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**TESTIMONY**  
**BEFORE THE**

**SENATE HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATE, LOCAL,**  
**AND PRIVATE SECTOR PREPAREDNESS AND INTEGRATION**  
**ON**

**“MISSION POSSIBLE: FEMA’S FUTURE PREPAREDNESS PLANNING”**

**THE UNITED STATES SENATE**

**SEPTEMBER 24, 2008**

**Introduction**

Thank you Chairman Pryor, Ranking Member Sununu, and distinguished members of the Committee for allowing me the opportunity to provide you with a statement for the record on our nation’s preparedness. I am Nancy Dragani, the President of the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA). I was named Executive Director of the Ohio Emergency Management Agency in 2005, after serving with the agency since 1994. My previous experience includes a variety of positions with local, state and the federal government including the director of administration and public information chief for the Ohio EMA, editor of the Ohio National Guard’s quarterly magazine, and radio and television broadcaster with the United States Army. I served in the Ohio National Guard with 22 years of combined U.S. Army, Army National Guard and Air National Guard service. In my statement, I am representing NEMA, whose members are the state directors of emergency management in the states, territories, and the District of Columbia.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before your Committee today on FEMA’s future preparedness planning. FEMA’s readiness is a critical issue that Congress and the next Administration must carefully explore if changes are considered. Over the last several years, FEMA has weathered two significant reorganizations. First, the organization was included in the Department of Homeland Security just after 9/11 as the Department was created through the Homeland Security Act. Second, FEMA was again reorganized and retooled following the 2005 Hurricane Katrina through the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA). NEMA’s members have been carefully coordinating with FEMA through these transitions and serve as the state coordination point and the

Governors' contacts for all hazards emergency preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation. With the lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina still fresh, Gulf Coast recovery continuing, plus a new round of devastating disasters in 2008 including Midwestern flooding, and Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, 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. To ensure our national preparedness efforts succeed, our efforts must be all-hazards based; span the national mission areas of prevention, preparedness, protection, response, recovery and mitigation; and fully recognize the importance of a collaborative and coordinated approach among levels of government, the private and public sectors. In March 2008, NEMA's members drafted a White Paper outlining Recommendations for An Effective National Emergency Management System. I would like to share with you these recommendations today, including the top emergency management issues, states concerns in the current framework, and the priority recommendations for the Administration, DHS, and FEMA. While FEMA's role in the equation of successful response to disaster is key, it takes a strong partnership between all levels of governments to ensure FEMA has the tools and authorities to accomplish its mission effectively and in a timely manner.

### **TOP FIVE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

To understand the scope of where FEMA fits into the national emergency management structure, we need to frame the most critical emergency management issues today. NEMA members have identified the top five emergency management issues:

1. All-hazards emergency preparedness must be the cornerstone of national planning efforts;
2. Emergency Management, from mitigation through long-term recovery, must be "owned" and supported by elected officials at all levels as a critical government service. Efforts and resources must be sustained so that long-term recovery planning and implementation can be achieved;
3. The nation requires an emergency management system, which recognizes the requisite integration of local, tribal, State, regional and Federal organizations capable of creating a single management structure in response to disasters;
4. Citizens and businesses must understand and act upon their responsibilities to prepare for disasters and emergencies and lessen their reliance on government; and

5. Emergency management must continue to grow as a recognized profession. Adequate education and training resources are needed to meet the ongoing needs of emergency management professionals at all levels of government. A strategy is needed to recruit, train and develop our future leaders.

### **CURRENT STATE OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

Many recent disasters did not impact just one state, but rather impacted many other states that assisted through mutual aid or evacuation and sheltering. As a result, the FEMA regions and regional coordination capabilities among states are more important than ever before. FEMA's current initiatives to build regional capabilities assists states in meeting the needs of disaster victims at the crucial point when state resources are becoming depleted. As Congress explores how FEMA should be best positioned to address emergency management in the future, NEMA supports the forward-leaning policies that FEMA has recently instituted. FEMA must have strong regional resources, leadership, and personnel to quickly address disasters. FEMA must be fully staffed at the Headquarters and Regional offices, must establish and maintain stockpiles and pre-position resources and equipment, and must continue to maintain a trained cadre of personnel to provide assistance to states in large disasters. Similar capabilities are necessary for State, local, and tribal governments.

