



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

STATEMENT OF

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U.S. OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

before the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT, THE FEDERAL
WORKFORCE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
AND THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISASTER RECOVERY AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE

on

FROM EARTHQUAKES TO TERRORIST ATTACKS: IS THE NATIONAL CAPITAL
REGION PREPARED FOR THE NEXT DISASTER?

December 7, 2011

Good afternoon, Chairman Akaka, Chairman Pryor, Ranking Member Johnson, Ranking Member Paul, and distinguished members of the subcommittees. My name is Dean Hunter, and I am the Deputy Director for Facilities, Security and Contracting at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM). In this position, I have primary responsibility for security and emergency management at OPM. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss OPM's role in hazards affecting the operational status of the National Capital Region (NCR), as well as our partnerships with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other Federal, State, and local emergency management entities.

By law, individual Federal agencies possess the authority to manage their workforces and to determine the appropriate response during emergencies, including natural disasters. Nonetheless, in order to facilitate a consistent and coordinated approach on a region-wide basis, Federal, State, and local authorities have traditionally looked to OPM to determine the operating status of the Federal Government across the DC area. OPM maintains a 24-hour operations center to actively monitor unfolding events. As emergencies arise, our standard protocols include participation in conference calls hosted by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) in order to develop situational awareness, facilitate the exchange of information, and coordinate communications and response efforts among Federal, State, and local agencies and other stakeholders. Participants in these structured calls typically include over 100 Federal, State, and local partners in all applicable disciplines, including weather (e.g., National Weather Service), emergency planning (e.g., Federal Emergency Management Agency, emergency management agencies of DC, MD and VA, as well as County representatives from local jurisdictions), transportation (e.g., Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority/Metro/Metrobus, Virginia Railway Express, Maryland Area Rail Commuter, Amtrak, commuter bus lines, Departments of Transportation for DC, MD, and VA), law enforcement (e.g., Metropolitan Police Department, U.S. Park Police), utility companies (e.g., PEPCO), and school districts.

The collaborative feedback of this network of stakeholders drives OPM decisions during emergencies. Ultimately, OPM's decision serves to carefully balance the safety and security of the Federal workforce and the public, with the need to maintain continuity of government operations. Once made, a rapid dissemination of the OPM decision takes many forms - - from direct notification to media outlets, to posting on the OPM webpage and call-in line, notification

to MWCOG, the Chief Human Capital Officers, the White House, and Congress, to e-mail alert notifications to subscribed employees, Washington Area Warning Alert System notification, and updating social media including, Facebook and Twitter. Additionally, OPM is aware that some private-sector employers in the DC area follow OPM's dismissal and closure decisions, thereby magnifying the impact of these decisions on the region's transit authorities.

We review and update our dismissal and closure policies on an annual basis in order to continue to ensure that we are able to make the most well-informed and timely decisions in the face of both expected events such as snowstorms or unprecedented, spontaneous events such as earthquakes. For example, Federal offices in the National Capital Region were closed for four consecutive days during the historic snowstorm of February, 2010. Partly in response, last year we updated our policies to add "Unscheduled Telework" as a new operating status option for agencies to provide their employees the ability to telework and maintain continuity of operations, to the greatest extent possible, when severe weather conditions or other circumstances disrupt commuting.

As we reviewed our dismissal and closure policies this year, we wanted to keep the momentum going on telework to support continuity of operations. The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010, which the President signed into law almost a year ago, requires agencies to keep up efforts to implement telework not only to reduce costs and improve employee work/life balance, but also to help ensure continuity of operations during both short- and long-term disruptions due to emergency situations. To that end, we are committed to continuing collaboration with all agencies to build a strong, results-based telework culture in the Federal Government.

Another issue we wanted to focus on during our annual review was on improving communication and coordination with our Federal, State, and local partners and dissemination of information to agencies and employees. Even before the earthquake, we were engaged with our partners on MWCOG to improve the region's preparedness and response to emergency events through enhanced communication and coordination. On November 9th, the MWCOG Steering Committee on Incident Management and Response presented a report making recommendations to enhance incident management and response in the National Capital Region. Among other improvements, the Steering Committee recommended the establishment of a Regional Incident Coordination (RIC) Program focused on ensuring regional coordination and communication among the region's decision-makers and providing better information for making operational decisions.

The COG Steering Committee after action review with our interagency partners in emergency management and transportation, as well as collaboration with the Chief Human Capital Officers, also led to the incorporation of additional options to our DC Dismissal Guide, including shelter-in-place, an early dismissal with a fixed final departure time, and an immediate departure option. It is important to note that although OPM has added new announcements for "shelter-in-place" and "immediate departure" to its procedures, this has been done to complete our emergency preparedness tool kit. We do not contemplate issuing these new announcements very often, if at all, but instead we provide them as constructs to illustrate the full range of potential emergency situations that agencies might face, which will help agencies plan for emergency situations.

We are committed to making operating status decisions as far in advance as feasible in order to reduce uncertainty and minimize demands on transportation infrastructure. It will always remain our goal to have employees home safely prior to the onset of dangerous conditions. For those times when events happen during the workday and decisions on early dismissal must be made, we strive to make these decisions as early as possible, emphasizing staggered releases so as not to overwhelm the transportation systems. For anticipated late afternoon weather events, OPM will consider the most strategic options. For example, OPM could use “unscheduled leave/unscheduled telework” at the beginning of the day to reduce traffic into the city and, if necessary, follow-up with a staggered departure announcement after the work day has begun if conditions deteriorate sooner than originally forecasted.

We recognize that the quality of our decisions depends not only on being well-informed, but also on being made in a timely fashion. There is obviously a tension between having the most accurate information and making a timely decision, with safety being the foremost consideration. We learned over the past year that some decisions are best made on a building-by-building basis, rather than through a broad, region-wide announcement. For example, immediately following the earthquake, individual agencies were better positioned to make decisions on a building-by-building basis concerning shelter-in-place or evacuation, given the potential for varied levels of damage across the building inventory, ongoing structural assessments, and the potential for aftershocks.

OPM appreciates and is proud to be a part of a strong, collaborative partnership with other Federal, State, and local entities in the National Capital Region (NCR) working on emergency

preparedness and response. In 2009, OPM and FEMA's Office of National Capital Region Coordination (ONCRC) jointly formed the National Capital Region Federal Workforce Preparedness Subcommittee (NFWPSC) of the Joint Federal Committee (JFC), created to improve regional coordination and emergency management. Working with the interagency community, these efforts have yielded the development of a Strategic Plan and a Concept of Operations Plan for Catastrophic Events, as well as two tabletop training exercises. We are expanding our efforts in the coming year to develop web-based preparedness courses and an NCR Federal Worker Preparedness Brochure. We will continue to leverage those relationships and utilize lessons learned from each event to improve decision-making and communication in the interest of enhancing the safety of the Federal workforce and the public.

Thank you for this opportunity, I am happy to address any questions that you may have.