
Shattering the Illusion of FEMA's Progress: 10 Recommendations for Rebuilding a Broken Agency

*AFGE Local 4060's Proposal for Change
February 3, 2009*

Executive Summary

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was created in 1979 to help protect American lives and property from the consequences of all emergencies and disasters. During the 1990s, under the leadership of James Lee Witt, FEMA evolved to become a model Government agency with high employee morale and a strong sense of mission.

But since 2001, FEMA has been on a downward spiral, due initially to cuts in mitigation and other effective programs, and later to the diversion of funds to the newly created Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and to corresponding policy and resource shifts toward the department's focus on security. The heavy departmental shift toward terrorism prevention and security, and the corresponding and misplaced agency reliance on defense and military expertise, detracts from FEMA's critical mission to coordinate the national response to a disaster – in partnership with other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and the non-government sector – when security efforts fail, or when natural disaster strikes.

In the three years since Hurricane Katrina, FEMA's public relations efforts have pushed the story that the agency has learned from its mistakes, telling the public that the agency has been improving coordination, adding leadership, and recruiting talent to successfully support numerous disasters since those fateful days in the late summer of 2005. The harsh truth is that the disasters FEMA has supported in recent years are basically mid-level disasters, and not large-scale catastrophes on the scale of Hurricane Katrina or the 9/11 attacks. These more recent mid-scale disasters caused swaths of devastation, but did not for the most part destroy local and State governments' ability to coordinate and manage their own responses to affected areas. Should a disaster on the scale of Hurricane Katrina strike today, we do not believe FEMA is ready.

This is an agency still suffering from a failure in leadership, the heavy influence of political appointees, a lack of strategic direction and coordination, poor and unqualified management, over-reliance on contractors, undervaluation of employees, hostile work environments, wasteful spending, duplication of effort, and a systemic failure across the agency to integrate proven principles and concepts of emergency and incident management into programs and operations.

FEMA today is running in circles. Preparedness activities are not based on the principles and concepts of incident management, and do not serve to integrate exercises, training, and planning across the agency and across the Federal, State, tribal, and local spheres. Instead, multiple and separate plans are developed internally and externally for a variety of purposes, in various directorates, and often unnecessarily – wasting tax dollars and staff time. FEMA’s preparedness activities do not link to other Federal, State, tribal, and local incident management activities... let alone those in the private and nongovernmental sectors. The National Response Framework (NRF) that has been put into place does not provide a useful operational plan for coordinating a national response to any disaster, let alone an effective response to a catastrophic situation. FEMA itself does not follow the principles and concepts of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) that the agency is required to develop and implement nationally and that should provide a framework for the majority of its activities. Few of the mechanisms in place within FEMA’s preparedness or operational response and recovery systems link soundly to State and local incident management programs or mutual aid coordination systems to create a comprehensive, coordinated approach to incident management.

American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Local 4060 is the union representing approximately 400 FEMA employees in the Washington, DC area. Many of these public servants who have worked for FEMA for years and have watched with frustration and dismay as this once proud agency has been steadily dismantled, yet branded with false claims of “progress.” The experience of these employees represents a wealth of knowledge, yet this invaluable asset has not been tapped by FEMA.

AFGE Local 4060 believes that FEMA’s role is vital for America, and that the agency needs to be put back on track before the next catastrophe strikes our country. Time is of the essence, as the both the risks and the vulnerabilities are high. To that end, this paper recommends that the following 10 actions be taken by the new Administration immediately to begin to rebuild this broken agency:

1. Provide FEMA with strong and effective leadership at all levels, and the capabilities for that leadership to turn the agency around.
2. Evaluate management at all levels for appropriate relevant experience; and actively recruit new management and staff, both from inside FEMA and from outside agencies with first responder and emergency management experience.
3. Reduce the high number of political appointees in the agency; and ensure that all appointees have bona fide professional credentials in emergency management and a serious commitment to the reform of FEMA to ensure the agency’s long-term viability and success.
4. Implement tools for job rotations and employment partnerships to strengthen FEMA’s internal operations and its partnerships with Federal, State, tribal, and local government agencies.

5. Implement measures to stop the abuse, incompetence, and corruption permeating the ranks of FEMA's mid- and senior-level management.
6. Evaluate program areas where the use of private contracts has created waste, inefficiency, and ethically questionable policy, for potential conversion to work that could be more efficiently and effectively accomplished by federal employees.
7. Immediately halt current agency hiring and reorganization actions until evaluations can assess their legality and appropriateness.
8. Implement mechanisms to ensure that FEMA's knowledgeable and experienced staff are involved in strategy, management, and programs.
9. Build an agency strategy and organization based on the principles and concepts of the National Incident Management System (NIMS).
10. Pursue removal of FEMA from the Department of Homeland Security.

These recommendations are intended to provide the new Administration with a starting point to overhaul this damaged organization, mitigate the chronic problems underlying the agency, and lay the groundwork to rebuild a FEMA that will be prepared to facilitate an effective and efficient response to a catastrophic disaster.

The following section provides additional background on the illusion of FEMA's progress, and specific details regarding each of these ten recommended and urgent actions.

Shattering the Illusion of FEMA's Progress: 10 Recommendations for Rebuilding a Broken Agency

A New Improved FEMA, or a Skewed Perspective?

The deterioration of FEMA's capability can be best seen in three examples:

- In 1995, when terrorists bombed the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City without warning, FEMA staff mobilized immediately, and search and rescue teams *were on their way within two hours*.
- In 2005, FEMA and DHS leaders were unable to act effectively in response to Hurricane Katrina, despite having more than *two days' advance warning* of the storm; and were incapable of acting effectively for several days after the storm hit.
- In 2009, as the much-anticipated Presidential Inauguration approached, FEMA was still preparing...somewhat ineffectively, as shown below...at the 11th hour.

FEMA is an agency suffering under the weight of inexperienced leadership, corruption, poor morale, shifting goals, and a lack of effective strategic integration. In the FEMA of today, funds are shifted away from Congressionally authorized and otherwise strategically funded programs to questionable contracts under highly suspicious circumstances; programs are cancelled and re-started, then moved, cancelled, and re-started; offices are constantly reorganized with no apparent long-term strategy; and agency leadership continually activates emergency teams and other staff to work evenings, nights, and weekends at a high cost to the taxpayers when there is little or no danger of a major disaster. Agency managers in many cases do not appear to grasp fundamental principles of emergency management, and during actual disasters, many managers do not demonstrate critical thinking relevant to the decisions that need to be made. The result in the end is an increase in chaos, and not an agency equipped to bring some semblance of order to an emergency.

In many ways, the agency appears to be leaning on public relations to cover the symptoms of ineptitude. In 2007, when FEMA learned that some trailers housing disaster victims could be giving off formaldehyde, an in-house FEMA newsletter cheerfully reassured staff that "formaldehyde is a common substance that is found in homes and buildings everywhere." But when a CBS TV News team attempted to interview FEMA Administrator David Paulison about the issue, the Administrator at first did his best to turn his back to the cameras. When that failed and the cameras were in front of him, he turned his face away from the cameras and mumbled a noncommittal response toward the ground. On the TV screen, the Administrator's actions more resembled those of an accused criminal than those of a responsible public official. The story as it unfolded in the national news over the ensuing months became significantly more complex.

An aggressive FEMA public relations campaign struck again during the October, 2007 wildfires in southern California. When FEMA staff were mobilized at that time, one of the

first priorities mentioned by Deputy Administrator Harvey Johnson was for employees to visibly display FEMA hats, shirts, and vehicle decals bearing the FEMA logo. After-action reports from numerous sources following the fire disaster indicated that FEMA's largely uninvited "assistance" actually confused things, and resulted in major resource mobilization confusion when FEMA added yet another coordination layer – in an environment where multiple resource coordination systems already existed. Further, FEMA's hollow and inaccurate public relations claims taking credit for the fire response coordination did not help build relationships with the existing Federal, State, and local agencies who were heavily involved in actual fire suppression and response activities.

FEMA's latest public relations efforts seem focused around the message that the agency is just a model for success, after having turned itself around following the massive failures after Hurricane Katrina struck. In fact, some of the credit for this supposed turnaround is bestowed upon DHS. But if the recent near-misses of the 2009 inauguration are any indication, neither FEMA nor DHS are in a position to boast.

A Recent Event: The 2009 Presidential Inauguration

The urgency of the need to make changes within FEMA may be best illustrated with a quick look at the agency's handling of its most recent responsibility: support of the 2009 Inauguration of President Barack Obama. While overall federal planning of the inauguration has arguably been in the works since the last Presidential Inauguration four years ago, FEMA's efforts to support the inauguration appear for all intents and purposes to have occurred very much at the last minute and with very poor execution. Shortly after the November 2008 election, FEMA experienced difficulty locating hotel rooms for staff for inaugural activation at FEMA's Continuity of Operations (COOP) site in rural Virginia, as rooms had already been booked by other agencies that planned ahead, or by tourists planning to attend inaugural activities. FEMA's internal inaugural activity planning appears to deteriorate from there, with the agency devising plans as late as early January to activate its National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) in downtown Washington, DC for the Presidential Inauguration – within two blocks of the National Mall.

Activation of FEMA's NRCC so close to the incident area violates generally accepted best practices for emergency management, specifically that numerous prior incidents have shown that an incident command post or emergency operations center located very near an incident runs the risk of being overrun by the incident itself – therefore adding to the incident's complexity and diminishing the response capability for the incident. FEMA's decision to activate the NRCC in such close proximity to the inauguration placed its employees at risk, and jeopardized its own ability to coordinate an effective and efficient response to any potential incident in the area. Had an attack or any other unfortunate incident occurred during the Presidential Inauguration, it is difficult to tell if FEMA's already diminished response capabilities might have been further jeopardized by the agency's decision to locate its operations center location so close to event activities planned on the National Mall.

Near-last-minute activation of FEMA's NRCC in the downtown Washington, DC area brought up several other issues. In the weeks prior to the inauguration, the agency scrambled first to find employees to work the planned shifts, and was forced to recruit numerous employees not previously trained to work in the NRCC for the planned event; and then struggled to find cots and other accommodations for a workforce that the agency required to camp out in its headquarters office building for the event activation. Due to the inaugural event, traffic into and out of the city was restricted, and because of the late decision to activate the NRCC downtown, FEMA did not know if it had enough hotel rooms for staff.

Adding to the above issues are questions about inaugural event planning and response coordination itself. In the week since the inauguration, countless stories are surfacing from witnesses to the event, showing a lack of on-the-ground coordination between law enforcement and other agencies – and indicating that if an actual attack or incident had occurred during the Inauguration, the city and in fact the government may not have been able to effectively manage the situation. Here again, it has been FEMA's responsibility to build and implement a comprehensive national incident management system, yet during this very large-scale planned event, it does not appear that such a system was utilized by the department or its agencies, nor does it appear to have been applied and utilized consistently across all involved agencies.

10 Recommended Actions

Following are AFGE Local 4060's urgent recommendations to restore FEMA's effectiveness and for inspire our success as an agency.

1. Provide FEMA with strong and effective leadership at all levels, and the capabilities for that leadership to turn the agency around.

The next FEMA Administrator must be technically qualified for the job, and bring broad emergency management experience. The new Administrator would be best prepared to manage the agency if he or she is able to bring in a strong background that includes emergency response coordination responsibilities across multiple and complex jurisdictions with a high incident frequency and a corresponding need for mutual aid. FEMA's new Administrator will also be most successful if he or she has demonstrated effective administration and coordination of the four key elements of emergency management: 1) Mitigation, 2) Preparedness, 3) Response, and 4) Recovery.

Perhaps as importantly, the new Administrator requires support from the Administration, Congress, and departmental leadership to make appropriate agency decisions, and to ensure that the agency is structured in such as way that those decisions can be effectively coordinated and implemented.

It is also essential that FEMA's new Administrator have a demonstrated ability to be not just an "administrator" but a true leader for FEMA.

The new Administrator must have the capabilities that will enable him or her to address the multitude of issues at FEMA head-on in order to effectively lead the agency. When James Lee Witt became the Director of FEMA in 1993, he met extensively with FEMA staff, and with the FEMA unions, to find out what the employees thought. For over a year, he held open-door meetings where any employee could meet with him face-to-face to discuss issues and problems, and Witt worked to solve those problems and strengthen the agency. His open-door policy also went a long way toward discouraging abusive managers, who never knew if or when their potentially abusive ways would reach the ears of the Director. This was an example of true leadership, and was valued by FEMA's employees at that time.

In 2001, a new Administration inherited a highly effective FEMA with a professional, well-motivated workforce. Since that time, the agency and its workforce have been steadily eroded by a succession of less than fully effective leaders. Perhaps most memorable was Deputy

Administrator Harvey Johnson's "phony press conference" during the 2007 California wildfires. When word leaked to the news media that his "press conference" had actually consisted of FEMA staff (not reporters) asking easy questions of Johnson, Administrator Paulison rose to Johnson's defense, stating that it was "shocking" that FEMA staff read questions to Johnson



without identifying themselves as FEMA employees. However, in the photo of the faux press conference here, Johnson can clearly be seen addressing FEMA staff – many of whom worked in his office and many of whom he saw every day. Neither Administrator Paulison nor Deputy Administrator Johnson were ever held accountable for this fraud, but the FEMA employee who leaked the photo included here to the media was soon fired for "poor job performance." That is not the style of leadership we need at FEMA.

- 2. Evaluate management at all levels for appropriate relevant experience; and actively recruit new management and staff, both from inside FEMA and from outside agencies with first responder and emergency management experience.**

FEMA's career staff continue to endure an increasingly abusive and disorganized atmosphere within the agency, and to remain greatly undervalued – both for their expertise, and as candidates for growth and future leadership within the agency. Staff are concerned that they are not able to obtain training to do their jobs and to continue their careers in the agency, that they do not consistently receive required job performance ratings, and that in some cases, they cannot even determine who their direct supervisor is.

In many cases, jobs at the GS-14 and 15 level have been filled with little or no advertising, and there have been reports that several of these positions have been filled by persons who are personally connected (or even sexually involved) with the hiring official or corresponding FEMA executive. In countless other cases, qualified career FEMA employees have not made certification lists for positions they should be well-qualified for. Experienced first-responders and emergency managers are also excluded from ranks of the well-qualified on many certification lists as well, and even when they are not, FEMA's hiring practices and mechanisms do not necessarily encourage highly qualified personnel who would be interested in working for FEMA to move themselves to FEMA's locations.

In a large number of cases, GS-14 and GS-15 positions are not being filled by experienced emergency managers. Since the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, there has been a heavy tendency for FEMA to hire ex-Coast Guard and ex-military personnel, many of whom have no domestic, field level civilian emergency management experience, and who are not well-versed in building relationships and interacting with the State, tribal, and local government agencies so critical to FEMA's success.

A new Administration would be well-served to institute an immediate temporary freeze on any hiring or promotion actions above the GS-13 level, (other than career ladder promotions) in order to evaluate ongoing personnel actions for appropriateness and a base in merit, and to critically review previous promotion and hiring actions for the same reason. Further, an evaluation should be made to determine a strategic way forward in this area to ensure that in future, experienced emergency managers and first responders from FEMA and from outside agencies are recruited and hired. With some strategic thinking, FEMA could retool its human capital process to focus on training and promoting qualified individuals from within, and on recruiting the most qualified and experienced individuals from outside the agency who can bridge the gap between FEMA and its critical allies: the State and local agencies it is meant to support, the other Federal agencies with which it must partner, and the private and non-governmental sectors with whom it works in disasters.

- 3. Reduce the high number of political appointees in the agency; and ensure that all appointees have bona fide professional credentials in emergency management and a serious commitment to the reform of FEMA to ensure the agency's long-term viability and success.**

FEMA's extremely high number of political appointees is not only disproportionate to other agencies of similar size; it also creates an environment of instability and a leadership vacuum during Administration transitions where the agency's stability, or lack thereof, could have ramifications for homeland and national security. Furthermore, FEMA's mission is not inherently political, in contrast to many other Federal departments and agencies. In short, Americans appear to expect that FEMA will be an effective mitigation, response coordination, and recovery agency despite the prevailing political winds. Reducing the number of political appointees would create long-term stability and direction within the agency, increase cohesion, and also provide the opportunity for long-term leadership positions to be filled with agency executives who have a solid experience base and a clear vision for the future.

4. Implement tools for job rotations and employment partnerships to strengthen FEMA's internal operations and its partnerships with Federal, State, tribal, and local government agencies.

While "FEMA" is in name a single agency, in many ways it is a series of separate, often-disconnected components. Staff who work in Preparedness may have minimal awareness of activities in Mitigation or Operations. Headquarters staff can work for years and seldom, if ever, visit a FEMA Regional Office or Field Office. Likewise, Regional Office and Field Office staff can spend their entire careers in the agency without ever working at, or understanding, FEMA headquarters. Moreover, FEMA "Headquarters" staff themselves are now scattered across nearly a dozen different locations in D.C. and Virginia, adding further obstacles to program coordination.

This situation has resulted in a fractured working culture where various groups both inside and outside FEMA may not understand each other or may even be at odds with one another, and end up functioning in a disjointed fashion, when they function at all.

AFGE Local 4060 recommends that FEMA's new Administrator consider a proactive approach to this bureaucratic hurdle, and establish a system of cross-training and job rotation at FEMA. Such a system could introduce mechanisms to get Headquarters staff out of the Washington, DC area, and into the field to better understand FEMA's role on the ground during a disaster, and to get field staff to Headquarters to gain depth and understanding into the policy and political context the agency is embedded within. Such a program would broaden the involvement of FEMA staff from all directorates in disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery, and support.

There are also a number of other authorities which could be utilized to strengthen FEMA's understanding of and relationships with other Federal agencies and the agency's State, tribal, and local partners. These funding and hiring authorities could be utilized in tandem with employee development programs to increase the institutional knowledge of the agency and its employees, and to build a stronger and more diverse workforce for the agency.

As an example, in the National Capital Region, a number of local government executives in Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia have expressed interest in participating in no-cost staff exchanges with FEMA for a few months to a year. FEMA's management to date has not taken full advantage of this opportunity, but it represents fascinating potential. FEMA Regional Offices may have a similar situation. When a major disaster hits, the mutual trust and familiarity between FEMA and the agency's non-Federal partners can become crucial to a rapid and well-integrated response. Employee exchanges between the agency and neighboring partner agencies would build stronger relationships and mutual understanding of common and often complex issues all agencies face. There are opportunities for FEMA employees to learn other aspects of response in other ways as well through the development of mutual aid agreements. Targeted agreements can improve capability as well as skills. For example, mutual aid agreements could facilitate deployment of agency personnel to learn from well-established incident management teams, such as those in the wildland fire community or hosted by experienced local government agencies, in order to improve the agency's understanding and implementation of incident management principles and concepts.

5. Implement measures to stop the abuse, incompetence, and corruption permeating the ranks of FEMA's mid- and senior-level management.

As indicated above, FEMA continues to experience a long-term trend toward hiring and promotion practices favoring individuals whose job qualifications – and often whose ethics – are highly questionable. This trend began in 2001, increased in speed after Hurricane Katrina, and moved into high gear after the November, 2008 election. As a result, FEMA has become top-heavy with less-than-qualified leaders, and well-intentioned FEMA staff who try to manage agency programs effectively (and legally) tend to be continuously frustrated in their efforts.

The following is just a partial list of the unfair hiring practices and hostile work environment(s) that have developed in the agency's current culture:

- FEMA staff have continually been excluded from higher-paying jobs through questionable hiring processes that appear to favor pre-selected but under-qualified candidates.
- Vacancies have been shifted from their assigned and funded program areas to nebulous programs with different managers and unclear purposes, for reasons that raise questions about conflicts of interest and the agency's intentions to meet required program mandates.
- Experienced FEMA staff are passed over for promotions and then required to train their newly-hired and inexperienced supervisors – and expected to do so with deference.
- Many jobs are being filled without being competitively advertised.
- Federal civil service hiring regulations appear to have been bypassed or ignored in the hiring of new employees at all levels within the agency.

- There is an obvious shift away from the agency's use of career ladders for the promotion of internal employees, and other tools to train and improve the workforce – in favor of hiring unqualified outside employees into federal service.
- Unqualified new employees hired into federal service who do not perform are not removed from federal service during their probationary periods.
- Managers and employees who have knowingly broken laws or regulations are often simply “counseled” not to do it again, and allowed to keep their jobs – and often when they are still within the probationary period where they could be removed from federal service.
- Supervisors who are known to terrorize and intimidate their employees are allowed to remain at the agency and in supervisory positions.
- Complaints of harassment and discrimination on the job have risen exponentially, and the agency has paid undisclosed sums of taxpayer dollars to settle these claims. (These include, for example, an allegation by a female employee that she was sexually assaulted in her office by a FEMA executive.)
- Complaints of sexual harassment, racial discrimination, and even workplace violence are not addressed or resolved.
- FEMA field offices, located far from Washington, DC, have become notorious for sexual and racial discrimination, and for pre-selection and favoritism in hiring and promotion practices

As indicated above, AFGE Local 4060 recommends an immediate, temporary hiring freeze on all positions above the GS-13 level (other than career ladder promotions) to ensure that new hires are qualified candidates selected on the basis of merit, and that the selection system has been open and fair. The union suggests that an impartial review of all hiring and promotion actions above the GS-13 level, including all SES positions, since January 1, 2006 be conducted to determine the validity and appropriateness of these hiring decisions; in part for the determination of future actions if said hires were achieved inappropriately or in violation of civil service rules.