Additionally, all states, local and tribal governments must be able to build, maintain, and sustain a baseline capability to respond to the hazards and threats that each uniquely face. Resources are an issue at the state level to ensure preparedness as well. As you know, the Emergency Management Performance Grant Program (EMPG) is the single federal all-hazards emergency preparedness program in support of capacity building at the state and local level. EMPG should be maintained as a separate, all-hazards program with adequate funding and flexibility to address the specific needs of states and local governments. Personnel costs should continue to be eligible under the program with no caps or limits. Other programs, such as emergency operations center construction and renovation, should be included.

On the mutual aid front, NEMA appreciates the financial support of the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) as an expedient, cost-effective approach to disaster response and recovery. EMAC is an interstate mutual aid agreement ratified by Congress, coordinated with the

National Response Framework and adopted by all fifty states, three territories and the District of Columbia. Congress must continue to support EMAC by establishing permanent funding authorization to maintain and improve the compact's intent which is to allow states to assist other states with personnel and resources in times of disaster. Only that kind of continued support will ensure effective, coordinated emergency response

While not susceptible to large, potentially catastrophic events like hurricanes and earthquakes, Ohio is prone to devastating flash and riverine floods, tornadoes and winter storms. Over the years Ohio has developed a strong relationship with our federal partners, particularly Ed Buikema and the staff in Region V. We have an equally supportive relationship with our local partners at the 88 county emergency management agencies. An effective national emergency management system requires both trust and confidence in all your partners, at all levels. This trust and confidence was readily evident last summer, when we experienced devastating late summer floods in several central and west central Ohio counties. The Federal Coordinating Officer for this event was a familiar face to us, having served as our FCO for two flood events in northern Ohio the previous summer. When I learned that our FCO was going to be Jesse Munoz, my concern over any potential federal issues immediately dissipated because Jesse was, and is, a trusted, experienced federal partner who understands my state and our concerns. Ohio was fortunate to enjoy this type of support from FEMA in past, and continue to both to receive and expect it in the future. This type of mutual respect and partnership is critical. It must continue, at all levels of government, but particularly within FEMA, if we are to build a truly effective national system that serves us all.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FEMA, DHS, AND THE ADMINISTRATION**

Congress and the Administration need to examine how to best position FEMA to be successful in the future. FEMA's ability to help state and local governments as outlined in authorities by the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, must be maintained as a very important component of our emergency management system. For states, some of the critical considerations to ensuring a strong emergency management system and appropriate level of preparedness include:

- The FEMA Administrator must continue to serve as the primary advisor to the President on all issues related to disasters and emergencies, and have the full authority granted to the position through the Stafford Act and the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act;

- All levels of government must share the responsibility for preparing for and responding to emergencies and disasters. Adequate personnel, equipment, facilities, training, and other resources are necessary at the local, state, and federal level. Strengthening the capabilities of local and state emergency management and their emergency support functions will help prevent the loss of life and property during disasters, deliver assistance to victims most expediently, and reduce the costs to the nation;
- State, local and private stakeholders should be involved in the full life cycle of any strategy, policy and plans development related to national preparedness efforts;
- Federal interagency preparedness activities must be coordinated at the federal level prior to implementation. Federal initiatives must be sustainable into the future; and
- The federal disaster declaration decision-making process should be consistent and documented. A quick resolution to appeals is needed so that other types of disaster assistance, including those from other federal agencies than FEMA may be available to disaster victims as soon as possible.

## **CONCLUSION**

We appreciate Congress' attention and focus on ensuring preparedness at all levels of government for all hazards. We hope to work with the Committee and the next Administration to continue to strengthen FEMA and the nation's emergency management system. I thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of NEMA.