wide flood risk reduction standard that takes into account the increased risk the region is facing from extreme weather events, sea level rise and other impacts of climate change.

FEMA is also working with our partners in federal, state, local, and tribal government to continue and expand our work in the area of mitigation by applying our existing statutes and authorities to incorporate future risk into ongoing plans, policies and procedures.

### **State Mitigation Plan Review Guide**

In early March 2015, FEMA announced the release of the State Mitigation Plan Review Guide ("Guide"). Starting March 6, 2016, the Guide will be FEMA's official policy on the natural

hazard mitigation planning requirements from Title 44 Code of Federal Regulations Part 201, and federal regulations for state hazard mitigation plans, inclusive of the District of Columbia and five U.S. territories. The guide supports state, tribal, and local government mitigation planning to identify risks and vulnerabilities associated with natural disasters and establish a long-term strategy for protecting people and property in future hazards events. State mitigation plans are one of the conditions of eligibility for certain FEMA assistance, such as Public Assistance Categories C-G and Hazard Mitigation Assistance mitigation project grants. States are required to update the state mitigation plan every five years.

This guide asks states to consider the probability of future hazard events, including changing future conditions, development patterns, and population demographics. The Guide clarifies that the probability of future hazard events must include considerations of changing future conditions, including the effects of long-term changes in weather patterns and climate on the identified hazards. States must continue to provide an overview of all natural hazards that can affect the state, using maps where appropriate.

To better reduce risk and enhance resilience, the Guide encourages states to take a holistic approach and include not only emergency management, but also the sectors of economic development, land use and development, housing, health and social services, infrastructure, and natural and cultural resources in their planning process and mitigation program, where practicable. These hazard mitigation plans must be adopted by the highest elected official or designee in the state, in order to ensure to ensure a holistic, whole of community approach..

## **Conclusion**

Addressing future risks, such as those posed by extreme weather events regardless of their cause, is key to our mission. Wherever possible, we bring data to bear and work with deference to state, local and tribal needs and priorities. By addressing future risks, state, local, tribal and territorial governments are best prepared for future extreme weather events and are able to bounce back faster at the individual and community level.

Thank you.