AFGE Local 4060 also recommends re-establishing supervisory ratings, whereby staff rate their supervisors, and to make these ratings a part of supervisors' records in order to encourage appropriate behavior and to discourage abuse and misconduct.

AFGE Local 4060 encourages the new administration to research the agency's human capital and contracting practices, and to provide an environment where employees can feel safe in coming forward with information regarding illegal and unethical practices. This complex and potentially corrupt situation will not be easy to address, but it must be addressed if FEMA is to be revitalized and rebuilt.

This process will undoubtedly require changes in the way FEMA's Human Capital (HC) Division is run. The failure of HC leadership to put a stop to FEMA's highly questionable personnel practices, and to continually allow marginally or un-qualified staff to be hired and promoted at FEMA is unacceptable. It is also unacceptable that the HC Division continues to support some of our most abusive managers in their hostile and adverse actions against FEMA employees. Why are GS-15 jobs

advertised for only five days? Why are so many jobs filled without being advertised at all? Why are some FEMA managers allowed to abuse and scream at their employees without penalty, while rank-and-file employees face disciplinary actions for relatively minor infractions?

The union has no way of knowing to what extent, if any, HC Division leadership is culpable for the many personnel abuses at FEMA, but it seems that HC would be an obvious starting point to investigate these problems. It is AFGE Local 4060's position that the incoming Administration needs to critically review the actions of FEMA's HC Division leadership to assess accountability regarding FEMA's personnel practices, and to determine what if any remedial actions need to be taken.

In addition, we recommend an Equal Rights audit of the agency to determine our status in that regard, and to suggest remedial actions that may be needed.

If FEMA is to function, we need to have a fair and efficient personnel system that not only adheres to applicable civil service laws and regulations, but that actively works to promote an effective, high-morale workforce.

6. Evaluate program areas where the use of private contracts has created waste, inefficiency, and ethically questionable policy, for potential conversion to work that could be more efficiently and effectively accomplished by federal employees.

It has been widely reported that there are extensive and large contracts in place within FEMA for a wide range of activities, from preparedness activities, to policy, to response, to long-term recovery. FEMA's spending on large contracts is extremely high, and represents in many cases massive and significant waste and possible fraud. Questionable ethics practices within the agency abound, and it is debatable whether the agency has sufficient oversight for the high contract volume. In addition, much work that is done by contractors may actually be work that is inherently governmental. Due to known violations in this area, the agency has had to send agency-wide memos several times over the past year to remind employees and contractors of policies regarding work that is and is not appropriate for contractors to perform.

AFGE Local 4060 recommends that the incoming FEMA leadership immediately and temporarily freeze all contract activities relevant to new or renewing contracts until such time as they can be evaluated for their appropriateness in the use of appropriated funds, and in light of ethical and political considerations and original program funding and intent. In many cases, the type of work that is done by contractors could arguably be done by federal employees at a significantly reduced cost to the government. AFGE Local 4060 encourages the new FEMA leadership to examine the potential for significant long-term cost-savings and improved efficiencies in this area by converting contracted tasks to federal jobs.

Much of FEMA's contracting is specific to disaster response and recovery. In this area alone, improvements in coordination of response resources, planning, and tighter

integration between preparedness and operational components as well as actual implementation of the principles and concepts of a national incident management system could significantly improve efficiency and effectiveness of the agency and its corresponding contracts. Exploring development of a single, integrated national coordination system would provide the agency with the potential to save significant additional contract dollars. Such a coordination system, with adherence to single ordering points and a standardized ordering process for mobilizing and prioritizing resources, could decrease FEMA's extensive spending on contracts for response by vastly improving efficiency.

7. Immediately halt current agency hiring and reorganization actions until evaluations can assess their legality and appropriateness.

Within FEMA, there are currently numerous active reorganization, realignment, and personnel actions, including new hires, that are questionable in terms of ethics, agency direction, policy, and/or appropriations requirements. While this trend has persisted in recent years, it accelerated rapidly after the November 2008 election with an obvious rush to fill as many leadership positions as possible in place before the advent of the new Administration. Leadership positions at FEMA have been advertised for as little as five days – or in some cases, not advertised at all – before being filled by candidates who in some cases appear to have been pre-selected by the prior Administration.

Further, there are ongoing reorganization and realignment activities underway in the agency that contradict agency direction prohibiting such actions during the Administration's transition, but which are also prohibited in legislative direction and provisions in agency appropriations. Immediately halting all actions related to reorganizations and realignments would allow incoming agency leadership to ensure that the agency meets the full intent of the law before such actions are completed in possible violation of the law, and to ensure that agency actions are in compliance with the new Administration's intentions and direction.

8. Implement mechanisms to ensure that FEMA's knowledgeable and experienced staff are involved in strategy, management, and programs.

In rebuilding FEMA, AFGE Local 4060 recommends that the new Administrator draw on an excellent source of ideas for strengthening the agency: FEMA's own employees. The great majority of FEMA staff are strongly dedicated to the Agency's mission, and their experience brings knowledge of how to better meet that mission.

AFGE Local 4060 invites FEMA's new leadership to meet with union representatives to work together to identify problem locations, to listen to employees' concerns and vision, and to work proactively toward effective and real solutions to outstanding issues. The union encourages a close partnership in the development of an updated, fair, and effective personnel system within the agency.

In preparing this paper, the union solicited suggestions from current and former FEMA staff. The results of this solicitation are attached, and remain un-edited except for alterations toward brevity and clarity. AFGE Local 4060 recommends that the new Administrator and his or her staff invest some time to consider these inputs prior to making any major changes to the agency.

The union also suggests that FEMA's incoming Administrator make an effort to determine employees' professional assessments of their managers and the actual effectiveness of the management of program areas where they are working. Many of FEMA's executives and managers are in fact effective leaders who should be retained, others are not. Both groups need to be identified and appropriately valued.

AFGE Local 4060 strongly recommends that the new Administration implement processes to ensure that employees and their input are included in agency strategy and decision-making processes. There are many options for doing so, including a strengthening and enhancement of the role of FEMA's Labor-Management Partnership Council (LMPC). The union also recommends the development of a program to solicit suggestions from FEMA staff on an ongoing basis so that those public servants within the agency can safely and effectively express their ideas for strengthening the agency. Union members have seen the success of an Administrator's open-door policy in the past, and the practice comes highly recommended. Such a policy would allow any employee, at any grade level, the opportunity to talk to the Administrator in person for at least a few minutes at some point. This approach not only improves communication, it improves morale, loyalty, and trust.

Surveys over the past few years at FEMA show that employee morale is near or at rock-bottom. FEMA struggled to reach 95% of full staffing in 2007, but a year later those levels were back down to 75%; a 20% loss. In other words, employees are still quitting faster than they can be replaced, and many of those who remain are searching for new jobs outside the agency, or are looking into retirement. There is evidence that FEMA's highly trained Federal Coordinating Officers (FCOs) continue to leave, meaning that the employment satisfaction issue is not limited to non-supervisory personnel.

FEMA's recent practices do not indicate that the agency values its employees, including its own management. This became even clearer during the transition – when a large volume of questionable job announcements, new hires and promotion actions occurred, and last-minute appointments and management shifts were put in place. The union is available to help the new FEMA leadership find a positive way forward through this tangle to help repair the damage done to FEMA, to public servants and their careers, and to work for the success of the agency as a whole.

9. Build an agency strategy and organization based on the principles and concepts of the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 stated that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary, acting through the Under Secretary for Emergency Preparedness and

Response [now FEMA], shall include responsibilities for “building a comprehensive national incident management system [NIMS] with Federal, State, and local government personnel, agencies, and authorities, to respond to such attacks and disasters; [and] consolidating existing Federal Government emergency response plans into a single, coordinated national response plan.”

FEMA would be a more effective and efficient agency if it were built around the principles and concepts of “a comprehensive national incident management system” (NIMS), and if the national response plan it was directed to build actually followed those same principles and provided a single, clear, integrated operating plan for the agency. Instead, FEMA is again writing countless and separate plans, and has failed to integrate preparedness activities with operational components – both internally and externally – through its own policies, direction, and grants processes. FEMA’s failure to build and utilize an integrated and comprehensive national incident management system means that FEMA’s response mechanisms are separate and often stove-piped from those used by other Federal agencies and State, tribal, and local governments, detracting from the efficiency and effectiveness of response and negatively impacting public safety.

10. Pursue the Removal of FEMA from the Department of Homeland Security.

DHS focuses mainly on security, intelligence, and law enforcement for preventing terrorism. FEMA focuses on comprehensive emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. The integration of FEMA into a department whose primary mission is so different from FEMA’s creates internal conflict as well as competition for resources, and a severely disjointed program.

For the most part, the roles of FEMA and of the roles of the rest of the DHS components are very different, yet personnel and leadership within and outside DHS frequently confuse these roles and their corresponding expectations. When errors have occurred as a result, DHS leadership has often focused on covering up the errors rather than addressing them. To cite just two examples:

- When Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005, FEMA was taking orders from homeland security personnel who seemed to know little or nothing about disaster relief – and who appeared to be primarily concerned with protecting the Administration’s public image. A National Situation Report produced by FEMA staff gave FEMA and DHS executives a detailed warning about the impending storm *48 hours before Katrina hit*. After Hurricane Katrina, the incriminating report was deleted from FEMA’s public website, and was restored only after outside groups aware of the report’s existence brought legal action.
- In 2006, DHS “determined” that hurricanes could be predicted reliably a week prior to landfall, and that detailed response planning would be handled accordingly. FEMA staff who disputed this unscientific approach were told not to argue the point, and a manager who used computer modeling to disprove the DHS “one-week-warning” theory was abruptly reassigned to different duties.

ATTACHMENTS

The following attachments were submitted by current and former FEMA staff. Some of them have been edited for clarity, spelling, or grammar, but otherwise have been left as is to represent the employees' opinions.

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Topic A – Reasons to Take FEMA out of DHS

1. President Barack Obama has promised change, and this is an example of a change that can be made which will be embraced by the American people. The average American wasn't involved in the decision to put the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) into the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), however, the average American remembers when FEMA was there to support them and worked so well in the 1990's. Taking FEMA out is really a Congressional jurisdiction issue, and the American public will embrace this change as another example of Barack Obama doing something to make the government work for the people. Removing FEMA is a positive step from a public perception stand point. It is the perfect example of taking an action to make government more responsive to the needs of the people.
2. The DHS mission of preventing terrorist attacks by protecting the borders, the seas, the airports, and cyber space is a law enforcement mission. There is nothing in the FEMA mission that supports this law enforcement objective, therefore, FEMA does not contribute to this mission. This is why DHS "taxed" FEMA funds to support other DHS elements that were part of its mission. FEMA's mission is to help the Nation mitigate, prepare, respond and recover from the consequences of all hazards. Consistent with its consequence management mission, terrorism is one of the hazards FEMA would address, as it did as an independent Federal Agency following the World Trade Center bombing in 1993, the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.
3. DHS mission and programs are driven by the Federal government being in charge. FEMA programs and authorities under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief Act (P.L. 93-288), clearly defines the role of FEMA as a Federal entity, which acts in support of and supplemental to State and local jurisdictions. This partnership with State and local governments is critical. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that FEMA is the only entity included in DHS that has 10 Regional Offices to support its activities with State and local governments and partnerships with the private sector.
4. Homeland Security, i.e. terrorism, is a national security issue with unique parameters and restrictions from a prevention perspective that do not exist or play a role in other man made or natural disasters. This is a singular issue whose prevention should be supported, it cannot be all hazard but needs to coordinate with those mechanisms, such as public health that can support it's deterrence but will never be the primary focus of its implementation – this is truly an apples and oranges combination.
5. The idea that the agencies being combined into DHS would make for a better Federal response has not materialized, in fact it has inhibited the Federal response. As an independent Agency, FEMA coordinated and directed the actions of all of the other Federal agencies to support State and local government response to and recovery from disasters. It was assured of access to the full resources and

capabilities of the Federal government through the Federal Response Plan and reimbursement through the Disaster Relief Act. During Katrina, the Coast Guard, self deployed and did an exemplary job in rescuing people in Katrina but had FEMA still been in charge, the Coast Guard also may have been used to shore up the levees and do other tasks that would have resulted in a less devastating event, but because they were acting as a part of DHS, they chose their missions as opposed to performing duties designated by what used to be the lead agency, FEMA. Other than the Coast Guard, there are no entities within DHS that directly support, contribute to or enhance this Nations' emergency management capability.

6. It is hard to define a much more essential function of government than responding to disasters. The American populace believes that their government should be there to help during a time of disaster. The Administration's response to a disaster, more often natural than anything else, is one of the most visible examples of a competent government and Presidency. This is a singular issue that can be tested in the 50 + States and territories; it is not tied to the more long term terrorism or homeland security issues. During the 1990's, the President's approval ratings rose every time FEMA responded to a disaster. This is a high priority to the American public – more people believe they may be impacted by a natural disaster than by a terrorist attack, and the statistics support that presumption. In response to this, the Administration needs a single, visible face for disaster response and recovery whose sole responsibility is to assure the populace that the Administration will support them during their time of need and support their State and local governments, communities, private sector, etc in being rebuilt after a disaster and that they are the direct representative of the President.
7. Returning FEMA to an independent status will reduce the bureaucratic layers between the FEMA Director and the President and State and local governments during the response and recovery process.
8. Establishing FEMA as an independent Agency will actually reduce disaster costs and be cost effective. FEMA, as an independent Agency, operated lean, using a cost effective, temporary, surge workforce, State and local partners and some contractor support. We need to go back to that model and support development of State and local capability. For example, DHS has paid millions in dollars to private contractors for evacuation capabilities in the Gulf Regions even when not executed. An independent FEMA worked with State and local governments to support evacuation possibilities that were executed during Hurricane Floyd when x people successfully evacuated from Florida, GA, NC and SC.
9. Responding to disasters inhibits the Secretary of DHS from accomplishing his critical homeland security mission. When a disaster occurs, the Agency responsible for responding to that disaster becomes the face of the President and must be on site at that disaster for extended periods of time, do we want the Sec. of DHS, absent from the critical daily duties of combating terrorism for extended periods of time and leaving the country vulnerable? For example, the FEMA Director spent almost 6

weeks in Southern California after the Northridge Earthquake and almost 3 weeks in Oklahoma City after the Oklahoma City bombing.

10. Fix what is broken. Right now, the Nation's emergency management system is broken. Some say that FEMA needs a break and the Agency should not be reorganized at this time. Also, it will cost money to reorganize yet again. But keeping the status quo will result in another Katrina. The system must be fixed and the first step is moving FEMA out of DHS and making its mission a top priority in the Obama Administration.
11. DHS has discouraged expanding the partnerships that historically made the Nation's emergency management system work. In fact, DHS has moved to centralize more and more of the Federal government's response and recovery capabilities in DHS and FEMA. Old partners are being pushed out and new partnership opportunities are being ignored. All disasters are local and trying to centralize the response and recovery capabilities in the Federal government is a recipe for disaster.
12. The aftermath of a disaster is a time when the recovery process can concentrate on building a community back better and more safe than before. This includes environmentally sound decisions and practices, such as the recycling of debris materials and new construction and larger repairs that take a "greener" approach. Congress has encouraged these actions but the thrust of such efforts has nothing to do with DHS' mission or day to day operations and a lack of understanding by DHS leadership has discouraged any innovation, even when it was included in the Post Katrina Act.
13. FEMA elements, such as Mitigation and Flood Insurance and Response and Recovery can complement each other. The floodplain mapping can inform decisions on the placement of temporary and semi-permanent housing as well as infrastructure repairs. Insurance requirements can encourage stronger building codes. FEMA must concentrate on this existing synergy rather than trying to meld it with prominent DHS concerns such as immigration enforcement or anti-terrorist intelligence.
14. In the cacophony of the post-disaster environment, it's important to have one sure and certain federal voice. Given the top tier DHS leadership's need for identity, a new position was created – Principal Federal Official (PFO) that appeared to override the Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) appointed by the President. Congress now refused to fund the PFO, but that position was present after Katrina and caused confusion and administrative problems. An independent FEMA would not have a PFO and would have the necessary authority to carry out an efficient response and a comprehensive recovery.

A Comedy Writer's Inspiration at FEMA

For the first round of Katrina CORE hirings in Louisiana in March 2006, my coworker mistakenly wandered into the wrong classroom and sat in on a "How to Apply For a FEMA CORE Job" class which was taught at the Area Field Office in New Orleans. The staff in the office had been working on their applications for months for the jobs which were advertised "All Sources."

The format was unpublished and required at least five pages of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) in size 11 font, single spaced, with 1/2 inch margins all the way around. The instructor stressed that individuals were standing by the fax machine with rulers and would shred any resumes or applications that came in any other format. The only place this format was taught was at the New Orleans Area Field Office (AFO, later the Transitional Recovery Office or TRO).

Once my coworkers put their applications in this format, they were successful in getting jobs, including a 19-year-old who had just started his senior year in high school when Katrina hit who got a GS-11 CORE position.

That was part of the beginning of my love affair with FEMA. You know I wanted to be a comedy writer before I came to FEMA, and I felt like that little tidbit was God's way of agreeing with me...giving me material to become a non-fiction comedy writer.

“Could My Family Schedule the Funeral for the Weekend?”

There is a pervasive lack of professional courtesy within the Agency, which breeds waste, inefficiency, and exacerbates the retention problems. In the current culture, supervisors disrespect employees' time, talent, and professional development, which encourages employees to disrespect each other. Some examples:

- Some offices hold daily 7:00 a.m. meetings for all employees to prepare for standard 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. office hours, which builds in standard overtime for employees during non-disaster periods. During disasters, emergencies, and at the supervisors' request, the 7:00 a.m. meeting is held for a standard work day, but employees will stay until 7:00 p.m. or even 9:00 p.m. "in case leadership needs them later in the evening." Senior leadership schedules meetings and briefings for 4:30, 6:00, or later and requests these meetings or briefings in the morning, leaving employees no time to plan for child care or their personal needs.
- My supervisor would email me on my blackberry until 11:30 at night though he required me to be at work at 7:00 a.m. If I did not answer, I got a cell phone call. These calls would sometimes be "out of curiosity" kinds of inquiries and the supervisor requested that I not account for the time.
- Upon telling my supervisor about a death in my family, he asked if my loved one had been cremated, and, if so, could my family schedule the funeral for the weekend because he could not spare me from the office that week. My coworkers asked the same question.
- One employee put off chemotherapy for hurricane season though he was told he needed it in July. Senior management said they could not spare him, though his position consisted mostly of attending daily meetings and being "on-call" the rest of the day and the chemo treatments would only take one day per week. When activated, he was required to do the same 7-day, 12-hour per day shifts as other employees.
- Employees can be deployed at any time for any length of time. This is understandable during a disaster, but that is not always the case. A friend of mine was told one morning that he would deploy for a few days. He went home, packed his things, and left that afternoon for "a few days" and returned six weeks later. This was a non-disaster deployment that the supervisor knew about beforehand but it did not occur to him to tell the employee until the morning he was to leave. The employee had no family and was able to give ask a neighbor to care for his pet until he returned. This practice is not uncommon.
- There are rivalries between offices that should be coordinating with each other; these rivalries are led by the supervisors and perpetuated by employees. On a conference call with all of the Regions and some other Federal agencies, my coworkers began complaining that the office down the hall "does nothing and is

completely incompetent." The supervisor chimed in and, as a result, many Regions and Federal Agencies did not call into the next conference calls.

- Supervisors rely on one employee for specific tasks and will openly tell that employee that it is because their coworkers "don't know what they're doing."
- Standard forms are changed by offices without notice or public posting. These changes can be as small as changing the width of a border on the form, but the office in charge of processing the action (pay roll, benefits, Travel Authorization, reimbursements, etc), will refuse to perform the action on that basis.

Employee Morale, Health, and Stress

I think that the first problem at FEMA that has to be addressed by the next administration is morale. While a new plane or ship can help increase the productivity of the Department of Defense, the only thing that FEMA can rely on is a well-trained staff with competent leadership to do its mission. However, the fact that we have been placed under DHS, robbed of financial and personnel resources and provided with questionable leadership has reduced our chances of success. The constant change in responsibilities, such as the removal and then restoration of the responsibility for providing grants to State and local governments, has led to constant turmoil in organization and functions. In the last six months, there have been at least six reorganizations in various parts of FEMA. The struggle over MaxHR has also caused a great deal of personal and professional uncertainty. Even just the fact that FEMA Headquarters is now spread over at least nine different sites around the city has reduced our sense of togetherness and cohesion. Even though the Post Katrina Act of 2006 mandated that everyone at FEMA be put on a career path, this still has not been done by management.

