



**The Future of FEMA:
Stakeholder Recommendations
for the Next Administrator**

Statement of

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President and Chairman of the Board**

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Good morning, Chairman Donovan, Ranking Member Payne, and members of the subcommittee. I am Chief John Sinclair, fire chief of the Kittitas Valley Fire and Rescue department in Ellensburg, Washington and president and chairman of the Board of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC). The IAFC represents approximately 12,000 leaders of the nation's fire, rescue and emergency services. Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the future of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

From a stakeholder's perspective, FEMA faces a number of major challenges. Overall, the costs and severity of disasters continues to increase. Meanwhile, the variety of hazards that the nation faces continues to escalate. In my state, I have to prepare for earthquakes, wildland fires, landslides and flooding, and the risk of a mass casualty event. FEMA has to address all of these issues – and more – in a tight budgetary environment.

The nation's fire and emergency services are important partners of FEMA and consumers of critically important FEMA programs. The local fire department is an all-hazards response force that must provide fire suppression; emergency medical response; hazardous materials response; multi-casualty/civil unrest/terrorism response; urban search and rescue; train derailment response; and technical, high-angle, swift water, building collapse, confined space and deep trench rescue. Most fire departments are tied closely to their communities. In some cases, the local fire department serves as the closest thing to government that provides service to them, their families, and their friends.

When states request mutual aid assistance, local fire departments provide the fire apparatus, firefighters, paramedics (and an array of other specialized resources) that arrive on scene. In addition, when an incident occurs, the local fire department usually is the first agency on scene and the last to leave during the recovery period.

From our perspective, FEMA must address a number of challenges in the future. They can be addressed along the framework of improving information sharing; strengthening the National Preparedness System; supporting federal efforts to improve public safety communications; and supporting mitigation efforts.

First of all, the IAFC would like to see experienced leaders with fire and emergency service leadership and emergency management experience appointed to leadership positions at FEMA and the U.S. Fire Administration. Both of the last two FEMA administrators, R. David Paulison and W. Craig Fugate, were able to transform the agency based on their experiences at the local and state levels. The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (P.L. 109-295) set specific requirements for the FEMA Administrator, including a “demonstrated ability in and knowledge of emergency management and homeland security” and at least five years of management experience. The IAFC recommends that the FEMA Administrator, the Deputy Administrator, any Assistant Administrators, and the U.S. Fire Administrator all meet these criteria. The FEMA leadership also should understand the roles of state and local partners during

national emergencies. It is important to have experienced leaders who are ready to respond to the various national challenges on Day One.

Information Sharing

Local fire chiefs need help in deciding how to focus resources to prepare for the most serious risks to their community. Effective information sharing between federal, state, tribal/territorial and local partners is a key component to this challenge. FEMA grants, such as the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) and the State Homeland Security Grant program (SHSGP), support funding for intelligence fusion centers and planning and exercise efforts. These efforts play an important role in addressing this dilemma, but much work remains to be done.

Fire chiefs still struggle to get actionable intelligence from their fusion centers. While there is a greater quantity of information flowing among the different intelligence partners, it can be focused more on quantity than quality. Information may be more law enforcement-focused or include extraneous classified information. Fire chiefs need to receive information that is written from a fire and emergency medical services (EMS) perspective and that only includes the tactics, techniques, and procedures that they may face, so that the fire and emergency service community can develop and implement the countermeasures necessary to save lives. In addition, it would help to have an estimated prioritization of the risk that the local jurisdiction might face.

There are solutions to this dilemma. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) is more focused today on working with local partners representing all of the law enforcement and emergency response disciplines. The National Counterterrorism Center's Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team brings local first responders to the Washington area as fellows to help produce intelligence products targeted to local first responders as an audience.

FEMA and the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) can work with I&A to ensure that intelligence products meet the needs of local fire and EMS responders. In addition, USFA can provide classes at the National Fire Academy (NFA) to educate local fire and EMS personnel about the intelligence community, how to handle classified and sensitive information, and how to incorporate this information into planning, training and exercises. FEMA also should ensure that grantees are meeting the funding requirements for fusion centers by ensuring that fire and EMS personnel are represented at state and local fusion centers.