The OPM survey of the Federal government has shown that the morale at FEMA is near the bottom of all Federal agencies, reducing our ability to be productive professionals. While FEMA was able to fill 95 percent of its positions in June 2007, a year later the number of filled positions had dropped to 75 percent to attrition, giving an idea of the current level of turmoil. The current state of written policy at FEMA is another problem that shows the state we are in. A great deal of our policy and guidance is out of date, or published as interim guidance, although no one can tell you the process or authorities needed to make it approved guidance.

I think we lack people with experience at State and local level emergency management. That is what we have been missing after Katrina. A lot of the hair-trigger activations in response to any potential problem is probably due to the lack of experience that most of our current leadership have, compared to the people at the State and local level who have had to actually decide when to mobilize resources for an event.

These are some of the issues that concern us in our office:

- We are constantly being told that we (FEMA) are broke and that they (the new managers) were brought here to fix us.
- Being rewarded/bribed with candy and stickers and giving out magic wands in order to do a good job. Treating the staff like kindergarten students.
- Management is untruthful – saying things and then denying that it was said.

- Staff have been told that the manager was on Prozac when interviewed for the position.
- Constantly saying that they are new to FEMA and that they do not know anything about what is going on.
- Denying staff permission to participate in casual dress Fridays.
- Management is canceling some of the staff's compressed work schedule and not others - without any reason.
- Favoritism in the office.
- Hiring military friends for vacant positions instead of qualified FEMA personnel.
- Katrina COREs are only given a 6 months extension – but they are continually hiring new two-year Katrina COREs.
- Management feels that job titles do not mean anything – they suggest that a staffer can call ones self anything that they want because a title does not mean anything.
- Management keeps telling the staff that we might be audited and could go to jail.

While I do not have access to the senior management diversity stats- actually probably applies throughout entire agency when this administration took office- but I strongly believe if a comparison is drawn from the previous admin to this one you would see two unwritten requirements for senior management positions are male gender and having had a previous "dot.mil" email address. I think we would be further down the road as an agency if we had more diversity of thought and mannerism when dealing with complex issues than what we currently have. Another obvious way to get the difference across quickly is to note the motto under previous administration was "people helping people" under this administration that was changed to "a nation prepared". Says it all to me!

I was definitely stressed out, and when I went to the nurse as a healthy XX-year-old and was told that I could plausibly be having a stroke due to stress, I was pretty shocked. The best thing that happened was that the nurse seemed like this happened a lot with people in the Agency having stress-related health problems. I had figured out that my work environment was not healthy, but was angered and actually kind of inspired that it was a systemic problem. I laughed and she and I talk about it every time I stop by.

We forget that our coworkers have home lives and, since there's no Agency-wide push for work/life balance, people trudge along and cultivate a lot of stress.

And I think that's another overarching theme of the New FEMA: There's no sense of deliberate intention around the Agency in normal life or, thus, during a disaster. Things in the office just seem to happen. Take, for instance, the space and furniture allocation "process:"

1. You are sitting in your office, doing your job.
2. Someone who works in some management position in your directorate walks into your office with a stranger.
3. You tune into the fact that they are talking about how to arrange the furniture and who will go in each (currently occupied) office.
4. You introduce yourself and say "can I help you?"
5. The stranger explains that they are moving into the office while the management person avoids eye contact.
6. The management person quickly wraps up your conversation and moves the space allocation discussion out of your space.

After this, the rumors start, you ask your boss who has heard nothing of it but finds out that you are moving (even though you all just moved into the space) and tells everyone to pack their stuff for "the move" which then takes weeks, months, or suddenly someone's box is on your desk one morning. It's quite disconcerting. Meanwhile, furniture is moved overnight (who hasn't lost a bookshelf here or there?) or while the occupant is on deployment. It's an everyday thing, but that's not the way businesses do business.

The lack of procedure exists in almost every administrative process in this Agency, and is matched only by the lack of communication throughout each process. How I request time off varies by supervisor (understandable - email works for some, while in-writing works for others) but also how or if I charge time spent "on-call" varies by supervisor and by day, it seems. Most of that is the supervisors' requirement - they want you at their personal beck and call or will not hire/train additional staff, but they don't want to pay for that.

Where being on-call may be an Agency requirement for NRCC and disaster deployments, I don't think OPM has been contacted to ensure people are paid according to regulations. XXX, the former Team Lead on FIRST-(city), current Operations Section Chief on Region XXX's IMAT, who has worked within these guidelines as a supervisor, told me that if I was truly "on-call" for the NRCC Activation Team, according to OPM guidelines, I should be compensated per hour or day that I

was on-call, due to the fact that I was a GS-XX. Only GS-YYs and above can be perpetually on-call. My then-supervisor said "we won't worry about that" but my next supervisor said "we should check that out" and never got back to me. By the way, some IMAT team members (who are perpetually on-call for deployment as a primary duty) are GS-9s or 11s, but we never asked for or got guidance from HR or OPM for that.

My point is that this Leaning-Forward-Always-At-The-Ready stuff is not new to government and thus should be checked against existing regulations. Though I was on "24-hour call" for my entire time as an employee and answered the blackberry at night, early morning, and on "time off," I was only compensated for the hours of overtime spent physically at work. I'm not asking for money, but some oversight to protect employees.

The lack of Agency procedures surrounding on-call duration and compensation (the loss of the Red, White, and Blue team rotations, for example) creates a burnout that drives people out of the Agency (in May 2007, FEMA was losing 29 PFT employees per month and in June of 2008, that number had risen to 75 - a rate of over 3% of the agency PFTs at that time). For those who stay, it severely impacts the motivation to serve the mission. Four of 11 employees in the OPB left the Agency on July 4th, after a month on straight 24-hour NRCC shifts for Midwest Flooding, and during what became a busy Hurricane Season. Most offices in Operations stopped sending employees to the NRCC for Hurricane Ike because they had been deployed so often through the year. A number of GS-14s and one GS-13 in Disaster Ops have reached or are in danger of reaching 15-step 10 and are no longer reporting overtime. Might check to see if this is higher in one Directorate over another.

I would bet that the percentage of people taking all of their Use-or-Lose in Nov/Dec/Jan is higher in FEMA, but I don't have experience in other Agencies. This is a mission issue: Mother Nature (or, you could say, Terrorism for those who are not afraid of her) doesn't rest because we can't stop people taking their Use-or-Lose time. The Midwest Winter Storms last year were marked by a lack of employees and leadership in the Agency, so who could deploy or make the call to do so?

My family is VERY skeptical of me returning to FEMA because of overtime I did in the first 6 months of the year. As a GS-XX, I earned enough in overtime to be a GS YY during the non-Hurricane season and even then, in the NRCC, my supervisor was asking me to work during my XXX because "no one else felt like working weekends." This was after 17 straight nightshifts, 3 of which I spent alone in the Planning Section because other team members or their supervisors refused the deployment. I was feeling a little loopy at the time, but was dedicated to the NRCC and knew there was no one to take my place. Not that the agency couldn't find someone to help out, from PFT staff or even the DAE cadre, but my willingness to work continually with no time off and the lack of oversight from leadership kept anyone from really looking/ requiring other employees to deploy. When I gave my 2-weeks notice, they brought in XXX who was on overnight shifts from the end of June through the end of

September in the Planning Section. I had to quit the agency to get relief on a disaster deployment.

I laughed when Paulison and Johnson quoted an employee who said "I've seen more change in FEMA in the last 2 years than in the previous 25!" at the December 2007 All-Hands. They stated this as a good thing and meant it to improve morale, but come on.

Anyway, to somewhat wrap this up, here is what changes would bring me back to FEMA (and here are the standards I've set for whichever office I return to when I return, because some actually do this): oversight and tracking of all employee deployments and overtime; established limits on the amount of overtime or time spent deployed for all employees; establishment of office structure and space allocation systems to ensure people; procedures for office name, purpose, or location changes; mandatory training for all employees; more access to education or training opportunities (more than 1% of Agency funding on training too much to ask?); and a concentrated health and wellness program for all employees - HQ and field offices.

Here's how I would do it:

1. Decide on a timeline for restructuring directorates and reviewing Agency structure. "We are going to take suggestions/do review for restructuring from January 15-February 15. New structure will be announced March 15, Offices must be moved by April 15. You will not move offices during Hurricane Season." Then, we review again each year or every 2 years. That provides everyone a chance to settle and get to work. Publish this cycle.
2. Create a small, possibly temporary, office of Employee Wellness Initiatives which will work with FOH, HR, OPM, and the Union to track deployments and overtime. This office can work one-on-one with each office to do a "Gap Analysis" on needs and provide statistics to the Administrator and help rectify discrepancies between offices. If something like this happens, I will apply for this job with my clipboard and open ears as I wander the building and talk directly to people.
3. Conduct an audit on employees working super-overtime to determine why they are working overtime, and then develop training programs to bring coworkers up to speed and position descriptions for targeted recruiting to bring in relief. If employees are addicted to their overtime, refer them to #4.
4. Develop and fund an Agency-wide health and wellness program that employees can join together to start a fitness regimen and track progress. There is a Presidential Fitness program online that I joined last year (and forgot about) that 7 FEMA employees had also joined where you can track weight loss and fitness levels. I was trying to recruit people, but then we all got deployed and people quit the Agency... There is a great recreational program at Mt. Weather and

some Regional Offices might do the same, but there needs to be an overall cultural change.

5. Create a rotational structure for deployments and require EVERY employee to be on call for their established month. If you are so "essential" to the Agency that you cannot deploy, you should either be the Administrator or some other familiar Face of FEMA or we should have three of you anyway in case you get the flu or something.

So there is my 5-point Contract with Employees.

And speaking of health, you might reach out to the nurse in Room 714 (ext 3851 I think). She told me that is not unusual for FEMA employees and mentioned to me that FEMA employees have more stress-related conditions than other agencies. I don't know if she keeps numbers and could provide those or a comparison to other agencies, but it might provide statistics that would be useful. Of course, if she tracked this in different offices or Directorates or if the Shiny-New FEMA wants to start tracking wellness statistics (combine these numbers with HR stats on overtime or time spent deployed), that might be a good management improvement initiative which could lead to better retention and morale.

I was just thinking about that because the entire time I worked for FEMA, I went to one doctor's appointment...some managers are driven by the "you must be here all the time because any direction from above can come at any time and we can't do it without you." With the IMATs especially, I often remained in the building until 7 PM, when we could be sure the Admiral or XXX would not ask for a fly-by presentation.

If this was during Hurricane Season or any other external time constraint (Congressional investigation, end of the Fiscal Year, other deadline), it is completely understandable, but this is a routine thing for many offices in Disaster Ops. My overtime for waiting around for leadership was always approved, which is why when I left the Agency for a \$XX,000 raise in salary, I actually took at least a \$YY,000 cut in pay due to overtime. I would be happy to provide my pay stub from January-July 7th where I made almost twice my salary in overtime when it was NOT Hurricane Season. The amount of overtime is staggering. I wonder if you can get these numbers from HR.

This whole situation is driven by my previous "Who sets Operational Requirements for Deployment" issue. For me, the manager (former fire fighter, former Coast Guard) would say "We need to be in here this weekend. Do you want Saturday or Sunday?" and I would show up. This happened on Easter Sunday but they just "allowed [us] to go home but have [our] blackberries on [us]." When we did come in on the weekends, we did Power Point presentations or "plans." Both of these were sometimes never presented or used. On Easter weekend, we were told to write a Federal "Plan" for flooding near St. Louis though no assistance was ever required. When there is a disaster, Federal planners, have a 10:00 meeting with the NRCC reps from other

federal agencies but do not coordinate or communicate with the JFO or RRCC Planning Sections, which are actually communicating with the locals and states and field reps from other agencies. At these meetings, they develop a presentation and then stress out to give this presentation at the VTC or to Leadership at closed meetings later in the day. These types of initiatives were the justification for bringing employees in for 10-12 hours a day and on weekends for months at a time while field personnel were doing the work at a local and state level.

A Proposed Employee Performance Management System for FEMA

Background

Throughout FEMA's existence the importance of Performance Management has been recognized and the methods of individual performance appraisal have continually evolved reflecting the Strategic Goals and values of each administration. An underlying objective throughout has been to hold employees accountable for work tasks while encouraging supervisors to make a subjective process as objective, as possible. Employees have consistently expressed strong desire for there to be a clear connection between day to day tasks and the Agency's publicized strategic goals and objectives and that the bases or standards in which their performance is appraised are as objective (i.e. measurable), as possible. Many believe that a giant step toward responding to these issues would be quantifying the performance objectives of the Agency down to the unit and individual level. It is also recognized that as necessary as Performance Appraisals are they can be intimidating, unfair and counter-productive when adjectives are used rather than quantitative measures to evaluate performance.

Past GAO findings (January 2003 – Major Management Challenges and Program Risks – Federal Emergency Management Agency) and DHS Strategic Plans (The Department of Homeland Security – Strategic Human Capital Plan 2003 – 2008 – July 15, 2003) highlight the criticality of optimum use of human resources and the dire implications of demographic realities (2003), competition for recruitment, retention and well documented morale issues.

In both public and private sectors that performance management systems are used by organizations as vehicles for receiving maximum return on its most valuable investment, its human resources. Each FEMA administration has placed some value on its Performance Management System. Yet, despite the consistent evolution of employee performance appraisal formats, employees have continued to express frustration about basic fairness regarding evaluations of their performance, individual training and development and promotion opportunities. Past assessments of FEMA's Performance Management System indicate that the process, more often than not, that managers and supervisors are themselves delegated to particular work tasks and putting out fires to the detriment of actually managing the human resources. Too often when the appraisal process is re-visited, only as frequently as quarterly, the process is not particularly productive. When the communication is less frequent, the process is understandably even less productive. In fairness, this is not a situation unique to FEMA.

Management Improvement "Best Practices" indicate that performance management is most effective when there is continuous interaction regarding measurable performance standards and out of those discussions come objectives for individual development, training, promotion opportunities, improvement of work processes and identification of other resource needs. Best Practices also indicate that when the performance plans of managers and supervisors reflect a high value placed on consistently working collaboratively with staff to achieve measurable objectives rather than infrequently

providing oversight. There is a great deal of evidence illustrating extraordinary success when executives ensure that their managers actually “manage” performance management. Most recent communication from FEMA Management to staff (FY 2008 Fourth Quarter Performance Reviews, dated October 8, 2008 10:15 AM) emphasized that “Although FEMA leadership has the overall responsibility for ensuring that the employee performance plans are in place and that performance reviews are conducted on a quarterly and annual basis, employee performance management is a shared responsibility between supervisors and staff. The message goes on to specify some very reasonable behavior regarding the employee’s responsibilities to attain an understanding of the supervisor’s expectations, seeking clarification and providing feedback. Clearly, this process should be “managed” by members of the management team rather than sharing this responsibility with employees who look to them to set priorities.

Recommendations

The primary purpose of the FEMA Performance Management System is to establish objectives related to valued work against which unit and individual performance can be measured, to discuss performance against these objectives and to continually enhance performance. Continuous discussion of performance focuses not only on the individual, but also on work processes, resources and any other issues that can be addressed to improve performance.

The process of managing performance can be initiated by collaboratively defining measurable objectives for unit performance that are based on assigned work. These unit objectives establish the framework in which individual performance in which individual performance objectives and those of supervisors can be defined. Performance objectives at the unit, supervisory and individual levels are frequently reviewed to determine their continued relevance and if needed, they are reviewed.

It is recommended that the FEMA executive issue a strong policy statement citing the importance of the Performance Management System as a vehicle for improvement and change when required. The system is identified as the basis for obtaining the maximum return on investment in human resources, as well as, a means in which FEMA can ensure that its workforce possesses the capabilities (i.e. knowledge, skill and abilities) to carry out its critical national security mission and compete, in the marketplace, for talent.

In addition, it is recommended that an organizational role is assigned responsibility for assisting and advising units regarding performance management activities. Individuals conducting performance management functions should receive the preparation needed to perform their responsibilities and adequate time and funding should be allocated.

When they arise, individual performance problems are discussed and documented. If performance continues to be unsatisfactory, a Performance Improvement Plan is

developed and tracked and appropriate policies and guidelines are followed to ensure fairness and objectivity.

Outstanding performance is recognized and rewarded on an ongoing basis. Rewards include special recognition outside of the compensation system for accomplishments of significant value to the organization. A Recognition and Reward strategy is developed and communicated to the workforce. As rewards are made, public recognition is provided to reinforce those skills or behavior that the organization values.

Recommended Goals

1. To issue (FEMA executive) a Policy Statement citing the Performance Management System as the vehicle for ensuring the most proficient use of human resources and their individual development, professional growth and promotion opportunities

Potential Benefits:

- An organizational role(s) is assigned responsibility for assisting and advising units regarding performance management activities.
- Adequate resources are allocated to maintain consistent focus.
- Individuals conducting performance management activities receive preparation needed to perform their responsibilities.

2. To establish measurable performance objectives based on assigned work to each unit and individual

Potential Benefits:

- Each individual's performance objectives are drawn, in part, from the performance objectives of their unit.
- Individual performance objectives are reviewed and revised, when required, to coincide with those of the unit.
- All appropriate members of the unit are involved in developing the unit's performance objectives based on their involvement in making work commitments.
- Potential improvements in processes, tools or resources which could enhance an individual's performance of tasked work are identified and appropriate actions taken.

3. To initiate policies and procedures to ensure that performance problems are managed expeditiously and fairly

Potential Benefits:

- Performance problems are identified, in the context of individual development planning (IDP).
- Performance problems are discussed objectively, documented based on appropriate performance objectives, policies or other applicable guidelines.

- Performance Improvement Plans are developed for resolving persistent performance problems according to documented procedures.
 - Objectives and criteria are used in evaluating progress against Improvement Plans.
4. To initiate policies and procedures to ensure that the rights and dignity of each individual are respected during the conduct of all performance management activities

Potential Benefits:

- Performance management information and data are confidential to the individual(s) they concern.
 - If necessary, disagreements about performance results, interpretations or other performance feedback are discussed to an appropriate entity, such as a higher level of management, the human resources function or other appropriate professionals.
 - Criteria developed and used to evaluate whether a different position or career option should be considered.
5. To initiate processes to solicit employee feedback regarding supervisory performance, for use in formulating the Individual Development Plans and Performance Plans of supervisors and managers.

Potential Benefits:

- The Performance Management System can become a tool to focus supervisors and managers on the importance of enhancing their management effectiveness, as various needs require it.
 - Resolution of performance problems will consider developmental needs of supervisors, as well as individual staff members.
 - Performance Plans and Individual Development Plans can be used to foster valuable behavior (e.g. voluntary mentorships).
6. To develop guidelines for providing for providing Recognition or Rewards Strategy in order to develop a culture which values teamwork and extraordinary effort

Potential Benefits:

- Recognition or Rewards are made to reinforce the skills and behaviors that the organization values.
- Recognition or rewards are determined according to established well publicized guidelines.
- Recognition and Rewards are presented to individuals or groups, in a way that conveys the organization's appreciation

Employee Recruitment, Training, and Retention

I have a burning concern that all (especially NEW) Legislative Staffers need to be part of a training session on Federal Grants – and someone should be summarizing things that are pertinent to THEIR customer service potential in their small jurisdictions. Every delay that an elected official puts on the table on behalf of a constituent delays the timeframe (sometimes critical safety issues) in which work can be completed and could be a cause for that little ‘burg to lose matching funds for money for which their activity may be eligible

1. Improve the way people are recruited by FEMA by eliminating the pre-selection/"wired" method: Instead of the quick opening and closing of the announcement windows, expand the window of opportunity to ensure that the biggest pool of qualified applicants have a chance to apply. Also, HRM should conduct seminars on how to address the KSAs and Selective Placement questions described in their announcements.
2. Improve the way people are recruited for disaster deployment to the NRCC, JFO and the field by describing in full what people will be doing on the NRCC, JFO and in field. For example, if people are recruited to serve on the NRCC, a list of all positions, not just the supervisory ones, along with position descriptions and risks of serving on 12-hour duty should be included in the solicitation of volunteers. The same thing should apply for the JFO. For all other jobs in the field, such as Community Relations, these should be described, along with the working conditions, including risks of getting infected by insects, bad food, poor hygiene/sanitation, etc. In addition, better screening of DTE and DAE applicants should be performed to ensure you're not getting convicted felons or credit card abusers.
3. Require the Acquisition staff to use existing the Contracting Officers' Tech Reps (COTRs) in the cadre to coordinate issued contracts. What is the point of expensively training those of us who are in the cadre and have to refresh our knowledge about procurement if the Acquisition folks don't use existing resources?
4. Try harder to recruit knowledgeable folks from various sources to lead the Agency. Then, educate the folks who originate from the private sector about Agency programs, how to do budgeting, and issues such as union rights and Hatch Act protections.