Fire and EMS departments have important responsibilities as information-sharing partners. They must take part in the "See Something, Say Something" campaign and the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative. They also must make sure that their personnel are trained to report suspicious activity appropriately. Most importantly, fire and EMS departments must start incorporating the intelligence and information-sharing disciplines into their promotion and career-track systems. Fire chiefs must ensure that their departments are engaged and actively participating with their fusion centers. Finally,

fire and EMS departments should be using intelligence and threat and risk information continuously to guide their planning, training, and exercises.

The National Preparedness System

The IAFC is very supportive of the National Preparedness Goal (NPG) and its role in guiding the National Preparedness System. The federal, state, tribal/territorial, and local agencies all have important roles to play in the complex requirements to protect the American public. The IAFC particularly was pleased to see that Fire Management and Suppression was added recently as a Core Capability in the NPG.

As FEMA continues to develop and revise the NPG, it must begin to explain how the NPG relates to local first responders. The Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) should help drive the requirements of the NPG down to the state and local levels. Across the nation, fire and EMS departments are participating more in the THIRA process.

Information sharing is a critical component of the THIRA process, because federal, state and local intelligence assessments should be driving how threats are prioritized and critical infrastructure is identified. As states use THIRAs to identify risks and capabilities and allocate resources, the THIRA's analysis should be transparent and easy for local fire chiefs to comprehend. A fire chief should be able to access his or her state's THIRA and understand how threats and risks are prioritized and how resources are allocated to build capabilities to address these threats and risks.

In order for the National Preparedness System to remain effective, fire and EMS departments must be reimbursed in a timely manner for interstate mutual aid deployments. When a state requests fire and rescue response through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), local communities send their firefighters and apparatus to respond. These costs are borne by the communities until they are reimbursed. If a community has to wait years for reimbursement through the complicated federal/state process, local leaders will face fiscal challenges requiring them to stretch budgets; raise taxes; or take on debt until the community finally is reimbursed. FEMA should be directed to review the reimbursement process for mutual aid deployments to ensure that local communities are reimbursed in a timely manner.

An effective mutual aid system is essential to the National Preparedness System. Every day, local communities use mutual aid agreements between neighboring communities to provide emergency response at incidents. These incidents can include large fires, hazardous materials spills, major traffic accidents, or any other type of emergency incident. Many major states, like Illinois and California, have proven statewide mutual aid systems. FEMA should continue to work with the IAFC and the states to ensure that they have strong fire and EMS mutual aid systems. These statewide systems can help to provide resources effectively as the states request and provide aid through interstate compacts or the EMAC system. Having strong mutual aid systems in place is not only cost effective, it is essential to the preservation of life and property.

In addition, FEMA must continue to ensure that federal, state and local response agencies continue to utilize the National Incident Management System (NIMS). FEMA revised NIMS last year, and states are now expected to develop an alternate set of protocols and training curricula to align with the new national standards. The FEMA Administrator should ensure that these NIMS revisions remain consistent with the Incident Command System, and that the state emergency operations centers are able to interoperate with the first responders in the field.

Grants

In discussing the National Preparedness System, it is important to discuss FEMA's grant programs. The Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program provide matching grants to local jurisdictions for equipment, training, and staffing, including the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. The Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) helps states prepare for the threat of terrorism by encouraging planning and exercises and funding intelligence fusion centers. The State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP) also helps fund fusion centers and, in some states, funds statewide mutual aid systems.

Because local fire departments provide the response resources during national deployments to address terrorist incidents and other national emergencies, the AFG and SAFER programs are vital components of the National Preparedness System. These programs bolster local fire departments' baseline capabilities to respond to all hazards. While the programs have been successful, there still is a lot of work to be done. Please consider these examples from the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) *Fourth Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service*:

- Fifty percent of all departments (that answered the NFPA survey) do not have enough portable radios to equip all emergency responders on a shift.
- Fifty-three percent of all departments (that answered the NFPA survey) cannot equip all firefighters on a shift with self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA).
- An estimated 60% of all departments (that answered the NFPA survey) provide hazmat response but have not formally trained all of their personnel involved in hazmat response.
- Almost three-quarters (72%) of departments (that answered the NFPA survey) reported that some of their personal protective clothing was at least 10 years old, which exceeds the life-cycle of the equipment.

As these statistics demonstrate, many fire departments still lack the most basic requirements for a safe and effective response. In fire departments around the nation, firefighters still must share personal protective equipment and gear. In addition, many fire departments across the nation are operating with severely outdated and sometimes inoperable apparatus. A neighboring jurisdiction of mine has only one fire engine that

does not start. The AFG and SAFER programs help local fire departments meet their direst needs.