A fair rotation of personnel for disasters. It's not that people are being called to often; it's that the same people are being called to work on the NRCC every time. If a real emergency hit, you will only have a few people trained and ready while others would not know where to start. If you are running an emergency management agency, every

employee especially in the HQ should be trained on how to operate in the NRCC. Even when they ask for volunteers, the same person should not be allowed to go unless no one else is willing. If you continuously pick the same volunteer it shows favoritism instead of a fair working environment. How are the volunteers selected? Would a fair rotation be that a person is only allowed to go to the NRCC 2 times in a fiscal year? Unless a major emergency hits and more people are needed.

Institutional (especially African American) knowledge is being pushed out the door by work being removed from them or substantive work not given to them.

All ESF-15 major components are not staffed with a full staff of people to appropriately work daily issues and to prepare staff to respond effectively during disaster activities. For example, the Office of External Affairs has refused to fully staff the Community Relations component of ESF-15.

The majority of FEMA's institutional knowledge on emergency management response and recovery is held by temporary employees, most notably among the members of the FCO cadre (TFTs hired under Title 5 who serve at the pleasure of the administrator and can be released from their positions at any time without cause) and the DAE cadre (who, as Stafford Act employees, serve only in disaster and do not deploy for after-action activities). These are the two sources for Agency deployments and serve in response and recovery capacities for all disasters. There is no formalized process for members of these on-call cadres to transition into PFT positions at the Agency, even in Disaster Assistance and Response Operations, despite the training and experience.

There is no formalized recruitment process for new employees and no career ladder for existing employees to become leaders in the agency. Entry-level recruitment depends on local hires from recent disasters and word-of-mouth, despite the recent rise in emergency management degree programs across the country. Reservists (DAEs) and senior GS officials are informally recruited by existing FEMA employees from recent retirees in other fields such as military or fire service, resulting in an aging DAE cadre that is not always ready to deploy (many are forced to refuse deployments or leave responses early due to health issues and many simply die out of the positions) and frequent turnover among agency leaders who serve FEMA for 3-5 years as a second career while collecting retirement pensions from the previous, non-emergency management profession.

You wouldn't ask a FEMA employee to run the Coast Guard.

As of 2007, over 67% of the agency leadership was politically appointed. According to OPM statistics, the average time spent in a Temporary Full-Time position (FCOs and political appointees) is 2.5 years. This turnover in leadership leads to instability and

waste as new initiatives are introduced, implemented, and then abandoned as the appointees leave their posts. Recent examples of offices that have been upended by this are Acquisitions and Disaster Communications, but the process repeats itself agency-wide with each change in administration (see Project Impact). Political appointees include most Regional Administrators (due to recent efforts to make these Career positions) and the Assistant Administrators of all Directorates in the Agency. This also contributes to low employee morale as good initiatives are introduced and then abandoned without regard to success and new processes are constantly invented, necessitating almost constant training on new procedures. For comparison purposes, I have been told that the Secret Service has roughly the same number of Permanent, Full-Time employees (2500) as FEMA and only 1 political appointee.

Operational requirements for specific incidents are not set by hazard-specific subject matter experts, but rather "Operations" subject matter experts. The emphasis of Agency training and the structure of the Agency are based on the Incident Command System and National Incident Management System, so that teams are deployed almost immediately without reference to the severity of an incident. The Illinois Earthquake of April 18, 2008 was a particularly egregious example where Headquarters personnel deployed the NRCC Activation Team to a Level 1, 24-hour shift based on the news that there had been an earthquake in Illinois. Approximately a dozen states were brought onto a conference call at noon which revealed the only damage to be one mobile home that fell off its cinderblocks and was restored by the residents and their neighbors. One individual in the NRCC VTC room was able to explain to curious Activation Team members the severity of the earthquake prior to the call, and that was due to his personal interest in earthquakes. He did not speak on the call and was not called into an advisory role for the event. The deployment was ordered by leadership (backgrounds in USCG, Fire Service, and Secret Service) and the Senior Watch Officer and no earthquake subject matter experts served as advisors. This deployment resulted in several Activation Team members going home for paid Admin days in preparation for an overnight shift that was not necessary.

Over half of the FCO cadre that was employed in 2002 has left the agency. All but one are currently working in emergency management, though none are working for FEMA.

DAEs are provided no formalized mental health assistance while deployed or debrief afterward, including those who serve in disaster mortuary or individual assistance capacities. These services are provided by the Red Cross and other agencies to volunteers who serve in similar positions. This includes individuals who served at 9/11 and Katrina.

DAEs are provided no health insurance or protection for their full-time jobs while deployed, as National Guardsmen or other on-call workforces are in other parts of the government. Some employees are fired from their full-time jobs and their benefits while on longer-term deployments and thus network to extend the deployment or transfer to another disaster. Thus, FEMA's reservist cadre is dependent on frequent disaster

deployment to pay for benefits rather than voluntarily on-call for service. The rates of divorce among the reservist cadre are high for this reason, which leads to more dependence on deployment. Since reservists are paid hourly and per diem, there is an incentive to remain at the disaster site rather than turning the job over to Local Hires and, in so doing, extend both the paycheck and increase the chances of networking to be deployed again.

Bear in mind, there is a disincentive for companies to hire DAEs because deployments are unpredictable in length, frequency, and season. This could be improved with changes to recruitment policies (hiring a subset of the cadre from recent college graduates a la Americorps, training) (routine training and 2-week deployments required every year), and pay structure (monthly stipend for being on-call) as well as the same employment protection offered to other on-call workforces who serve their country.

I'm trying to figure out some good populations to target recruitment programs. For example:

1. DAEs could come from a combination of retirees, college students, and disaster victims themselves, which is where XXX said the majority of DAEs used to come from. I figured this, having been a local hire myself, but the DAE cadre has run itself for so long and it's too clique-y to get into very easily (I had to apply to be a HQ Generalist, even though my manager thought I was "really great at this stuff." Hey, his money depends on his deployment!)
2. COREs should come from DAEs and Locals.
3. PFTs should come from the DAE cadre, Local Hires, service programs such as Americorps and Peace Corps, and state and local emergency managers.
4. FCOs should come from within the agency and from among state and local emergency manager.

I think you have to create target percentages to recruit. For example, 90% of new recruits could come from target groups, split evenly among retirees, college students, and disaster victims. For PFTs, it's harder to create percentages because of OPM regulations, but recruiting in emergency management journals is not a violation. It's also not a standard practice, because the HR people think it violates the "All Sources" rules. Once again, we need 0201 Series HR Specialists in the agency who understand how to classify positions and can understand the Emergency Management is a profession performed outside of the agency, but let me get off my high horse. Seriously, if NSF can recruit scientists, what is our problem?

See, the target percentages should change over time as certain groups prove more efficient as FEMA employees. For example, some college students might just blow you away with how awesome they are at DAE work. Some are really going to disappoint. That's why FEMA should get an Americorps subset: volunteers tend to be

more reliable and dedicated. And the way we could pay them (as DAEs) is more than many Americorps volunteers make.

If you did an audit of FEMA employees right now who have been hired in the last 3 years, you would have the largest percentages with backgrounds in the military, law enforcement, other federal agencies, and the fire service. Now, if you took a subset like Mitigation, this is different because they hire engineers and building inspectors and stuff. Same with Assistance and people from Red Cross. Basically, I'm thinking about Operations, Policy, Logistics, and External Affairs, which are our major failure factors right now. But if I am wrong, and the majority come from emergency management backgrounds, then an audit would probably bring up morale and help us all understand the best practices that exist in FEMA HR! You might be able to predict how I think such an audit would turn out...

The Agency has a budget of \$500,000 per year to pay relocation costs for directed reassignment. XXX paid out of his own pocket to move from AAA to BBB when he joined the FIRST. The other 4 members were on 2-hour call at all times and were thus living apart from their spouses and kids and paid the rent in BBB on their own dime. One's family was in Denver, another's was in Washington State, another's was in Michigan. I only knew them when there were 4 people on the team (they couldn't keep a full roster because of the no-relocation cost problem with the high stress of the job). OPM budgets \$260,000 per fiscal year for reassignments, so FEMA only maintains enough for one per year. A lot of people work far away from their families but I think the Chicago FIRST was just one glaring example of how this contributes to employee turnover.

If you're going to develop an interoperable Agency that can respond to all-hazards and you are going to put people in austere working conditions, you might help your employees move to their new assignment.

Hiring and Promoting Our Friends

Our Section continues to experience personnel hirings, firings, and promotions that seem highly unethical, if not in fact illegal. Using initials instead of names:

- R, who is the first line supervisor in the XXX Section, hired N as a GS-14 to work directly under him as a team lead. N had never been a civil servant before, but she had been living with R recently while she was out of work. Many others were interviewed but she was hired under “Direct-Hire” Authority and selected over other candidates who were qualified and who had more experience and time in the government.
- P hired D as a GS-14 to work directly under her as the second line supervisor; she worked with him at her job prior to FEMA, and I believe she considered him an old friend. He was selected over other qualified candidates who had more experience and time in the government.
- R then succeeded P as the first line supervisor when she transferred to another agency, and D remained in his current position as second line supervisor.
- S was hired as a GS-12 under Direct Hire Authority with only two years experience in Contracting and was selected over several other qualified candidates and was immediately given the bigger projects to work on over the other employees who had been in the XXX Section longer.
- Performance evaluations were handed out to all employees whereby brand new employees were rated much higher than employees who had been with FEMA in the XXX Section for over a year; the rationale behind that per R is that those new hires had worked on more complex work assignments to warrant the higher ratings.
- New hires such as S were selected for deployment by R over employees that had been with FEMA for over a year.
- R withheld a promotion to an eligible employee who occupied a GS-13 promotion potential position, stating to him that he was just not ready even though the employee had never received any “Unsatisfactory” ratings on any performance evaluations.
- R stated to L that, although she had not received any “unsatisfactory” ratings on her performance evaluations and she was in a permanent full time position with GS-13 promotion potential, he could hold up her promotion on a whim if he so desired. He stated this with N sitting next to him, nodding her head in the affirmative.
- L (who is in a PFT GS-13 promotion potential position) was delayed her promotion by two months by P because she “lost the paperwork,” and then was told that she may not re-coup that time as the clock starts over once in a new grade.

- R punished employee L for taking leave for being sick during flu season by withholding her compressed work schedule.
- R forced the resignation of M who had been hired as a timekeeper before he landed the position as first line supervisor because he said M “scared people” when he was setting them up for interviews because he is not as articulate over the phone as he is in person. (M received a 3.2 GPA from an accredited university with a degree in Business Management.) R stated that the only other reason he forced his resignation was because his peers did not wish to work with him. R then bragged to other employees that he was firing him but giving him until January 31st to find another job.

History Repeats Itself at FEMA

An examination of FEMA's ups and downs over the years reveals a repetitive pattern that goes something like this:

- A small ("normal") disaster generates accolades among grateful locals, transmitted through an eager press. This is the **spike** in FEMA's popularity.
- But then eventually there's the big disaster (which, as Congressman Weldon said after Hugo, FEMA was designed for in the first place) and it's discovered that the money thrown at the small one won't cover the planning gaps exposed by the large one, and the locals and the press turn mean, and the FEMA Public Information Officers (PIOs) are bristling with martyred betrayal. This is the **trough**, where FEMA's popularity hits bottom.

Interestingly, this rhythm has been repeated again and again for over twenty years, but has been largely forgotten by people today:

- 1984, North Carolina tornadoes – An easy spike; someone even called the Joint Field Office (JFO) staff a "transient utopian community" of can-do "disaster gypsies."
- 1985, Pennsylvania tornadoes – A larger, harder a trough...in Tom Ridge's home district, with the outcry helping drive him into authoring the Stafford Act)
- 1985-1988 – The "spike" here was actually just a lull; not many big disasters going on, press distracted by FEMA's various scandals, nuclear doomsday scenarios, and a chemical dumping controversy.
- 1989, Hurricane Hugo – Hugo was a huge trough, and FEMA's popularity hit bottom. People now are so busy re-quoting Senator Hollings's "bureaucratic jackasses" comment that they forget his other quotes, like "FEMA should either lead, follow or get the devil out of the way."
- 1989, Loma Prieta Earthquake – Here the spike came almost immediately, because the White House was mortified by Hugo and took direct control of the earthquake response. (It was also smaller than Hurricane Hugo had been.) Press and locals were very impressed, actually talking about the "new face of FEMA" as if it was something more permanent than a euphoric spike. (Criticisms came later.)
- 1992, Hurricane Andrew – Nobody needs to be told about this trough, and "Where the hell is the cavalry?" Press and locals turn unfriendly with a vengeance. White House feels betrayed by bungling. Pesky Governor didn't ask for aid. FEMA feels martyred, complaining that it was just too big, and people just don't understand.

- 1993-2001 – Could be that it was as good as they say. But if it rested on one man's personality - as Senator Barbara Mikulski said - maybe the future was foretold.
- September 11, 2001 Terrorist Attacks – This was pretty much of a spike, discounting for the complaints about settlement amounts...but this spike would be nothing compared to the 2004 Florida hurricanes.
- 2004, Hurricanes Charley, Frances, et al – In this brilliant spike in FEMA's popularity, the press fawned all over FEMA Director Mike Brown as the can-do hero, giving out all that money, with few in the media seeming to mention the obvious link to the upcoming Presidential Election. One news story was actually headlined, "Locals Are Impressed with a 'New FEMA.'" Meanwhile, FEMA's former Chief of Staff (under the Clinton Administration) Jane Bullock was at that moment drafting a book that would actually predict the Katrina horror a year later, but this was nowhere evident in the press/local love fest for the 2004 effort. The amount of FEMA aid given out in the 2004 success story was, say, about 1/100th of the Katrina avalanche to come. But everybody could feel good. And be helpful. And ignore the gaps.
- August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina – What in the world has happened to the news media's heroic view of Mike Brown?
- 2007-2008, California Wildfires, Midwest Floods – Certainly not small, except by comparison, and another spike of FEMA's popularity in the press from grateful locals, repeatedly cited as proof that there is a permanent "New FEMA." But the Houston Chronicle had an ominous prediction at the same time, pointing out the comparative smallness of recent disasters, the suspiciously shallow euphoria, the lack of hard-choices planning underneath...and sure enough, only a few months later comes the crash, in the form of....
- 2008, Hurricane Ike – I saw some things in this trough that aren't easily believed, so I took pictures. To say that officials from FEMA Headquarters glossed this over is like saying the sun is a little hot.

Will this cycle continue in the future?

Horror Stories from Texas

September 2008, Austin, Texas. We were told to check out of our hotels at 5:00 a.m. and to drive to Houston and report to the Reliance Center. It was very dark when we left. We reported to the Reliance Center as ordered and stood around for hours without direction. Seemed no one had made a plan. There were hundreds just standing around wondering why we left Austin at 5:00 a.m.

In Galveston we were ordered to go to the bridge that comes off Interstate 45 to welcome the people of Galveston that were returning. Again reporting time was 5:00 a.m. It was pitch black out. Orange safety cones were placed on the bridge with a box of FEMA fliers to pass out, with several FEMA papers stapled together in each packet. A FEMA Reservist was told to stand by the orange cones – directly next to the high-speed road – and hand out the fliers.

Shortly after that, however, an 18 wheeler came roaring through and crushed the box with the fliers, sending them flying. (This was where the Reservist was supposed to be standing!) A group of students from Galveston was going to help, but when their teacher saw what happened she said, "My students will not be standing in the highway."

After that the FEMA Powers That Be decided it was too foolish to make us do that. But further up the highway FEMA people were mandated to give out fliers to the motorists coming through. The FEMA person in charge does not have much background in Emergency Management. I think this is a political plum job.

I would faint if I ever called FEMA HQ and talked to a real person. I always get messages that say, "I am away from my desk, your call is important to us, please leave your name and number, and we will get back to you." I have never received a call back. It also so is evident that they don't do their jobs. If they bothered to read the evaluations and recommendations for advanced training it would seem logical that we would be sent to school so that we might advance.

Hurricane Ike – Inside the “New FEMA”

“...The line wasn't moving at all and the people were like hamburgers on the grill.”

Should it be doubted that FEMA Headquarters can be clueless about what's going on in the field, consider Hurricane Ike. I was deployed there from the Iowa disaster and found that no one in Washington seemed to know where the actual deployment site was, except that it was somewhere in Houston, and XXX was there, but she wasn't answering her phone.

In increasing dismay as I drove a rental car into the hurricane ruins, a few days after landfall, I made more and more calls in search of the phantom Houston contact point. I phoned Austin, Denton, Washington, and always the answer was: Gosh, if you find out where it is, please let us know.

Finally I got somebody who had an alternative phone number for the mysterious contact, and she gave me directions to a FEMA Mobile Emergency Response System (MERS) at the Houston Astrodome...where a cozy contingent had been all along, with no more concern about how new arrivals would find them than a summer's day.

When I finally found the MERS truck that was my check-in point, it turned out to be parked next to 800 or so idling trailer trucks in a vast Astrodome parking lot...trucks from all over the country bringing ice and water, most of which was never used...though soon I was sent to meetings in Houston's low-income neighborhoods where people without power were crying for ice to preserve medicine and milk for children.

The Red Cross was ready to distribute the ice, but couldn't pry it loose from FEMA's 800 trucks, sounding remarkably like point-of-contact bottlenecks ranging from Hugo to Katrina. The mayor of Houston made news shouting obscenities at two ladies with clipboards who wouldn't let the ice move out of the lot. Shades of Katrina!

In the tight space of the MERS I heard furtive discussion about how to make this embarrassing problem go away...*by sending all that ice secretly out to a remote San Antonio airbase (emphasis on the word "remote") and spreading it on the runway under black tarps to melt.* A mysterious floating quality...like slow-motion underwater ballet...seemed to keep resources from getting to needs.

In Ike, everything seemed to be unlike the smaller, widely complimented Iowa disaster operation I had come from, but you couldn't blame those rambunctious ghetto dwellers of Louisiana for this one. This was Houston, the supposed bastion of disaster efficiency where FEMA would be unbound. There were countless stories like the ice, most flashing by me as vague ghosts with no way to see the gremlins in the works.

The housing issue thundered by...people were being given generic lists of hotels they were supposed to stay at, *even though the distributors were told over and over that the list was fake, for the hotels were full.* More “not-my-responsibility” frowns and grumbles.

More furtive dodging of the questions. It was doubly pathetic to see how the people of Houston, rich and poor, continued through it all to largely view us as cavalry-to-the-rescue, not objects of contempt.

(Later, when I was deployed to Florida, I would learn that over there *a number of sharp, experienced Disaster Assistance Employees (DAEs) said they had intentionally avoided going to Ike...because, they said, it was a big one, and they knew it would be chaos, because, well, we couldn't do big ones, and there would predictably be meltdowns and finger-pointing and ways to get chewed up...which I was to discover firsthand.*)

The DAE problem is a great iceberg beneath this tip...the workforce that really runs the disaster but is constantly turning over and getting shifted away, and getting barely disguised disdain from the full-timers. "You guys are the turn-over kings," a sarcastic Mississippi official once told me, tired of seeing a new face as soon as the old rules were learned, as "FEMA flexible" became code for "We don't know how to solve the flexible workforce riddle." The deployment process is largely politics and ADD is something of a joke, though at times sprinkled with a few helpful, efficient saviors. Behind the scenes there is a sizzling DAE grapevine that heavily influences placement...and without it, competence would numbly be given equal weight with clueless time-serving. The backdooring, though, further teaches that the official line is a Gilbert-and-Sullivan pretense that must be kowtowed to.

The personnel parade in Houston had a bottom-of-the-barrel feel to it...either because the sharp folks were ducking this one (as the skeptics in Florida said), or because the system was maxed out with deployments elsewhere and there was no planning to consider the national good and "intrude" on the rosters of other mothballed disasters.

But it wasn't just the elusive quality of the personnel mix, it was also the puzzling pattern of taking some very good people (I can think of a couple of names) and putting them on the bottom, while some widely reputed mysteries were put on top. What was this? Who was doing this? Texas--a proudly confrontational state that won't even allow our Intergovernmental teams in (unless disguised guiltily as Community Relations Teams)--presented muffled sounds of high-level battles in the background, but I only saw the peon-level shakeout. In Iowa I had learned about the textbook success story of the Wisconsin disaster next door, with an FCO who was a genius at getting loved. In Florida there was a similar genius, a guy people would have followed into hell. *In Texas there was the statement that if people were living in tents, well, it was their choice.* This was a Big One. This was the kind of catastrophe for which FEMA exists, but whose riddle remains unsolved.

I found that my supervisor, as the staff rolled their eyes, was spending hours outside on a personal cell and organizing nothing. I was sent in to be the "Disaster Recovery Center [DRC] guru"...an interesting job since nobody seemed to know where the DRCs were. (The branch manager would rage about this openly.)

There were stories that the Houston DRCs were rushed into service too soon because of White House pressure, but I had no way to know. The first two I located were getting along well enough, but the next was a melt-down, because the rush had provided insufficient equipment or preparation. Standees were sweltering for hours in a Home Depot parking lot that was a Texas-style oven. Cheap portable sun canopies to protect them were readily available, but were not used. True, at Northridge in the 1990s applicants had waited even longer, through the night, but not in this blinding, steam bath subtropical heat.

I was giving a TV interview beside the DRC line when a woman behind me, wearing an oxygen feed but consigned with the others to the endless broiling sun, began to wobble. I fumbled, then caught her before her head hit the pavement, but she was out.

The news camera taped the ambulances arriving in the chaos. One of the FEMA specialists at the tables these people were waiting to get to was holding a clipboard surreally over her head the whole time, the sun was so withering.

Over and over at such junctures, there seemed to have been little looking ahead to the real possibilities to see what might be needed...and once the planning hadn't been done, the people on the ground were left to scurry and make excuses. By then it was too late.

Then the next DRC...the worst one. Here the line wasn't moving at all and the people were like hamburgers on the grill. A Home Depot store manager was so distressed to see the tragedy unfolding in her parking lot that she took the initiative herself, and sent out a hundred or so orange plastic Home Depot buckets, so the poor people would at least have something to sit on as they baked.

To see the results of this, storm victims forced to perch on buckets in an endless line baking in the sun, like some kind of boot-camp punishment, would make anyone who cares about FEMA's mission get a little upset.

But then, who would ever see it, except the storm victims? Washington would never see it. Austin would never see it. They would see written reports with all the boxes neatly checked off, and would wonder why the local officials kept griping so unfairly.



The Home Depot store manager also sent out a couple of sun canopies on loan, which at least covered a few of the people. FEMA was unable to take such initiative. Instead, the DRC staff were visibly cowed into a lockstep mode of obedience. They were DAEs, "at pleasure" employees. One wrong chirp and home they went, no more pay.

Some specialists at the outdoor tables were so cowed that they wouldn't even move their laptops back a foot to keep them from broiling in the sun...because the boss hadn't told them to. Before I went to this DRC I was told there were some management problems and no one was sure who the manager was anymore. When I saw him, it looked to me that the manager himself was visibly disoriented in the merciless heat. He would later be pilloried by the news media for providing no Spanish-speaking interpreters to the largely Spanish-speaking crowd sitting obediently on the orange plastic buckets.

This DRC staff had been rushed here with no sleep and no lodging in some cases, expected to do the impossible. Their operation had become a pretense. The ultimate absurdity was that at one of the tables waiting for the baked applicants in the four-hour line was a crisis counselor. What was he there for? To have people wait four hours in a trial by fire and then counsel them to calm down?

Soon both the two co-managers, Federal and State, were saying that this was all just too much, and they were going to shut the line down early, well in advance of its announced hours, and anyone who had perched on the buckets after the cut-off point was just out of luck. But this was Sunday, the only day off for some of these people. If they were sent home now, after waiting so long, how could they come back?

I was accompanied by another FEMA staffer by that point, and both of us were bilingual. As the standees (or bucket-ees) saw our FEMA shirts and dangling IDs, they naturally began asking us what was going on and what they should do...and when they heard us speaking Spanish, this process accelerated. The operation had no signs telling people what this line was for, and it turned out that many of the standees had not even registered and should not have been in a DRC line in the first place.

The other FEMA staffer and I began going through the line, explaining to the unregistered ones that they could go home and register by phone, so that others – some with urgent problems – could get to the head of the molasses-like line before it shut down. Throughout all this, the applicants were quiet and cooperative, almost browbeaten.

Next to the outdoor specialist's table I spotted a table with six unused telephones, clearly meant so that unregistered people could call in and register, but everyone seemed to be ignoring these phones. At first I thought the 800 number must be busy or something, but it wasn't, so in Spanish, I began calling unregistered standees over to the phones ("Opcion Dos Por Espanol"), and soon all the phones were in use.

The line was now getting down to manageable size, but people were still out in the sun, so I stayed, and continued to use my Spanish language to assist those who appeared to be most in need. But as the afternoon went on, one of the DRC co-managers began making it clear to me that these efforts were not especially welcome.

I believe I was doing the right thing in taking the initiative to help the applicants who were baking in the heat, but I was going up against the bureaucracy. Eventually, the bureaucracy won, and I was sent home.

I never got to see firsthand how the ice-melting at the remote airstrip turned out, or how the housing list was handled for all the hotels that were full, or whether the DRCs ever got Spanish interpreters.

This was the Big One.

“I Called FEMA and They Didn’t Even Know a Hurricane Hit New Orleans!”

The Need for FEMA Staff Training

Training throughout FEMA is not only inconsistent, but haphazard and, in most directorates, almost completely nonexistent. For the most part, employees show up to work, are given whatever electronic devices their offices provide (laptop, blackberry, cell phone), and are then thrown into their positions, which leads to each employee individually interpreting not only the purpose of their position but also, in many cases, federal disaster and emergency management policy. This is the basis for many of the issues FEMA has in disaster response and recovery because it breeds waste and inefficiency and damages the relationship between FEMA and all stakeholders, especially the local officials and citizens who have been affected by disaster.

The FEMA Helpline

When I applied for disaster assistance almost three weeks after Hurricane Katrina, the person on the other end told me I was lucky to live in New Orleans because he and his buddies were planning to go there for Spring Break. I thought this somewhat insensitive, but was good humored and proceeded with the application. As the process went on, it appeared that the guy was not only completely clueless about what had happened in New Orleans nearly a month earlier, but did not understand the questions on the FEMA registration application. For example, he asked me if my home was damaged. I said I did not know. The FEMA Helpline Representative actually laughed and said, “How do you not know if your home is damaged? Aren’t you there right now?” I told him that no, the city of New Orleans was under mandatory evacuation so I could not return to my home yet. To this he responded, “Holy s**t, are you serious? Why?” I made sure I was speaking to a FEMA representative and explained that a hurricane had hit the city, the levees had failed, it had flooded, and that search and rescue operations were still ongoing. It was then that the representative told me he didn’t pay attention to the news and that he had gotten the job because he was home from college on academic probation and FEMA was hiring.

There are a few issues evident in this story which, as I later learned by working in Individual Assistance in Louisiana and then at FEMA HQ, were not unusual. First of all, immediately following Katrina (as had happened immediately following the four Florida hurricanes of 2004), a huge number of new employees were hired to handle the surge (13,000 in 6 weeks is the number most often quoted). This understandably overwhelmed the training system and staff was placed on a 24-hour Helpline with little to no orientation to the Agency. The individuals who are available to work a surge immediately are available for a reason, which is normally either that they are retired or they are unemployed. Often, those who are unemployed are unemployed for a reason. Wherever these people come from, they need training.

Second, the FEMA Helpline handles every disaster or emergency that is going on, including those that are not yet declared. Keeping up with tornadoes and hurricanes in

the news can be overwhelming, but the fact that supervisors were not providing some kind of information about the disaster for each employee was distressing at best. When I was working in a Disaster Recovery Center in Louisiana later that month, I found that my colleagues were similarly uninformed of what was going on in New Orleans. A basic overview of what happened and where the affected victims are for each disaster might help get Assistance employees in a better frame of mind for customer service.

Providing the Helpline with an understanding of what a disaster victim experiences is also helpful because the experience of losing one's home or witnessing a major weather phenomenon is unique and overwhelming. Basic training in how this experience might manifest is incredibly important. People may have lost their homes, cars, or family members and may be experiencing PTSD when they call, yet Helpline representatives frequently make inappropriate assumptions about the situation ("Why don't you just drive over there?" "Have you tried calling your mother?") which come across as ignorant and/or insensitive and can create a public relations fiasco ("I called FEMA and they didn't even know a hurricane hit New Orleans!").

Third, disaster assistance registration questions are very generic ("Was your home damaged?" "Do you have need for transportation assistance?") and require some level of interpretation. Since it is necessary to be flexible to accommodate all kinds of disaster losses (a bicycle might be the primary form of transportation that was destroyed), it is also necessary to train the FEMA employees to help interpret the questions for applicants who may be traumatized, elderly, or confused ("Was your home damaged? What I mean by that is, are you currently able to live in your home?").

Later, when I was working in the Disaster Recovery Center, we would call the FEMA Helpline for certain situations like a change of address. I spent many hours over ten months on hold or talking to Helpline Representatives. Often, the Helpline rep became frustrated with the applicant and, in several cases, the FEMA Helpline rep actually yelled at or insulted the disaster victim. I would take the phone to sort out the situation and once actually spent 45 minutes consoling a FEMA Helpline employee who started sobbing because she was emotionally overwhelmed by the stories she was hearing and had had no training for the job she was doing.

FEMA Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) Employees

Many of the problems of the Helpline were evident in the field. I began work in a DRC about a month after Katrina and was lucky to have any training at all. Our training was designed and presented by a Region 6 Disaster Assistance Employee (DAE) and members of the Peace Corps Crisis Corps who had reported 2 weeks earlier who showed us the National Emergency Management Information System (NEMIS) for Individual Assistance. The explanation of the position was mostly anecdotal ("This one time in Oklahoma, we found a guy gored through the stomach by a tree and were able to help him!") and almost completely unstructured. As I understood, this training was presented in the field to new hires only if a FEMA employee felt like doing it. My

colleagues were literally given their laptops and a cell phone and were told where to report. They began working with disaster victims their first day.

There were a number of fascinating stories and unbelievable quotes that I witnessed which emerged from this scenario, ranging from the ignorant to the downright appalling. One woman who had worked for FEMA as a DAE for 8 years raised her hand in a meeting and asked if FEMA could do anything for people who lost their houses because that was “so sad.” She was listed as an “Expert” in the Individuals and Households Program and was assigned to train me for a day because of her experience, but had herself never had any training. Another said to a woman who had lost one of her three children to the New Orleans floodwaters as they jumped from roof to roof “Well, at least you still have the other two, right?” This employee had worked for FEMA as a DAE for over a decade.

DRC Employees were also uninformed of other government assistance programs such as HUD housing programs or Medicaid, which led to fraud and tremendous waste. Not only did FEMA employees request rental and housing assistance (including trailers) for Section 8 recipients, but the case would be appealed repeatedly if it was rejected (which not all caseworkers at the HQ level knew to do). This led to thousands of dollars in duplicate funding which could have been avoided if FEMA employees had an overview of government assistance programs. My manager taught me about them, but not all DRCs had the same protocol: when I was transferred to a different DRC in January, the disaster applicants were returning repeatedly for problems that my previous center had resolved in October.

The problem here is that the Individual Assistance Program is where FEMA has the biggest gains and losses in public relations, where FEMA employees can demonstrate incredible skill or ineptitude in helping disaster victims. It is a very personal relationship, sitting across the table from someone whose life has been turned upside down and needs to know their options. If FEMA employees were provided routine, standardized training for fieldwork which included a basic understanding of FEMA programs, other government assistance programs, and dealing with traumatized individuals, they would be able to provide viable options to disaster victims, and thus improve the agency's public image, the speed of disaster recovery, and the amount of duplicate government funding spent on assistance programs after a disaster.

Headquarters – Operations and Senior Management Officials

I showed up for night shift duty at the National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) in Washington during the June 2008 Midwest Floods and was informed by a coworker that FEMA's job was “pretty much done” because the water was receding in Cedar Rapids – it had fallen 8 inches or so, so there was just under 20 feet in downtown. We would probably be closing the operation at the federal level after 4 days because “the water is heading downstream and it's up to the locals now.”

Bear in mind that “downstream” meant down the Mississippi River and towards several states and St. Louis, a major urban area protected by a levee system. This coworker directly answered calls from the White House and Homeland Security and led planning meetings for other federal agencies in which he was the expert on FEMA Disaster Operations. This expert considered 20 feet of water in Iowa’s capital to be “no big deal” and, at this point, “not FEMA’s problem anymore.”

This is not unusual. After brief video footage of one tornado-damaged home in a suburban Tennessee community in Spring 2008, one Senior Executive reported that “there wasn’t a dry eye in that conference room.” He said, “Can you imagine what it must be like to lose your house? What if you didn’t have insurance?” The people crying over one destroyed suburban home included all senior officials from the Disaster Operations Directorate and more senior officials who manage all programs for the agency. Field personnel and the States affected by that tornado system were appalled. Didn’t these executives realize that this was our job?

Further experience that I had at HQ included once when I was asked by a Senior Official in Program Analysis who heard about my Katrina experience how a flood in a house could mold a t-shirt. He remarked that that must be a really unusual occurrence. And when there was a police stand-off over a FEMA trailer eviction in New Orleans that led to the occupant being killed, the FEMA Administrator and Deputy Administrator convened an immediate meeting demanding to know how this could have happened, despite Agency protocol that requires Community Relations and Trailer Recertification teams to wear bullet-proof vests and travel with Federal Protective Service agents when conducting their work in the field. Obviously, there is a reason this practice is required, but somehow Agency leadership did not have a clue and, in the meeting they convened, did not have access to field personnel who could explain that this was not an unusual occurrence.

What happens, then, when these uninformed leaders are making decisions about whether to order personal protective equipment for field employees? Someone with a military, fire, or law enforcement background might not take the risk very seriously without the media coverage that this tragic incident received, and with as much turnover as FEMA has, there is a very short institutional memory that, in this case, could create a risk for FEMA employees. Think of it this way: the new leader of the EPA might never have experienced a hazardous materials spill, but he is surrounded by employees with field experience and training who could explain the benefits of a HAZMAT suit were he to try to cut the budget. FEMA employees don’t have that kind of protection because there is no such training for our leadership and no field experience required for anyone at HQ.

Most of Headquarters, including most of the Disaster Operations Directorate, is currently a conglomerate of individuals who have arrived at FEMA and into the field of emergency management from other Federal agencies since Hurricane Katrina and are intent on “fixing” the Agency based on what they heard about that disaster. In planning meetings, they will often cite Katrina as an example of “how FEMA works” and will

discuss their own previous agencies' successes after the storm to stifle conversation. It is not unusual to hear "See, the military could have fixed that" or "Well, when the Coast Guard came in..." from former military or USCG employees. They often try to finagle more responsibility (read: money) for their former agency in FEMA planning efforts, regardless of the limits placed on such activity by the Stafford Act or Insurrection Act.

In interagency planning meetings, these individuals will make commitments to other federal agencies for services or funding as official FEMA representatives, with little regard for or understanding of Federal law or Agency protocol. They have the power to draft and approve Mission Assignments (MAs), but no understanding of the laws and policies governing MAs, so when the bill comes due for that disaster, informed FEMA accountants do not pay the promised amounts because the initial request was not legal. There is one major exception: a Disaster Operations employee who has been with FEMA for over a decade who works in the field and trains other employees on the MA program. She is considered the HQ expert on MAs, but she is not in charge of the program: the program is represented at other federal agencies by a self-taught employee with no field experience in MAs who frequently makes promises in writing that are contrary to federal law.

Several offices in Operations do "planning" which mainly consists of Microsoft power point presentations. These offices are managed by former Coast Guard, Secret Service, Marines, and Air Force employees, and none of them reference or require military planning techniques when conducting emergency management planning. Furthermore, these offices are supposedly conducting planning for the disasters, but do not coordinate with FEMA planners at the JFO or, in most cases, the Region. Information on disasters is found on public websites like Google, Wikipedia, or CNN, despite agency and academic protocol that would not use these as viable sources and despite the agency's considerable involvement in and documentation of the affected area.

FEMA has wonderful people from all kinds of professional backgrounds. Some of our best employees were former military, fire service, or even teachers, secretaries, or hairdressers when they initially joined the agency. But not training these people in the history and policies of the agency when they arrive is dangerous and has led to duplication of efforts at all levels, most notably at HQ. When someone qualifies for a GS-12 through 15 position, they still need training in that position, but that is not being offered, either out of a "respect" for the person's previous service or out of ignorance on the part of the manager (who is most likely new to the Agency himself).

Policy Interpretation Positions

For policy interpretation and analysis positions in other government agencies, such as Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS), require job applicants to take tests that assess incoming employees' logical reasoning skills and ability to apply policy to various situations. Applicants who make the USA Jobs Cert List are then required to take a four- to six-hour SAT-style test which determines whether or not they are granted an interview for the position. After being hired, employees report to a centralized, standard

training for four to six weeks prior to doing any type of adjudication or policy interpretation.

But most employees who arrive at FEMA take only one half-day to complete HR paperwork, and are then turned over to their supervisors to begin work. Later, employees take generic ethics and sexual harassment/diversity classes, but are expected to take emergency management courses online on their own time, if the supervisor requires it. There is little if any formal training.

The supervisors, meanwhile, go through the same orientation, with a few extra supervisor courses for government HR policy and sexual harassment awareness. More importantly, the agency does not train its own supervisors, but writes position descriptions that require applicants to have supervisory experience prior to their arrival. Thus, the Agency gets military officers, fire and police chiefs, and supervisors from other agencies, so many have never supervised government civilian employees (or female employees) and many have never held policy interpretation positions, much less emergency management policy interpretation and analysis positions.

What this means is that FEMA does not have a uniform workforce, and is not providing uniform service as a result. Employees are largely self-taught and operate independently when deployed, because most likely, their supervisor has never been in their position and does not have the time or awareness to truly mentor the employee. After enough deployments, the employee is considered a Subject Matter Expert (SME), but has in all likelihood not been mentored or been able to test their assumptions about policy except when applying it to real-world circumstances. Two Public Assistance SMEs will interpret grant eligibility differently for a given situation, but there is no central authority to determine which is correct. Thus, State and local officials often request one SME over another depending on their prior experience. Individual Assistance applicants will call back to the FEMA Helpline or visit different Disaster Recovery Centers to get the answer they want and, ultimately, receive grant funding even if a FEMA employee told them they were ineligible. With the lack of standard training on policy, there is almost no such thing as a “no” in FEMA because the applicant can just ask a different “expert.”

Some enterprising field employees have created uniform standards for their expertise, and train their own mini-cadres by deploying certain employees by “Name Request,” but these are informal arrangements and have no oversight from Headquarters. When the enterprising employees leave the Agency – and FEMA’s good field people are heavily recruited – so too does the effort to standardize that position.

Attempts to Create Standard Training

There have been haphazard attempts to create standard training. Supposedly, all employees are “required” to take four Independent Study courses through EMI each year (IS-100, 200, 700, and 800). Certificates of completion for these courses are not

required by most supervisors and are not tracked by a central entity within the Agency, nor would failure to complete these courses result in a poor annual review.

The Emergency Management Institute and some Regional and Field employees have attempted to write Position Task Books for FEMA ICS positions in an attempt to create uniform standards and training requirements for all Agency employees. These efforts were tied to other initiatives and have been interrupted as field SMEs deploy to various disasters. Task books and SOPs created by Headquarters are not used in the field because they are largely irrelevant to actual field operations since the HQ employees do not have training or experience in their subject matter.

Furthermore, almost all documents are left in draft form and thus are not distributed to field employees, so they are not used and quickly become obsolete. In 2007, Region IX spearheaded an effort to create an "Incident Management Handbook" which would be distributed in a quick-read format much like the Coast Guard and Fire Service handbooks, but this effort was overtaken by HQ and died quietly on someone's desk when it became "too political." What task books and checklists field employees have are created and distributed informally in the field so that the JFOs and DRCs can function, but HQ has no visibility on these efforts and all of the institutional knowledge contained in these informal documents is held by the on-call workforce. Those who have created these manuals often guard them to ensure their own field deployments rather than ensuring that the Agency functions uniformly for other disasters.

How to Improve Training

First, all FEMA employees should be required to deploy to the field for a period of time every year. This suggestion is often made by field and Regional employees who visit HQ and by HQ employees who want to experience actual emergency management. Deployments to coordination centers (COOP site, NRCC, or RRCC) would not count because employees who currently deploy to these efforts mistake writing Power Point briefings for actual emergency management and do not have the perspective (on weather and how it affects people) that field operations provide. The normal time frame quoted is 2 weeks per calendar year.

Second, Every employee at the Regional or Headquarters level should also have an emergency position on the NRCC or RRCC Activation Teams, as was done with the Emergency Support Team in the 1990s. The team has dwindled to a few dedicated employees who literally work for months on continuous 12-hour shifts, often overnight, because certain Directorates (most notably those which came to the Agency in 2007 after PKEMRA) have decided not to provide employees for the team. This contributes to employee turnover in the Directorates who staff emergency teams.

To do this effectively, Support Teams should have defined deployment periods for Training, On-Call, and Off-Duty to ensure that employees and supervisors plan around potential activations. This way, declared presidential disasters and emergencies do not come as a surprise to supervisors and create emergencies in the office.

Third, the Agency needs to spend more money on a robust training program that focuses on emergency management at all levels and that provides routine, standardized training for on-call and permanent employees in every position. This training program needs to include standard protocol and centralized assessment systems so that Headquarters and EMI can harness the best practices and institutional knowledge of field SMEs and then develop Agency protocol to implement best practices across the country. Deploying PFTs to the field becomes part of this assessment program as it will help expose them to how the different Regions do business and how policy is implemented in different types of disaster.