In 2006 and 2007, my department received AFG funding in order to purchase personal protective equipment and SCBAs. We used these grants to replace twenty-year old turnout gear, which had far exceeded its ten-year service life. In addition, the purchase of new SCBAs allowed us to replace an old system with the current contemporary gear that neighboring departments had. This equipment helped us to regionalize our local fire and emergency service and provide more effective emergency response to our communities.

The AFG and SAFER grant programs are authorized through the end of Fiscal Year 2017. The IAFC requests that Congress consider and pass legislation this year to reauthorize funding for these programs over the next five fiscal years. In addition, we have concerns about the sunset provision in each program's authorizing statute, which would eliminate the programs in early January. We ask that Congress remove this sunset date in order to ensure that the programs can continue to support the nation's fire departments.

The SHSGP and UASI grant funds play an important role in helping communities plan for the response to acts of terrorism. One of the benefits of the programs is that the federal funds provide an incentive for fire, EMS, law enforcement, public health and other federal, state and local agencies to work together to plan and exercise for the response to mass casualty incidents, acts of terrorism or chemical and biological events. In addition, these grant funds are used to support intelligence fusion centers and information sharing between federal state and local officials. The grant programs also support training and equipment for specialized response such as the response to chemical, biological or radiological incidents.

For example, the IAFC endorsed the Medical Preparedness Allowable Use Act (H.R. 437), which passed the House on January 30. This legislation would allow grantees to develop a program using SHSGP and UASI funds to provide home med-kits to first responders and their families. These med-kits are important to provide the necessary protection for first responders as they respond to biological or chemical incidents.

We also have some concerns about the President's recent executive order regarding immigration and sanctuary jurisdictions. The order would authorize the Secretary of Homeland Security to designate sanctuary jurisdictions, which would prohibit them from eligibility for FEMA grants. There is an exception to this requirement for law enforcement, but not for other public safety disciplines. This language threatens to cut off funding to local fire departments and deeply affect their ability to plan for and respond to acts of terrorism. The IAFC Board has not adopted a position on the issue of sanctuary jurisdictions. However, my organization would recommend that the Secretary and Congress use discretion to recognize a broader exception for public safety purposes, when reviewing grant eligibility.

Public Safety Communications

Public safety communications will remain an important issue requiring FEMA's focus. After-action reports have determined that problems with public safety communications operability and interoperability plagued the responses at 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and multiple incidents in the following years. The Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act (P.L. 112-96) authorized the creation of the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) to establish a nationwide, public safety broadband network. This year, we expect FirstNet to announce its commercial partner, and begin to work with the states to build the network. As state governors contemplate opting out of FirstNet, the IAFC recommends that the FEMA Administrator remind them of the integral role that interoperable communications play in mutual aid deployments during national emergencies.

It is important to point out that FirstNet initially will provide mission-critical broadband data communications. Legacy mission-critical, land-mobile radio systems will remain vital to the fire and emergency service and public safety in general. The IAFC thanks the committee for its continued support of the mission of the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC). The OEC continually demonstrates its value by training first responders through its Communications Unit Leader training, which integrates communications into the command structure during major disasters. The IAFC encourages the FEMA Administrator to work with OEC to ensure that its recommendations are included when localities use federal funds to purchase communications systems, and to ensure that OEC is involved in planning for major disasters.

Since land-mobile radio will remain an important component of public safety communications, Congress must address the requirement that first responders return their spectrum in the T Band (470-512 MHz). P.L. 112-96 also required the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to begin auctioning public safety T Band spectrum by February 2021 and clear all public safety operations from the band within two years. This spectrum hosts public safety communications in 11 major urban areas of the United States. These 11 urban areas are Boston; Chicago; Dallas/Ft. Worth; Washington, D.C. (including parts of Virginia and Maryland); Houston; Los Angeles; Miami; New York City/Northeast New Jersey; Philadelphia; Pittsburgh; and San Francisco/Oakland. For example, Boston hosts its interoperable communications channel on the T Band. It's estimated that it will cost \$5.9 billion to migrate these jurisdictions to other alternative spectrum, and, in some cases, there is no spectrum to which to migrate. The IAFC recommends that the FEMA Administrator work with the FCC Chairman to resolve this issue, and not jeopardize public safety communications operability and interoperability for everyday use and major emergencies.