Very important in this is a robust orientation program that introduces every employee to the business and practice of emergency management and disaster. There is no excuse for a half-day "orientation" to get HR paperwork filled out when the Agency's business is as complex as it is. Employees are coming to this Agency because they want to be a part of making Federal emergency management better, not because they want to jump blindly into a dysfunctional agency and put in enough time to be called "experts" in it with no training or mentoring. Everyone should take classroom training in Preparedness, Response, Recovery, and Mitigation and should be trained to do paperwork for the major post-disaster work like Individual Assistance, Public Assistance, and Mission Assignment close-outs. All employees should have a basic understanding of the history of disaster and the administration of the Disaster Relief Fund. That way, all FEMA employees can understand the positive and negative press that the Agency receives and can contribute effectively to the surge when we have a major disaster like Katrina.

Fourth, FEMA needs to gather and create handbooks and checklists for the field and then needs to distribute these documents either electronically or in hard copy to every single employee. These handbooks need to be used in the field so they can be tested and updated every year or so. They also need to keep the same standard names and be stored on the public website so employees who have not deployed can quickly access them and do the business of the Agency without too much bureaucracy.

In order to do this, FEMA is going to need to focus on manager training and needs to cultivate its own leadership so the Agency has an identity independent from the Fire Service and Coast Guard. The Agency needs to target recruitment efforts in the field, to recruit from the on-call cadre, to bring that experience and subject matter expertise into the PFT cadre, so that managers have the experience to make informed policy decisions at the HQ level.

[Editor's Note: From 2002 to 2003, FEMA conducted an effort to develop a modular training program for staff deploying to the field in disasters. The project was scrapped after FEMA became part of DHS.]

Individual Assistance (IA) Program Suggestions

I have worked in Individual Assistance (IA) for 12 years and have experienced problems that can be corrected, but no one wants to take on the task of correcting the problems.

Here are some of the problems in Individual Assistance that need to be corrected:

1. FEMA rewards people for bad behavior. If the disaster victim has no insurance or not enough insurance, FEMA may give him a grant. If the victim has insurance, FEMA most likely will not help until the victim receives his settlement. If the settlement is over the max paid to victims, he will not receive any help from FEMA. If he has a \$5,000 deductible, which occurs in the hurricane areas, FEMA will not pay on deductibles, which should be corrected.
2. FEMA requires a new FEMA number in every disaster. This could be changed to having one FEMA number and the number placed under the new disaster declaration. This way it would save FEMA from having to spend about a half hour each time there is a disaster to register each victim and give them a new number. People could be pre-registered and only updates need be called into the NPSC.
3. FEMA doesn't pay overtime if employee's wages are over the cap. That is: if the cap is \$33.76/hr., an employee will only receive his wages, if over the \$33.76/hr., the employee received his straight hourly wages (no half time is added to his wages). This should be corrected to pay as the corporations are required to pay.
4. FEMA only allows for one appeal. This should be changed so that when errors occur, the victim could appeal more than once.
5. FEMA has the saying that we try to place victims back into their residences by making the home safe, secure, and functional. Yet when we are deployed, we are required to rent a compact car for our transportation. I am over 6ft. tall and when I sit in the front seat of a compact car with the front seat slid back as far as it will go, my knees touch the dash. FEMA is placing me in an unsafe working condition. It would only cost FEMA \$3/day to upgrade to a bigger safer car for their employee.
6. FEMA hires contractors to inspect the homes of the victims. They also do the Quality Control of the inspectors. If there is a bad inspection, the contractors will back up the previous inspector, so it doesn't do the applicant any good to appeal. FEMA should do their own inspections as they used to do in the past. The inspectors were giving IIDs (Ineligible Insufficient Damage) to victims in the 9th ward in New Orleans. It took over 3 months to correct many of the bad inspections. These people received no help until their status was changed through an appeal. FEMA received bad press by having bad inspectors. I can tell you instance after instance of bad inspections, which we tried to correct, but it takes time. Victims want us to respond in a timely manner. With bad inspections, we show that we don't care about them!

7. FEMA hires contractors to set up the Mobile Homes (MHs) in a direct housing operation. If FEMA had their own Mobile Home group, FEMA could respond in a matter of hours or at the most a few days. As it is, FEMA has to wait until the bids come in and then award the bids to the appropriate contractor. This takes about two weeks to a month to respond. Meanwhile the victims are without housing until we obtain a contractor to react to the direct housing operation. Also, the contractor inspects the homes for habitability. FEMA used to do that inspection, but now the fox is inspecting the hen house. What a way to run a business! In Iowa, some of the contractors who hauled the homes to Iowa had inspected the homes in Texas. They then hauled them to Iowa, set them up, inspected them for habitability, and applicants were placed in the homes. The state then came to look at the homes, found mold in the homes, removed the applicants from the homes, removed the homes and sent them back to Texas. What a waste of money, when FEMA would have found the mold if they would have had control in the first place.
8. FEMA needs to have classes to train the DAEs. Our cadre manager called the other day and asked if I could be in XXX City to go to a training class. I stated that I was in YYY visiting relatives. She said that she probably couldn't get the funds to have me come to XXX City for the class. FEMA needs to provide funds to school the DAEs no matter where they are. If we are so important to the system, then we need to be updated and trained every year. I have only been to training at the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) once, and as it turned out it wasn't for anything that they have been using me for.
9. FEMA provides no grants for businesses. This should be changed so that they could receive at least a token benefit of \$5,000 or so. FEMA is hated by businesses for that very reason. Their business has been hurt to the extent that they have to borrow money to get back into business. We don't look at the business that they have lost while trying to recover from the disaster. Let us be a help instead of a dead weight.

Integrating With the Academic Community

There are entire sectors of academia devoted to the study of homeland security, emergency management, and disasters completely independent of FEMA. Researchers are studying emergency management and making great strides in improving systems at a local level, but FEMA has little to no visibility on it because the Agency is refusing to integrate with academia. There are a number of statistical definition and research methods standards being applied to disaster research from a variety of academic backgrounds including Sociology, Psychology, Economics, and Systems Engineering, but those are not connected with government practice.

For example, we were asked, for a briefing, how many people died in Hurricane Katrina? Despite the multiple tracking methods and articles written on the storm, there is no conclusive number. The statistic we were able to find internally was roughly 800, but this statistic was a measure of how many funerals FEMA had paid for after the storm and did not account for victims who had been able to pay for their own funerals. The number quoted on Wikipedia was 1836 so we used that in our briefing, though the number was not attributable to any Federal or State agency. FEMA itself does not provide an academic overview of the disaster or an authoritative public library about disasters, so researchers simply bypass the Agency when conducting research.

When creating policy for standard disaster procedures such as evacuation or commodity stationing, FEMA could benefit from the academic community's tested analytical tools by using standard formulas and algorithms to quickly determine how best to evacuate quickly. These formulas can be improved by allowing researchers to participate in response activities and recovery planning. Similarly, history, economic, and sociology scholars could benefit from the reports FEMA generates during the response and recovery periods following a disaster. FEMA can show academia how their theory meets practice, and academia can help FEMA improve those systems. Since this connection has not been made, academics are offering their services to local and State officials completely independently and publishing their findings in journals that FEMA employees are not required to read.

Since Katrina, there has been an effort to standardize statistics for situational awareness in response. There have also been buzzwords floating around - "Special Needs Populations" - with little concrete definition. The agency is tiptoeing around these issues without creating operational definitions in the name of public relations, but it is not improving the issues that arose from Katrina. How does one measure special needs? How can one determine which civilians are more likely to evacuate? More importantly, how can an Incident Commander use statistics to determine how many helicopters are going to be needed in a particular area? Researchers are defining these by looking at statistics from other Federal agencies such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Census Bureau, but FEMA is not doing this on a grand scale. There is one notable exception: the Disaster Assistance Analysis, Reports, and Technology Solutions (ARTS) Branch connects with BLS and Census data to map different populations for Recovery efforts. They can do this quickly for responders at all levels,

but at this point the responders are not accessing the latest theories on how to connect the data with response operations. The FCOs and field personnel have also requested that FEMA HQ Operations take an active part in these research efforts, but FCOs and field personnel often find FEMA HQ just as inaccessible as the academic community does.

For example, after mass shooting at Virginia Tech in April 2007, the school analyzed the use of social media and internet communications and did an after-action report on how responders, victims, and the local community responded to the incident. They then compiled best practices and created a comprehensive packet for other universities and institutions that have experienced a mass shooting which they sent to every school that experienced the same type of incident since. The packet includes a note of sympathy, a checklist for leadership, and suggestions for every aspect of recovering from the incident, including grief assistance programs for students, templates for messages to parents, and how to set up a separate fund for donations. This includes suggestions on how to visually set up the school website to tastefully acknowledge the incident while communicating logistical issues to the media, students, and family. The school has gathered other academic institutions to discuss emergency preparedness on campus for not only mass shootings but also major weather phenomena, and continues to conduct and coordinate research on the use of social media in major events and best practices in recovery following a disaster.

Why isn't FEMA visible in this type of effort? It seems to be an all-hazards analysis effort, but the Agency is not connected. Meanwhile, FEMA had a Brown Bag lecture on Social Media in Disasters, but the information presented was generic and did not connect the extensive research already being done to response or recovery programs in the Agency. There were not specific examples of how social media and texting was actually used in recent disasters because FEMA hasn't really done the research or even invited those doing the research to the Agency.

The academic community meanwhile is hungry for FEMA involvement. They want to test new technological developments in disaster areas and conduct research on programmatic effectiveness to help improve response and recovery and would do it for free. They would love to access government statistics on disasters the same way they can access this information from National Science Foundation or the Environmental Protection Agency but give up on researching FEMA because even when you try to FOIA a FEMA document, you'll find that it actually doesn't exist. Reports are not official records of response statistics but are just morning briefings that contain generic information and maps, so the researcher does better to go to the local sources than the Federal coordinators to get information.

If FEMA took an active role in developing the science and study of emergency management in partnership with the academic community, it would benefit all partners and would help the Agency to become more efficient, standardize procedures and nomenclature, and ultimately to find and train qualified new employees from the academic community.

Understanding of Meteorology and Geology

A discussion of academic involvement is not complete without mentioning the lack of basic understanding of geology and meteorology. FEMA employees are not currently required to undergo any standard training, but training normally consists of the Incident Command System at the expense of things like the Richter Scale (earthquakes), the Saffir-Simpson Scale (hurricanes), or the Fujita Scale (tornadoes). To the untrained eye, any tropical storm could be the next Katrina and any rumbling below the earth's surface could be the next Northridge. Similarly, any plane crash or accidental explosion becomes the next 9/11 or biomedical incident. When those who are determining operational requirements think like that, a lot of government funding is wasted on needless overtime and goodwill with Agency employees, other Federal agencies, State and local stakeholders is undermined. It is imperative that anyone at the Agency who hears the term "Category 3 Hurricane" understands the potential for damage to life and property and can work within their position to ensure that at-risk populations are evacuated and that the right commodities are positioned to respond.

It's Freezing In Here!

Members of FEMA's National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) Watch Team have been working on the night shift at FEMA's Mt. Weather, Virginia facility during the Inauguration period. The temperature in the room is quite cold. We're wearing our coats, and I'm wearing my scarf and hat as well. There's snow and ice on the ground outside and everything is covered in a blanket of snow.

No matter what we do, the temperature in the room doesn't get any warmer. Adjusting the thermostat doesn't do anything. You can hear the air blowing and you can feel the air blowing on you. There are only about 10 of us in the room at night. We called maintenance last night and asked for help. Someone came out and said the computer has the thermostat set for 69 degrees. It feels colder than that. He had some sort of hand held machine that verified that the temperature was indeed 69 degrees. He was told that only a few people had the authority or access to change the temperature set on the computer and that they weren't available right now since it was Sunday night and that the next day was MLK and they wouldn't be around then either. But he was going to try to track someone down to fix it for the next night.

So tonight, it's cold again. We called maintenance again and even called XXX who is the person in charge of setting the thermostat. He told us that he instructed everyone to NOT touch the thermostat under any circumstances and that if we were cold, we should get a blanket! We have another night of work to go and we're cold!

After checking with the day shift at Mt. Weather, I found out that they too, were very cold. Even the day shift had to wear their coats the entire time.

We were told the first night that the ambient temperature was 69 degrees but it felt much colder than that. The second night the thermometer on the first floor read 66 degrees and it was warmer on the first floor than on the second floor (where we were) so we knew the temperature on the second floor had to be less than 66 degrees. Then on the third night, one of us had a watch that measured ambient temperature. He placed his watch near the window where I was sitting and the watch read 49 degrees! Then he put the watch on his desk some time later, and it read 61 degrees. So the room wasn't set at 69 degrees as we were told and every night it got progressively colder despite the fact that the number of people in the room got progressively smaller as people demobilized.

The lack of concern for our well being was appalling and especially galling was the cavalier attitude of XXX telling us to "wear a blanket if we were cold" and that the temperature was not to be adjusted under any circumstances. I wonder if he even lowered the temperature just to spite us as it seemed to get colder each day.

The temperature surely could have been adjusted just a few degrees to allow for the fact that there were fewer and fewer people in the room as the days went by. With the outside temperature in the teens at night and snow on the ground, it should have been

warmer inside the building than 60 something degrees. I hope that none of us get sick from sitting in that room for 12 hours a night, three nights in a row.

I just wanted to voice my complaint and hope that something can be done so that in the future when we have to COOP at Mt. Weather, we don't have to suffer through this again.

And it's okay with me if you want to use my complaint as an attachment to your report to the Obama people. I'm just so mad about XXX's smart remark and the fact that he told us that he told HIS people that the temperature was not to be adjusted under any circumstances. They seem more concerned about the equipment overheating than about the people working in the room. And I'm a little confused as to why the equipment would overheat anyway if the temperature were at a normal, comfortable temperature.

Native American Tribes and FEMA

Policy – The current Administration never issued a Tribal policy nor did DHS, despite repeated requests by tribes and others. The FEMA Tribal Policy developed under the previous administration is still posted on the FEMA website, is largely ignored, and the tribes involved in that process at the time felt slighted, that key provisions were watered down. Similarly, repeated attempts by some program areas to define and issue tribal policy have been slow in coming, can be contradictory, and are mostly developed in a vacuum without tribal consultation and coordination.

The Regions are very inconsistent in how they handle and address tribal issues, and many tribes have not fared well given the lack of national policy and leadership on this issue. A few efforts were started with workgroups to include regional staff, who are usually junior staff with an interest but little experience, often trying to do the right thing, but no policies have taken shape and the groups disband without any results.

Many overwhelming health and safety issues, e.g., levees, NFIP mapping, disaster assistance and others, have been tackled by FEMA in recent years and regularly involve funding and meetings with key state and local representatives and associations, but tribes are not offered the same opportunities for involvement, consultation, coordination, or even informed after the fact. (This has occurred on numerous occasions, on many topics, policies, and training and outreach initiatives, most recently when staff suggested a tribal component in a project conducting outreach for the paperless map initiative where FEMA has decided to end distribution of paper flood hazard maps starting FY2010.)

Much larger issues that FEMA needs to address include tribal policy and regulations which will address their concerns and impediments to progress and participation, including set-asides under mitigation grant programs. FEMA needs consultation and coordination with tribes as part of a new administration on a high level to create an umbrella and regular overarching information exchange, as well as working groups with tribes within program areas to include regional and headquarters staff on the ground and in the weeds that can make things understood and more workable in the day to day details of program administration.

DHS – Some have stated frustration and oversight by DHS as a problem when dealing with tribal issues. In fact, since DHS does not handle or address tribal issues or have a policy, that creates more disincentive and disenfranchisement among tribes and FEMA staff who are genuinely concerned.

Legislation – The Stafford Act is often cited as one of the biggest problems when dealing tribes since they were included in the definition of community, under a state, which does not honor the government to government relationship that Federally recognized tribes have with the Federal government. While this is true, and this definition was taken from the regulations in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), the Stafford Act has been amended many times over the past twenty years so

FEMA could have worked with staffers on Capitol Hill and others to address this problem.

According to some FEMA staff, many people in FEMA's OGC do not have a basic understanding of the government to government relationship that tribes are entitled to or the trust responsibilities we have as a federal agency. Further, there have been changes that the National Congress of American Indians and others have repeatedly requested regarding the definition of tribes in our statutes and regulations, that have not been followed through on, regarding the definition of tribes. For example, the statute enacting the NFIP was silent on tribes, which some interpret to mean that it was not intended to apply to them, but our regulations, which are in our power to change, defined them as a local community with the intent to provide those that wanted an opportunity to participate as an NFIP community with that option but was later determined to require them to participate or be sanctioned and lose opportunities for disaster assistance if they did not join.

This problem is worsened by the repeated practice of neglecting the tribes due process under the NFIP, again intended by some to be a work-around but often resulting in denial of notification, consultation and coordination rights under the law. Similarly, by not having specific language to pilot and fund tribal initiatives, set asides, staff, grant programs, technical assistance, training, and resources, the tribes are consistently placed at a disadvantage, creating an ever widening gap.

Funding and assistance consistently goes to states with the intent of trickling down to localities, but does not include or assist the tribes, and is a violation of tribal sovereignty and rights. Even our own legal counsel conceded that if we are saying they need to participate and be treated the same way that local governments are, then we need to level the playing field and provide adequate funding, grants, technical assistance and resources for them to participate – which has not happened.

Staffing and Funding – FEMA has one full time person, the Headquarters tribal liaison, to deal with tribal issues. He is constantly overwhelmed, and his predecessor faced the same problem. There is one regional liaison in each Region (except for Region 3 which does not have any federally recognized tribes), but that person does not report to the Headquarters person and is not even full time for tribal issues, which are considered to be “other duties as assigned.” These regional staff may not know anything about key programs and issues that affect tribes in their region, e.g., they may be unfamiliar with Mitigation if they work on response issues, etc. A FEMA HQ staffer with knowledge of tribal issues is often approached for advice, but this same staffer reports being told to concentrate on overall emergency planning, not tribal issues. This staff person reports that management support for working on tribal issues is given grudgingly, if at all. But without management support and funding, staff are consistently steered away from addressing tribal concerns making the problems even worse.

One of the reasons given for not implementing tribal policies and granting them their rights is that we do not have enough staff to do so. In some cases contractors were

cited as a potential resource, but this would not honor the government to government relationship, nor would it build the internal knowledge and culture that is needed to fully embrace and address tribal needs. We need additional, knowledgeable, and experienced full time staff headquarters and in the regions, under a coordinated reporting structure, to assist tribes and meet their needs.

Awareness and Sensitivity Training – While there are some staff with varying levels of interest or experience in tribal issues, there is a huge void in understanding basic tribal laws, rights, cultural issues, etc. FEMA did work with tribes to develop an online independent study course but no one knows about it or takes it. At a minimum there should be a requirement to take this as part of orientation. The few courses we have to train tribal officials about FEMA programs need to be updated, deployed in the field, and supported with staff and funding.

Playing Politics?

In early July 2006, FEMA staff received a request from a senior Republican political official in the State of XXX to produce a press release about the State of XXX's success in credentialing and resource typing efforts, and how these successes could be a model in terms of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) for the rest of the U.S. This request came at a time when the Republican Governor of XXX was seeking re-election in a close contest, and may presumably have benefited politically from such a FEMA press release.

FEMA staff declined to produce the press release because national policies on resource typing and credentialing were not developed or finalized for context, because it is not typical to produce this type of press release, and because of concerns the requested information might be intended for the gubernatorial race in XXX and would therefore conflict with provisions of the Hatch Act.

The Republican Governor lost his bid for re-election, but his senior official who had requested the FEMA press release was subsequently appointed as a Deputy Administrator at FEMA. In 2007 and 2008, this individual made clear to many FEMA staff his frustration that FEMA did not produce documents he requested when he was in XXX, prior to his appointment at FEMA. The union has received reports of concern from numerous personnel within the affected directorate that two reorganizations and the reassignment of several FEMA career executives may be related to this issue - and may in fact be in retribution for staff's refusal to provide the sought-after press release during the 2006 XXX gubernatorial election.

FEMA's Private Sector Office Under the Obama Administration

Background:

For years, the private sector has attempted to interface with the Federal Government, specifically FEMA, prior to, during, and after disasters have occurred. Many large corporations have critical, and often scarce resources available in large quantities, and mechanisms for efficiently, and effectively delivering them to the disaster site. Too often, offers from the private sector go unheeded by FEMA because of a lack of ability or authority to accept donated resource offers. Many States have been approached by such corporations e.g. Lowes, Wal-Mart, Home Depot, large grocery chains etc., and have secured pre-event options to execute when needed. Many of these resources are donated, and others would require compensation. Many corporations want to offer assets, but need to know how to approach government.

The National Emergency Management Association (NEMA), which represents all of the State, Tribal and Territorial emergency management and homeland security agencies, has had a Private Sector Committee established for many years based on a recognition of the major role they can play in disaster. NEMA has recently submitted a list of priority issues for the New Administration to consider, including several focused on the private sector. They include:

- The need for a national emergency management system that effectively integrates local, state, and federal as well as private sector capabilities and resources has never been greater. The private sector needs to be fully integrated into all phases of the emergency management system. Government can benefit from the expertise and resources of the private sector that is much more experienced in logistics management and can assist with providing basic services in the immediate aftermath of disasters or emergencies.
- State, local and private sector stakeholders should be involved in the full life cycle of any strategy, policy and plans development related to national preparedness efforts.
- To ensure our national preparedness efforts succeed, they must be all hazards based; span the national mission areas of prevention, protection, response and recovery; and fully recognize the importance of a collaborative and coordinated approach between levels of government, the private and public sectors.

FEMA's current private sector outreach efforts are inadequate to accept this challenge. Given the enormity of private sector resources available, a new, refined focus on the private sector should be addressed by the incoming administration. This can be one of the New Administration "Change" points of light, and have major positive impacts on future disaster events.

Unfortunately, the current DHS/FEMA administration has not placed the proper focus and personnel to manage FEMA's private sector initiatives under the new FEMA. The program has the following deficiencies which prevent it from being supportive of both short term and long term support from the private sector:

- The current private sector office is located under External Affairs, and does not have the opportunity to be creative and develop proper relationships with the private sector.
- The current office is insular, internally focused, and is unable to be creative or proactive, and does not have the ability to recognize the needs at the local and State level of government. Therefore, it is not outward thinking or focused.
- The existing private sector office is improperly located within External Affairs, where none of the staff have the background in emergency management working experience with or in the private sector. It is difficult for high level corporate management to communicate with staff that is not conversant with either emergency management or the private sector when the staff is lacking in the proper knowledge, skills and ability.
- There is no current reporting regiment to keep the administrator apprised of private sector initiatives or progress in outreach.
- The private sector office is currently headed up by a political appointee (with no private sector or emergency management experience), who was given the job recently, reportedly at the direction of the Chief of Staff of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The position was originally to be advertised as a career position.
- The current private sector office does not dialogue with the other Directorates within FEMA or the other Federal agencies, to determine what their respective requirements are to support emergency management.
- There is no current short or long term plan with the private sector office to improve outreach and participation with the private sector. There is no strategic plan or focus on the role of FEMA to engage the private sector. This leaves the agency without direction, goals, performance measures, and expected outcomes.
- There is not a focus on identifying the key critical resource sectors where the private sector could provide support in a coordinated manner, e.g. logistics support, mass care, transportation assets, medical surge, etc.
- There is an immediate need for FEMA to more actively engage with members of the private sector to match the needs of government with the resources available from the private sector.

New Directions of Transformation:

The following are proposed New Directions of Transformation for the FEMA Private Sector Office under the Obama Administration:

- Immediate transfer and reporting of the Private Sector Office from External Affairs to either the Executive Office of Policy or directly to the Administrator.
- Appointment of a qualified and experienced Schedule C or establishment of a career position filled by a qualified individual with emergency management knowledge and experience, and experience in dealing with the private sector to lead the Private Sector Office within FEMA. Communication skills with the private sector will be a key to its success.
- FEMA does not command activities in the Private Sector. The new Private Sector Office should be focused on maintaining a proactive outreach function to develop enduring trust and partnerships with members of the private sector. This can be accomplished by:
 - Establishing a Private Sector Steering Committee or Advisory Group comprised of State, Tribal, local, and private sector communities of interest.
 - Conducting at least quarterly meetings with representatives of each of the key private sector representative industries or etc.
 - Conducting annual professional conferences/meetings for outreach focusing on obtaining substantive input on how to improve relationships between FEMA and the Private Sector
- Include the diverse FEMA Directorates (Operations, Disaster Assistance, Mitigation, Logistics, Preparedness, Information Technology, etc.) and other Federal departments and agencies under the National Response Framework in these conferences/meetings
 - Conduct similar outreach programs throughout all the FEMA Regions via the FEMA Regional Interagency Steering Committees (RISCs)
- Develop a very robust FEMA outreach partnership with the following: U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Business Civic Leadership Conference, the Business Roundtable, NEMA, IAEM, other professional organizations, industry representatives, individual firms, etc.
- Integrate activities of the Private Sector Office with planning initiatives of the other FEMA Directorates, e.g. catastrophic disaster planning projects for Florida

and the New Madrid Seismic Zone, and in the development of the National Planning Scenario CONPLANS and supporting Federal agency OPLANS.

- Identify mutual areas of research within the private sector that support emergency management objectives.
- The office should focus on customer service and establish a bottom up approach to identify support requirements from the lowest level of government and the private sector that will evolve into national private sector priorities.
- Establish an ongoing communication dialogue in addition to conferences, e.g. newsletter or website, to keep all involved parties of ongoing initiatives, progress, and feedback for continuous evolution and feedback.
- A specific Disaster Assistance Employee (DAE) private sector cadre would be established to train personnel in interfacing with the private sector at Disaster Field Offices in support of Presidential Declared Emergencies and Disasters.
- Examine ways to implement development and execution of standby contracts during a Presidential Disaster Declaration under the Robert T. Stafford Act.
- Focus on developing a proactive partnership with the Private Sector.
- Develop a strategic plan to help guide the actions of FEMA's Private Sector outreach activities, complete with goals, outcomes, and measurable performance metrics.
- Determine which private sector sectors to focus on, based on identified shortcomings and gaps in government resources, and the availability of private sector resources to fill such gaps.
- Realizing that the overwhelming majority of Critical Infrastructure/Key Resources (CIKR) is owned, operated, and maintained by the private sector, FEMA needs to improve collaboration with the private sector to protect, prevent, respond to, and recover from any disruption in CI/KR.

Conclusion:

Implementing the above, will place FEMA on a proactive footing to develop long and enduring partnerships with the Private Sector in support of mutual Private Sector and FEMA mission to save lives and protect property during a wide range of disasters. It will also greatly increase FEMA's capacity to prevent, protect, respond to, and recover from future disasters.

Recommendations to Management

How did so many things go wrong?

What got us into this mess?

How do we change and get rid of the pervasive dysfunction in a way that matches the scope and pervasiveness perceived by the employees?

Whatever changes are to happen within FEMA (aside from FEMA possibly leaving DHS) they should be grouped into subject areas and coordinated within those areas and with each other. What should be done is: a problem or negative situation should be announced to agency wide; the announcement would state what changes/corrections are proposed; what is going to be done to correct whatever is wrong; name a point of contact so an individual can submit ideas, suggestions, support, information; and set a milestones and a completion date. The completion of each milestone would be announced by email or in an on-line newsletter. Each subject area would have a committee that would provide common sense, consumer input and oversight and give a final looks good to us before it goes to the Administrator for final approval.

One of the largest problems is that employees have little sense of what is going on in FEMA, who is doing what, who is in charge of what, what do we accomplish, where exactly are we, and how can we get the smallest things done just to be able to do our jobs?

1. Develop a Missions and Functions Manual. It can be on-line. It would contain a coherent statement on each of the major offices at FEMA and discuss how what they do relates to each other; a mission and statements on each office; an organization chart on each office; a list of employees that would change when an employee enters, leaves, or changes jobs in the agency; a diagram of the major programs to show what they do and how they do it; the relevant authorities that prescribe what specific offices are responsible for what actions and programs; and an index, word based to more easily find information (international, safety, grant, training, etc.).

The actual process of assembling the mission and functions manual could be beneficial in addressing the problems. The mission and functions entries should be assembled at the lowest level with an opportunity given to the office employees to edit what has been written as the drafts go up the management chain to the final drafts. This has many benefits. The development of a mission and functions manual is a sanctified tug of war where offices have permission to specify what they are doing and what they think they can do or should be doing. Senior management (Administrator level and staff) can then look over within a standard framework what the agency is doing and look for overlaps, gaps, and conflicts. When the manual is published it clearly states who is to do what, reining in some and giving power or support to others. It helps stop mission creep, poaching, and war. The process also

allows employees to feel that they have had input into shaping their own jobs and defining what their office is going to do. It also provides one place that any employee can go and know what offices exist and what everyone is doing.

2. Develop a real FEMA telephone book. The FEMA phone book has long been replaced with an on-line system and that is fine; it doesn't have to be printed. But the old on-line phone book was recently replaced with a new software format and it is terrible. The biggest deficiency is that just individual people are listed but not FEMA offices and not offices with individuals. A phone book isn't just a list of names and numbers. It displays everyone in the organization and also groups them by office. It helps you locate who to call if you can't remember a name or if your point of contact has left the agency and you want to talk to someone else. The whole thing is a mess. It lacks focus, tries to do too much, and references all over the place. Just list the offices and everyone who works in each office.

The phone book should also resemble the type of phone book that we have at home where a lot of useful information is located. Who to call in a medical emergency; how to set up conference calls; that when you dial just "O" you get the FEMA main operator at Mt. Weather and "9" "O" to get an outside operator; the phone numbers to the guard stations; the addresses and google maps to FEMA locations; what procedure to call if you receive a bomb threat; how to talk to someone if they are a disaster victim and somehow have gotten your phone number and are crying or screaming at you; a list of what questions you might be asked out in public about FEMA trailers or other issues - and not fluff but the real answers; there are probably lots more of this kind of stuff.

3. Develop service guides. FEMA offices who offer services should develop guides that explain what to do to fulfill their requirements to provide the service. This includes getting a badge, a security clearance, ordering a phone or other electronic outlet, supplies, approval from IT to develop or procure software, obtaining a contract, booking meeting rooms and where they are, ordering print jobs and publications, etc. The guide doesn't have to be detailed but should include what service is offered, what steps have to be completed (in order), what forms to fill out with a link to the on-line form, a definition of terms and concepts (especially helpful when dealing with IT), a formula to use if you have to develop costs, contacts by name, and some sort of timeline of when the service can be delivered.

Just the process of getting these three items done would not just tell us what is going on in the world of FEMA administration but it would also probably help set up processes. And they would help the responsible office explain to their customer base what physical or technical limitations they face (i.e. a copier can produce only one page per second thus limiting how fast they can produce "x" number of copies of a document) and what regulations they have to comply with in order to deliver the service. Each and all three of these "documents" in whatever form would be of value to current FEMA employees and would be an impressive tool for new FEMA employees.

4. A virtual library of FEMA contracts. In submitting a contract proposal, a contractor once stated that they had a library of all of the Federal contracts and products (reports, publications, etc.) they had developed over the years. And when they received a new contract, they would go to the library and pull up all of the information they had on that subject from previous contracts to research what had already been done. Why doesn't FEMA do this and to save space, paper, and personnel, why don't we do this electronically. Think of all of the money and effort FEMA has expended over the years on all sorts of things, advertising materials, reports, software, management proposals, that are lost, discarded, etc. and which we probably repeatedly keep contracting for. How many studies have there been on cadre management?
5. There should be an agency wide calendar listing major events and deadlines. It would schedule major budgetary, personnel, training, and program dates. We know the approximate dates when personnel evaluations are due, the different stages of the budget cycle, etc. and so arbitrary dates could be initially assigned at the beginning of the year and then revised if needed due to events as the deadline approaches. This would help ensure that managers are on time in meeting deadlines especially if reminders were sent through the MicroSoft Calendar system. In order for it to be user friendly, it should not be an excel spread sheet with information crammed into a small, bare bones table but something the FEMA graphics office designed. The general FEMA population should be asked to submit further ideas and dates to get the best added value to the final product.
6. We are supposed to include the term "tribal nations" whenever we discuss anything dealing with the different levels of government. However, when we actually try to implement the concept into any plans, etc. it is difficult because we know so little about what is going on in emergency management in the different Indian tribes. FEMA should publish a report giving us some useful information: How many designed, official tribes are there and where they are; the geographical size of the tribe, its location and population; how many and which ones are places where people live or is it just a casino; is there an emergency management office and is there an EOC; does the tribe have plans; in a disaster does FEMA work directly with them or is it done thru the state structure; what is each tribe's major hazards; what assets/businesses operate on the reservations that would suffer damage from a disaster; what disasters have they had in the last 5 - 10 years; what amount do they get yearly from DHS/FEMA to support their programs or does it come thru their state; etc. This would provide the information we would need to know the status of emergency management within the tribal nations and how that would fit into our plans and programs. With out such information the term "tribal nations" will just be hollow words whenever we use them.
7. When people are new to an organization with complex programs they often have to mentally breakdown what an organization does by function in order to understand what is going on and how things relate to each other. After they gain

experience they then can usually see the broader conceptual groupings and understand why the activities have been grouped into the existing programs. Before the last reorganization, FEMA was divided into four broad program areas: mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. These were programs with broad, conceptual distinctions as to what FEMA was about and illustrated how each of these programs flowed into one another with recovery hooked back into mitigation. That symmetry has been broken with this most recent reorganization. Mitigation and preparedness remain program centered (mitigation because few people understand it, think it is just about concrete, and doesn't have a homeland security sexiness and preparedness is now a super, almost mini-FEMA office) but response and recovery have been reduced to just a functional persona (disaster operations and disaster assistance) with logistics flung out on its own. Why wasn't preparedness renamed disaster preparedness? Is there some sort of distinction between preparedness having a greater responsibility involving a greater variety of threats/hazards but response and recovery just constitute deploying teams and handing out money when in fact they constitute sometimes enormous activities lasting years? The rationale behind the titles is lacking and don't convey equal responsibility or scope.

8. The National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Plan (NEHRP) and Dam Safety programs publish reports every two years highlighting their accomplishments and future goals and activities. It is a great vehicle for those two programs and FEMA should publish comparable reports on their programs in mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. We currently have to answer, sometimes annually, to Congress on what we are doing and sometimes in great detail. Maybe it's because we don't bother to announce our own achievements and future plans. Maybe if we were more public on what we have done and what we are going to do we would perform better. And why do we just have the National Response Framework? Shouldn't we have a national mitigation framework/plan, a preparedness framework/plan, and a response framework/plan? Why is it a national framework/plan? That would imply the federal, state, and local levels of government. The federal framework/plan covers just the federal level of government.
9. There should be an agency wide calendar listing major events and deadlines. It would schedule major budgetary, personnel, training, and program dates. We know the approximate dates when personnel evaluations are due, the different stages of the budget cycle, etc. and so arbitrary dates could be initially assigned at the beginning of the year and then revised if needed due to events as the deadline approaches. This would help ensure that managers are on time in meeting deadlines especially if reminders were sent through the MicroSoft Calendar system. In order for it to be user friendly, it should not be an excel spread sheet with information crammed into a small, bare bones table but something the FEMA graphics office designed. The general FEMA population should be asked to submit further ideas and dates to get the best added value to the final product.

10. We need a FEMA “Super Analyst.” I am recommending that FEMA identify and employ highly skilled analysts to perform multiple analytical tasks that include program auditing, contact management, human resource coordination and data analysis. The position title could be called “Super Analyst” (SA). A SA would be called upon, as needed, to provide emergency support functions to Joint Field Offices or program areas at headquarters or the regions. Similar to Federal Coordinating Officer duties, SAs will have proven talents managing people in an urban and/or volatile environment generating and applying solutions to complex challenges while providing key decision makers with authoritative analyses of issues and recommendations for corrective actions. Related experience for SAs could include serving as a community organizer and/or serving as a high school principal. SAs could also be tasked to serve in a leadership position in the NRCC or to oversee sensitive disaster management special assignments or projects.
11. NRCC Rotations. Recommend that on-call FEMA staff serving in the National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) be eligible to serve, on-call, in the NRCC for a specific number of months during the year. This will prevent any FEMA employee from spending too much time away from their regular FEMA jobs and ensure that all on-call staff will be available to serve when activated. Special incentives should also be identified for these on-call employees to ensure quality talents.
12. Youth Disaster Management Training. FEMA should collaborate with local high schools and federal youth training programs (i.e., Job Corps, YouthBuild, or AmeriCorps). Youth from high schools and other programs serving youth could gain valuable disaster employability/management skills while developing a resume that could qualify them to be a part time Disaster Assistance Employee. This collaboration will also serve to maintain FEMA’s connection to the community as well as favorable public relations. Collaborative activities could simply involve meeting with a small group (5-10) of youth at headquarters or the regions to meet and talk with a staff about their job duties. Staff could serve as mentors for youth who display outstanding leadership skills and whom are committed to working with FEMA on a volunteer or employment basis.
13. CORE Employees. All CORE employees should be converted to Permanent Full Time (PFT) and be given time serve credit for their term served in their CORE position. FEMA has amassed a cadre of very talented and invaluable CORE employees who have served in many mega- disasters. FEMA will benefit greatly by reserving the talents of these highly qualified employees.
14. FEMA Shirts, Jackets, Hats. All new FEMA employees during orientation should be distributed a modest uniform that includes a FEMA insignia cap, jacket and shirt. From day one, new staff should be encouraged to proudly wear and display their FEMA wear, while on duty, or at least on Casual Fridays. I believe the public will be very receptive and make the FEMA employees more connected to their community.

Reservist Cadre Issues

PROBLEM: The FEMA Disaster Reserve Cadre has developed in a leadership vacuum for decades and so has developed a largely informal culture of favoritism and inconsistency in training, deployment, and overall management.

Current Basic Structure of the Disaster Assistance Employee (DAE) Reservist Cadre

Each Region has a DAE cadre, the size of which is determined by the volume of disasters within that Region. There is also one Headquarters cadre, the Generalists, made up mostly of DAEs who are new since Katrina in 2005 and others who are unable to move into a Regional cadre. Across these eleven geographic cadres, there are cadres for certain specialties such as Planning Section Chief or Individual Assistance. Each person is ranked for each specialty according to a scale from 1-4, where 1 is “Basically Qualified” and 4 is “Expert.” They are then deployed based on need for this skill and the length of time since their last deployment. So if Region I needs a Type 4 Planning Section Chief, they will search the Automated Deployment Database for Type 4 Planning Section Chief and, if more than one comes up on the search, they will call the person who has not been deployed for the longest time.

Each cadre has at least one Cadre Manager who works at FEMA HQ or the Regional Office. This person’s duties vary from processing and maintaining hiring paperwork to scheduling training and releasing DAEs from the cadre when necessary.

The Culture and Informal Structure of the Cadre

Though that is the basic structure of the cadre, there are many nuances that have created an entirely separate culture and thus an informal structure within the DAE program. First of all, Regional DAEs do not have to live within the Region where they are assigned, so they are not bound to a certain geographic area and thus will transfer into busier Regions until they are constantly deployed. Some cadre managers are constantly taking new hires (I was advised to apply in Regions 2, 8, or 10 for the best chance at getting in) while others are gaining the most experienced DAEs from other Regions (most are trying to get to 4 and 9).

Second, the qualification scale for each specialty is nonexistent. DAE field supervisors frequently engage in “social promotion” for their fellow DAEs, either to make themselves look better or to ensure a later deployment. I might manage my manager at the next center, so she will definitely give me a positive review and, if she knows how, she will move me from a Level 1 to a 2 in my specialty. When I was working as a Deployment Support Specialist, I put out a request in the database for an Expert in Individual Assistance and the name of one of my former colleagues came up – someone who had to work the reception desk because she could not handle casework and did not know that FEMA had a housing program at all. Of course, the database shows her to be an “Expert” in the housing program so at her next deployment, she will be expected to train

new employees or even run a Disaster Recovery Center. There is really no way to correct this unless the cadre manager steps in.

As a DAE, I initially did not know who my cadre manager was and never received any kind of correspondence from him in a management capacity. The office sent letters with a generic signature from the Branch Chief and, when I moved to Washington, DC, and came in to correct some security paperwork issues, I happened to meet my cadre manager, who promptly invited me to Happy Hour. When he arranged for my deployment to Mt. Weather, it was for a training that he also attended. He made several advances – bought me a drink and asked how far away my then-boyfriend lived – and, when he was duly rejected, moved on to another female on the deployment. As I later found out, he had a reputation for this kind of behavior. The other female employee was deployed several times while he served as cadre manager but recently, another employee has taken over the position.

This type of behavior is not unusual among supervisors in the DAE cadre, and the problem goes unreported. Supervisors will deploy their “FEMA spouses” by “Name Request” and, when a deployment is winding down and some DAEs are being sent home, will arrange for these individuals to remain deployed.

The “Name Request” invites this type of abuse but, because of the “social promotion” where friends are made Experts, is often necessary to ensure a competent employee is deployed. If standards were set and cadre managers were actively engaged in employee tracking and development as defined by national standards, these abuses would become less of the norm.

Dying Out of the Cadre

Recruitment for the DAE cadre, at this point, happens entirely word-of-mouth, and DAEs often boast that people “die out of the position.” This is literally quite true: in a few months of working in the field, I worked with three 90-year-old DAEs, all of whom had risen to the highest levels of the DAE pay scale and competence measures. Two of these often slept at their desks due to their chronic medical conditions, while the other notoriously forgot his hearing aid and would literally scream at disaster assistance applicants who came to the registration desk. In both of the DRCs, my managers kept these employees at the reception table – because they refused to use a computer to do casework – but made sure there were at least two other employees stationed at the table to actually sign applicants in.

This is not to say FEMA should impose an age limit on its DAE cadre, but the practice of deploying a 90-year-old to a location that has recently suffered a major destructive phenomenon is questionable at best. Once deployed, a DAE arrives on-site, picks up a rental car, and promptly begins working 12 hours or more per day, 7 days per week in areas where citizens are traumatized, medical services are not entirely functioning, and roads are covered in debris and potholes. Any employee will suffer some level of stress

in these conditions, but an elderly employee with a chronic medical problem really might do better in some other capacity.