Mitigation

Mitigation remains an important challenge for FEMA. Over the years, we have seen a steady increase in the number of disaster declarations. For example, the average number

of disaster declarations issued from 1960 to 1969 was approximately 19 per year. This number of declarations has skyrocketed to 56 per year from 2000 to 2009, with a record 99 major disaster declarations in 2011. The IAFC expects to see the intensity and cost of national disasters and emergencies to continue to increase. For example, the average federal wildland fire suppression cost from 2009 to 2012 was \$1.25 million. For the following four years, the number increased to \$1.84 million, a 32% increase.

The IAFC encourages FEMA to promote mitigation efforts and community preparedness planning to reduce the cost of national disasters and emergencies. For example, the adoption of statewide building codes can help reduce the cost of disasters. The IAFC has supported legislation in the last Congress, such as the Safe Building Code Incentive Act (H.R. 1748) and the National Mitigation Investment Act (H.R. 5177), which allows FEMA to incentivize the statewide adoption of consensus-based building codes, like the International Residential Code. We also support FEMA's pre-disaster mitigation programs, which help communities reduce the threat of wildland fire with fuels reduction projects.

In my state, we have seen the importance of post-wildland fire mitigation work to reduce landslides and post-wildland fire flooding. We support legislation that was included in both the FEMA Disaster Assistance Reform Act (H.R. 1471) and the Wildfire Prevention Act (H.R. 1009) in the last Congress that would allow states that receive Fire Management Assistance Grants to also receive hazard mitigation funding. FEMA-funded projects, such as the establishment of erosion barriers and re-seeding burned land, will help communities recover more quickly from wildland fires and prevent disasters as a consequence of major wildland fires.

The U.S. Fire Administration

I would like to highlight the importance of the USFA as I conclude my testimony. The U.S. still has an overall fire problem that must be addressed. According to the NFPA, there were more than 1.3 million fires in our nation in 2015. These fires resulted in more than 3,200 deaths, more than 15,000 injuries and approximately \$14.3 billion in property damage.

The USFA continues to lead efforts to combat this problem. It helps local fire departments develop programs to educate the public about fire prevention. USFA also administers the NFA, which has trained more than 1.4 million students in emergency leadership issues and specialized emergency response tactics since 1975. Most importantly, NFA helps local fire chiefs to learn about how to integrate their departments into the National Preparedness System through training about NIMS. The USFA also hosts the National Fire Incident Reporting System, which is one of the world's most comprehensive national fire data systems. The U.S. Fire Administrator leads the USFA.

The IAFC requests that the President move quickly to appoint an experienced fire and emergency service leader to the position of U.S. Fire Administrator. In addition, the

authorization for USFA expires at the end of the fiscal year. The IAFC urges Congress to reauthorize the USFA this year, so it can continue its important mission.

Conclusion

I thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the future of FEMA. The nation's fire and emergency service faces an operating environment that is changing at a rapid and alarming pace. The wide variety of emergencies that we respond to are increasingly more dangerous to our citizens and responders. The economic impacts of these incidents to our nation are escalating. The quality of the service provided by firefighters and EMS providers influence the citizens' feelings of safety and security, yet the ability to train firefighters – from our volunteers in rural regions to all-career firefighters in major cities – is a major challenge. The cost of procuring vital firefighting apparatus, tools and firefighter personal protective equipment has increased well beyond the rate of inflation and beyond communities' abilities to pay. The challenges require experienced fire and emergency management leadership.

We urge the new Administration to nominate an experienced leader in the fire and emergency service or emergency management disciplines to lead the agency. We also recommend that the other leadership of FEMA, including the U.S. Fire Administrator, also be experienced leaders.

In addition, we urge the Administration and the committee to work together to help FEMA address the numerous challenges that the nation faces. It is important that federal information sharing and public safety communications programs continue to be funded and supported in their missions. In order to ensure a strong National Preparedness System, FEMA must review its mutual aid and reimbursement systems. Also, FEMA should be given stronger authority to incentivize the statewide adoption of building codes and the implementation of community efforts to mitigate the effects of disasters. In addition, the IAFC recommends that Congress continue to support FEMA's grant programs, and reauthorize the AFG and SAFER grant programs. We also recommend that Congress reauthorize the USFA.

The new Administration and the new Congress present an opportunity to review FEMA's programs and policies. The IAFC continues to support FEMA's mission and the National Preparedness System. We look forward to working with the committee to ensure that the nation is prepared to respond to any of the potential threats that we face and keep America safe.