For example, some of these long-term DAEs have extensive knowledge and experience that could benefit FEMA if we would just draw on it. One of my senior colleagues had been with FEMA since 1979 and was an emergency first responder before then. He talked about the Northridge Earthquake and Oklahoma City and compared them to Katrina and other disasters. His institutional knowledge would be a great resource to the agency in training development or helping develop best practices in management.

But that is not how FEMA uses these long-time disaster folks. Instead, we sit them at desks for 12 hours and expect them to do routine work. Some of the older DAEs don't know how to use a computer; and some of them fall asleep at their desks while trying to work their 12-hour shifts. Is this really the best way for FEMA to draw on the experience and historic knowledge of these people?

By the way, when I worked as a Deployment Support Specialist I called DAEs for disasters whose family members told me they had recently died. I had this happen about a half-dozen times in a month. Others could not deploy due to major surgery or medical condition. Some of my colleagues in the field left on their physicians' orders due to blood pressure, diabetes, or other chronic conditions.

Being Available

In 2004, there were not enough DAEs to handle all of the disasters, which included the four Florida Hurricanes. FEMA hired about 5000 employees, deployed them for the storms and then, because the Regions did not want to take in all the new employees, promptly dropped them from the rolls once the work was done.

In 2005, FEMA hired 13,000 new people in 6 weeks to handle Katrina and Rita, and created a "Headquarters Generalist" cadre to keep them all in the system. Regions normally deploy their own DAEs first, which keeps the Generalists from being deployed to gain experience or field training. There have been some efforts to hold training for Generalists, but these are smaller, more specialized classes. Once a Generalist has a specialty, he/she shops for or is recruited by a Regional cadre to secure more deployments.

Since there have not been enough deployments and there is often no contact from FEMA cadre managers for long periods, good employees will find other full-time jobs to pay their bills. Thus, the Generalist cadre has lost most of their good people, either to other Regions or non-FEMA jobs. This happens in all of the cadres, but, because Generalists are so rarely deployed, this cadre suffers it more.

As the remaining Generalists have been deployed, the entire cadre has earned a reputation for being unqualified. Part of this is that many Generalists who are available

to deploy are available because they are not otherwise employed. Many, as field supervisors and cadre managers have discovered, are unemployed for a reason.

In September 2008, the Reserve Workforce Management office found that only 100 (of an oft-quoted 8,000) DAEs were listed as “Available” in the database, while about 4000 were deployed to the Midwest Floods or Hurricanes. The office sent correspondence to all DAEs who were listed as “Unavailable” and discovered that a number of the “Unavailable” DAEs were actually dead (which is why they had not updated their status in the database). Those who were not deployed (or dead) were given the option to either make themselves Available or provide an excuse for not being Available within 2 weeks, so that they could be deployed or their position in the cadre could be reviewed. The plan was to release all DAEs who would not make themselves available by October unless the excuse was medical.

So my friend is a Generalist DAE and a high school teacher. His excuse for not being available was that he was teaching full-time and intended to deploy during his summer vacations or if his area was affected by disaster (and school was closed). He could deploy 90 days per year and, as a college-educated, gainfully-employed citizen, would be an asset to FEMA, just not in September. He was threatened with release and has since been disillusioned with the Agency and may not make himself available this summer – if he is even still a member of the cadre at that point.

Suggestions for a Better DAE Cadre

First, develop a comprehensive training program for DAEs that includes a yearly one-to-two-week deployment. Training should include stress management, travel reimbursement procedures, FEMA policy and protocol (and recent changes to policy and protocol), ethics training, public relations training, and techniques for working with traumatized disaster victims. Training could be held for one week, with a second week on deployment either to disaster or to assist in closing activities for a disaster. There is more than enough paperwork to be done to close disasters out properly. This is also a time for cadre managers to hold workshops and gather best practices and other feedback from the field.

Second, use field supervisors to create a catalogue of positions and develop benchmarks for each skill level 1-4. For policy-based positions such as Individual and Public Assistance, create tests for employees to take to demonstrate skill level and maintain the status in the database.

Third, create a standardized list of tasks for cadre managers to do to ensure that employees feel like they are a part of a cadre. Publish the names and contact information for each cadre manager on FEMA’s public website so they are accessible and assign a certain number of DAEs to each cadre manager so that each is managing the same number of employees. Currently, some manage 1,000 while others manage 100, so many employees get lost in the shuffle.

Fourth, create seasonal cadres and recruit employees who are only available at certain times of the year. For example, teachers are available in the summer while real estate agents are available in the winter. Business owners in tourist areas who have a specific season (ski resorts, beaches, etc.) might also be willing to deploy during their slow season. If FEMA can recruit these individuals and maintain them as a cadre – by engaging them in the agency and keeping them trained – it creates a quality workforce that is ready to deploy, but is not dependent on deployment as its sole source of income.

Fifth, create an “exit interview” process for long-time employees leaving the cadre so cadre managers can harness the institutional knowledge they have before it is completely lost.

Finally, it might help to periodically review employees after a certain age (the same way States review drivers’ licenses at a specific age) to find a way for competent long-time employees to serve in a different capacity if they can no longer do field deployments. This is not meant to discriminate against anyone by age, but to ensure that those being deployed are able to handle the physical stresses of field work, and that those who can no longer deploy can still support FEMA with their knowledge and experience.

A Reservist's Thoughts on FEMA – 1

Here are some quick thoughts that might be germane.

1. Signage. All over the country, if you pull up to a FEMA Disaster Recovery Center (DRC), it tends to look like a Small Business Administration (SBA) DRC, because SBA is very efficient in providing pre-packaged signage for their field teams, but some mysterious paralysis seems to prevent such simple preparation in FEMA. Complaints about this go all the way back to Andrew, and I saw the mystery very much alive in Iowa and Ike 2008. The signage allergy seems to be of a piece with a general reluctance or inability to provide coherent and comprehensive orientation and education materials that cover the real, practical landscape one meets in the field. (Another symbol of this cryptology is the symphony of groans going up from the new Web-TA timesheets, said to be even more confusing than the old system just replaced).
2. Spurious rule-citing. The mantra is: "the Stafford Act doesn't allow this," though in many cases the action-stopper doing such rule-quoting hasn't read the Stafford Act, doesn't know what's in it, and is simply finding it safe not to solve existing problems. XXX condemned this problem in an April 2008 interview, and in the field it takes on the dimensions of a force of nature. One resourceful Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) was furiously working behind the scenes to get a few hurricane trailers transferred over to some tornado victims after a tornado struck a repository of 10,000 unused housing units, sending the press into spasms of disbelief that local residents who had patiently tolerated the 10,000 in storage couldn't be spared at least one or two in their hour of need. Naturally, the FCO succeeded, quietly. But a staffer then cried out in indignation: "He can't do that. It's illegal." What is this mysterious love of inertia?
3. Chicken-Little-ism. Emergency management implies Hemingway's "grace under pressure," combined with Kipling: "If you can keep your head.." Yet field dynamics seem laced with a curious vulnerability to wild rumors that exaggerate existing crises (hence sometimes exaggerating the sense of heroism felt in the claustrophobia of a Joint Field Office [JFO]). When a Community Relations (CR) team in Ike reported an eccentric resident who was talking about his gun, word mushroomed up through the branch manager and then to Austin that CR was getting shot at. Even after this hysteria was thoroughly debunked, attendees at a staff meeting were surprised to see a staffer burst in breathlessly and announce: "CR is getting shot at!" In Iowa, when a luckless contractor left her dog in her car in a Field Office parking lot, emails began to fly about calling the police, about sending the evil-doer home, almost to the point of calling out the troops--without ever inquiring of the dog owner what was going on. There are countless examples of this, a core temptation in Emergency Management--the temptation to medicate one's sense of insignificance by magnifying crises. Yet I've never seen any effort to teach crisis psychology or inoculate the Chicken Littles against the pox. Instead, when the hoary old tell-a-rumor exercise was offered briefly at the Emergency Management Institute (EMI),

and students were told that each was to whisper in the ear of the next a long sentence, to see how distorted it might come out at the end of the chain--there was a murmur of confusion about halfway through, as it was discovered that the highly obedient students, trying to be dutiful soldiers, were carefully writing down the phrase at each transfer and then reading it into the ear of each new recipient--completely (and unknowingly) defeating the purpose of the exercise. What is this mysterious disconnect? On some level, is there a tacit message that insight and initiative, those pesky subverters of command and control, are to be banished? Nothing really mysterious here. I remember Witt's desk motto: "Don't tell me it's not your job," and its contrast with the constantly heard motif of post-Witt FEMA: "Stay in your lane." Why can't emergency staff learn to be cooperative about respecting lanes? Can't they follow orders?

4. Micro-Management. It's so mysterious that I'm helplessly fascinated by it. I hadn't thought that constant officious meddling might be related to the many complaints in the past few years about exaggerated emphasis on dictatorial chain of command. Beneath all of it seems to be a kind of anxiety. As, far up the chain, somebody gets trounced for a triviality, and passes down the sense of fear and ferocity into the far reaches of subordinate-hood. The micromanager, of course, always has a neat box of fulfilled goals to present up the chain to a boss who then will put them into a bigger neat box to go further up--while all the things that don't get done because of this are nowhere listable in the check-boxes. Everybody would then be happy, if the envisioned utopia of filled check-boxes didn't keep getting interrupted by impertinent real-world stuff that refuses to be classified (Say. What's that smell? Sort of like embalming fluid, right here in this trailer. Couldn't be anything worth worrying about.)
5. I haven't gotten to one of the main themes, and the most mysterious: Stupidity.

A Reservist's Thoughts on FEMA – 2

I have been in FEMA since 1982 and I have seen a lot of changes to FEMA, some good and some bad.

1. The worst thing they ever did to FEMA was put them with Homeland Security. Homeland Security has nothing to do with the recovery of a disaster, they are primarily involved in security. When Katrina hit, DHS had just taken over FEMA and had no idea what to do but DHS didn't get blamed, FEMA did, and we still do.
2. Since Homeland security took over I have noticed the administration costs outweigh the money given to the applicants.
3. They have created so many extra jobs that are not needed that now it costs three times as much to support the staff.
4. All the extra money wasted on extra staff and unnecessary job titles could be used to help people in need, like those in Galveston, Texas where I recently worked.
5. Mobile homes should be ready to be installed within a week of incident, especially in those areas where the nearest apartments is 1 to 2 hours away like in Galveston. Then people would not be forced to sleep in tents to be near their property to work on it.
6. We should be able to loan the insurance money immediately so people could start work on recovery.
7. We should be able to help with deductibles.
8. The staff in the field does not have the comforts that the Joint Field Office (JFO) staff have. We are lucky if we find a place in the small towns that have micro/fridge or clean facility. Yet we're told that we can't look for a place with those items if we are on a waiver.
9. Some airlines now charge for an aisle seat, and that is not reimbursable. Recently I was assigned a seat, on a long flight between 2 other people. I asked at the ticket counter for an aisle seat and I was told it would be \$40. I paid for it because I was in route for a disaster that I knew would be very busy at the beginning since I work in the field as DRC Manager. I wanted to start as relaxed as possible, but I could not be reimbursed the \$40.
10. We now are told we can not accept an upgrade on the compact car. The little cars are very uncomfortable when you are working in the field and have to drive hours in a cramped position.

11. A big problem is the way the upper management treats the DAEs. Some of the IA officers I have worked with are some rude and treat their staff so bad, but if we say anything we get in trouble. Sometimes I think they treat the older staff badly trying to force them to quit. There needs to be some investigation and training in the way the DAEs are treated by some of the upper staff.
12. And last I think the management of all Disaster Assistance Employees (DAEs) should be taken away from the Regions and controlled by FEMA.

Safety and Health at Disasters

A lot of people think that safety and health are not a big issue for FEMA staff, because we are mainly office workers. But safety and health can become a problem for FEMA staff, especially during disaster deployments. During my years at FEMA, I have personally witnessed and/or been told of FEMA staff:

- Xeroxing papers at a disaster field office while standing on carpeting that was still wet from the recent hurricane.
- Deploying to the World Trade Center after the 9/11 terrorist attack and being told the air was safe to breathe (it wasn't).
- Sleeping in their cars on deployments because FEMA had failed to secure hotel rooms for them.
- Being told to stand next to an Interstate Highway ramp and hand out FEMA fliers next to high-speed traffic.
- Being told to drive all night to assignments, in the dark, often in unfamiliar terrain and/or bad weather, many of these people being older employees.
- Being assigned to work and park their cars in known high-crime areas, with no warning given to the employees of possible risks.

The list goes on. A lot of our FEMA employees at disasters are Reservists, which is to say "Temps," which means they have no job rights and can be fired at will, and they know it. Many of these employees are afraid to bring up safety issues for fear of losing their jobs. Some say they have been told, "If you want to keep your job, this is what you have to do."

I think the problem is, people think of safety and health in terms of front-line emergency responders such as firefighters or rescue teams. Of course everyone knows firefighters need to wear breathing apparatus in smoke, that rescue teams need to wear hard hats and heavy boots and gloves when clearing away rubble, etc. etc. But because FEMA staff are mainly office workers, not much thought is given to our safety and health when we are deployed at disasters.

The other problem is, some FEMA managers seem to think they are running the U.S. Marines, not a mixed bag of young/old male/female civilian employees. (Actually, I bet the U.S. Marines probably takes better care of their people than FEMA does theirs!)

I hope the new Administration will take this issue more seriously than the last one did.

Voluntary Agencies

The voluntary agencies' interests are not being properly addressed by FEMA. The liaison office to all of these major organizations falls within one unit (Voluntary Agency & Donations Coordination Unit) of one Section, of one Branch, of one Division, of one Directorate. It is far too low within the agency to ensure FEMA has the full visibility of agency outreach to the increasingly important Non-Government Organization (NGO) community, and to be sure that FEMA is effectively addressing their full range of interests. For example, voluntary agencies have critical interests in preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation but with their primarily liaison buried in one unit in one Directorate, they are not getting the attention they deserve. FEMA is not harnessing or leveraging their strengths effectively.

There ought to be a senior liaison to the NGO community within the External Affairs office, and each Directorate ought to have liaisons -- Logistics, DAD, DOD, Mitigation, and NPD in particular. These Directorate liaisons would have missions fulfilling each Directorate's voluntary agency coordination needs, but the senior liaison would have the overarching agency-wide responsibility to be sure there is a "go-to" person for the heads of these important national NGO offices, and have the responsibility to oversee the entire agency's relationships with the NGOs.

Other ideas: disband Citizen Corps. Change the name of the Faith Based Office, if not disband it altogether. Confirm that the Private Sector office only focuses on the private for-profit sector, not the private non-profit sector. The voluntary agency community has been very patient with FEMA for 8 years. They have been approached by Citizen Corps, FEMA Private Sector Office, DHS Private Sector Office, White House Faith Based Office, FEMA Faith Based Office, and even Northern Command. As a result, they are fed up with the poor coordination within FEMA. They are used to working with the DAD Voluntary Agency & Donations Coordination Unit, but it evidently needs to be raised to a far higher level within FEMA in order to show the full respect for the NGO community, and for FEMA to coordinate with them most effectively. One related suggestion is to create an ESF #16 for Voluntary Agency & Donations Coordination. There is considerable interest in this within States and the voluntary agency community. They would gain the authority and respect they deserve this way. It would be led by FEMA DAD, or even better as suggested below if the senior liaison to NGOs position is created within External Affairs, it would be housed there.

“We Are Working Under Horrible Leadership”

The Division Director has shared with numerous staff members that he is on Prozac for depression. What concerns me most is his mood swings: hostile behavior, going up and down the hall screaming at his employees to the point that he is unrecognizable with the veins popping out to the point of no return.

The division morale is now at an all time low; The feeling here is that we are working in a concentration camp, the feeling of, who is next to get blackballed for speaking up, or disagreeing with management on poor decisions on things like Federal spending or conflict of interest with contractual support. Acts of retaliation are reflected in our performance reviews, verbal bashings, and demeaning and condescending comments.

We have all become afraid, and are walking on egg shells for the next wrath of his and his Deputy’s dysfunctional behavior. He has mentioned removing the Security Guard services from our office location. How can anyone know what to expect next from these Executives who have so much angry and hate inside? Could it possibly result in workplace violence?

Many of the employees here feel that we are incarcerated in our offices, if we come out of our designated “cells” (office space) and speak to one another concerning projects, or even just to take a break, it can start the spark of dissension. The Division Director and his Acting Deputy serve as the judge and jury without trial or judicial process. You are guilty, and explaining anything is without a doubt the death sentence of your career. The tension has become so unbearable you could cut it with a chain saw.

We are not disgruntled employees, but employees who put in many hours for the mission and good of this agency, for the good of mankind when disaster hits. We are hard- working American people, who want a fair shake and to come to work each day and enjoy doing what we were hired to do! Not to be miserable and feel that we do not matter in the big scheme of things.

It has become clear that we are working under horrible leadership. This is so he and his selected staff will be able to secure a majority of a clique, and they rely on each other to gain power. They gradually intensify their acts of hostility, which creates havoc among the staff and promotes the divide and concur attitude that the Division Director, Acting Deputy and his selected staff use for their “victory” over the 2nd class working group.

Recommendation: Removal of Division Director and Acting Deputy Director, and they should never again be allowed to be in a position of power or supervision.

The Worst FEMA Assignment Ever

I have worked some nasty details in my 19 years of fire/disaster career, but my September 2008 assignment to Alabama has set a new low for organizational ability, communication with local agencies, and extreme abuse of Disaster Assistance Employees (DAEs) in the field.

First, a few DAEs were told to go to Nashville, Atlanta, and other areas. 2 DAE's had landed in Nashville, only to be called to relocate to Alabama on short notice. 1 DAE got to sleep in his car at the airport. The point of contact was wrong, with DAE's in hotels spanning 4 hours apart.

1st Day (9/2/08): Waited all day long for FEMA Community Relations (CR) staff to get paperwork together. Didn't get into the field.

2nd Day (9/3/08): Waited all day long on talking points to get approved, which finally happened at 4 p.m. DAEs were told to be back at their hotels by 7 p.m., so nothing was accomplished in the field. XXX mentions that there are rival gang members staying inside the Birmingham Red Cross Shelter, citing a potentially dangerous social climate.

3rd Day (9/4/08): DAE's reported to downtown Birmingham shelter, told by shelter staff to stay out due to anticipated 'riot conditions'. The Emergency Manager shows up to the shelter, extremely mad that no one contacted him from FEMA. Proceeds to verbally berate a DAE in public. Birmingham Police escort FEMA DAE's in broad daylight down the street by armed escort away from the shelter to the downtown Emergency Operations Center (EOC) basement, where they then sat in the EOC all day long, only to be released back to their hotels.

That night, at around 9 p.m., FEMA Community Relations (CR) senior staff ORDER all DAE's to immediately check out of their hotels and report to the Birmingham Convention Center to receive orders to work the entire night and morning...direct order from Alabama FCO according to YYY.

4th Day (9/5/08): STARTING AT 12 MIDNIGHT: The mission was to collect evacuee data prior to them leaving on buses from various shelters throughout the state. FEMA DAE's were given shelter sites and times where and when to intercept the buses/evacuees. The Red Cross have already done the data intake task, some buses were gone, and anticipated meetings with state assistants didn't happen. DAE's were told to sleep in their cars (violates all sorts of security rules), drive all night in the dark/unseen land, rain squalls, with no security. DAE's were informed that it was their choice to decline the mission directive due to lack of sleep/rest per federal safety standards. Only one refused (myself), -so about 50 DAE's had driven around all night long, many coming off on all-nighter with no hotel rooms in place yet.

FROM 11 AM TO 2 PM: DAE's begin to trickle back from the field, exceptionally low morale, severely exhausted. DAE's stand down while CR senior staff figures out what

to do with them. About 11 a.m., some DAE's are instructed to continue working, some until the early afternoon. At 3 p.m., CR Senior Staff inform all field DAE's that they are released from this assignment, and to report to the JFO in Montgomery (about 3 hours from Birmingham to Montgomery) by 9 a.m. Saturday morning to start traveling back to their home states.

5th Day (9/6): DAE's to travel back home when airports are canceling flights due to Tropical Storm Hanna after checking out of the Joint Field Office. Many DAE's cannot get back to their home airports easily.

So 2 days were entirely wasted waiting on field paperwork, with the last workday spent 'dazed & confused' from no rest whatsoever. 5 days detail, while 3 neighboring states have counties that are available for transfer to complete a 30 day assignment. I declined working all night long due to unsafe work-rest conditions.

I was released at 1:30 a.m., had to find a hotel, check in, and then was contacted at 3 a.m. and threatened that I would be fired unless I worked a shelter at 9 a.m. that morning. But as it turned out, the Shelter Manager didn't want FEMA staff in her shelter anyway, due to the rapid evacuation of occupants leaving in buses.

I have never seen such gross disorganization and lack of respect for the DAE workforce, plus knowingly endangering their safety/lives in order to collect data which had already been gathered by the American Red Cross.
