Written Statement of

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"Federal Partners' Emergency Communications Collaboration and Capabilities"

Before the
House Committee on Homeland Security,
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications

Washington, D.C.
November 17, 2011

Introduction

Good morning Chairman Bilirakis, Ranking Member Richardson, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. I am Damon Penn, Assistant Administrator for National Continuity Programs of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). With me today is Eric Edwards, Director of FEMA's of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Disaster Emergency Communications Division. It is an honor to appear before you on behalf of FEMA to discuss our emergency communication capabilities and collaboration with federal partners.

FEMA is continuously working with its partners at DHS, private industry, other federal agencies, state, local, and tribal governments to improve the capability and interoperability of emergency communications. This Whole Community effort also includes innovations in the way we send and receive information to the public before, during and in the wake of disasters.

In our testimony today, Eric will describe the activities of FEMA's Disaster Emergency Communications Division (DECD) and its work with other federal and state partners. I will provide recent developments and key updates in the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) program and our National Emergency Alert System (EAS) test. I will also share how our use of social media is transforming the way we communicate with the American public. FEMA is dedicated to employing cutting-edge technology and leveraging the Whole Community to increase the effectiveness of emergency communications.

Disaster Emergency Communications Division (DECD)

Since its inception in 2008, FEMA's Disaster Emergency Communications (DEC) Division, part of the Office of Response and Recovery's Response Directorate, has worked to build an effective disaster emergency communications program to improve tactical communications capabilities and interoperability during disaster response. To fortify this effort, the DEC Division works closely with the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC). As outlined by Secretary Napolitano's policy, OEC has the leadership role within the Department for coordinating strategic interoperability efforts. OEC's leadership role is supported by all the DHS components through the "One DHS Communications Committee."

An important part of the DEC Division's mission is to improve the effectiveness and interoperability of Federal response level communications throughout the country. The DEC Division serves this mission by delivering Mobile Emergency Response Support (MERS) capabilities to Federal, regional, state, tribal, and local agencies in various disaster situations. In this role, the Division works closely with DHS's National Protection and Programs Directorate's (NPPD) National Communications System (NCS)—Primary Coordinator of Emergency Support Function #2 (Communications). The Division, through its MERS detachments, assists NCS in evaluating and supporting post-disaster communications restoration needs. These capabilities provide voice, video, and data communications through deployable emergency communications units, often delivered in austere environments. The Division also works with FEMA regions to deliver temporary mission-critical communications for Joint Field Offices (JFO) during a Federal

disaster declaration. JFOs support the communications needs of the Federal Coordinating Officer, national response teams, and other emergency responders.

For example, in preparing for and responding to Hurricane Irene, FEMA pre-positioned a number of national response teams along the East Coast of the United States and Puerto Rico, to coordinate with state, tribal, and local officials. MERS assets were strategically located throughout the disaster-affected areas to support emergency response communications needs. The essential pre-positioning of MERS assets resulted in the rapid delivery of Federal communications services in the wake of Hurricane Irene.

In addition, the DEC Division provides expertise to various agencies regarding communications technologies, especially during mission-critical disaster response. The Division possesses a thorough understanding of current communication capabilities and a roadmap to adapt to future technologies at the national, regional, state, local, and tribal level which enables it to effectively aid various agencies. In the past decade, new policies and new modes of communications have significantly transformed the tools used by responders during disasters. MERS assets provide effective support to agencies by offering a blend of current and widely used technologies with new and innovative ones. For example, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has undertaken a number of efforts to assist public safety by modifying spectrum allocations in order to support the use of other services such as data and video applications that increasingly demand higher capacity channels. These efforts have included narrow-banding of land mobile radio (LMR) systems and allocation of radio frequency spectrum for broadband use by public safety services. In addition, commercial products used by public safety are transitioning toward more Internet Protocol (IP)-based devices that improve interoperability and increase spectrum efficiency.

Beyond incident response support, the DEC Division works across government and industry to increase emergency communications capabilities, performance, resiliency, and standards. The DEC Division recognizes that constant technology innovations, such as social networking and next generation wireless broadband communications, rapidly transform and change communications technology. Because of the rapid evolution of technology, the DEC Division must continuously modernize its communications assets to ensure the operational effectiveness of DEC activities and MERS capabilities by updating its communications equipment.

As a result, the DEC Division has developed the DEC Technology Roadmap. This Roadmap identifies how the Division can maintain and enhance current assets, incorporate new and emerging technologies, and assess which technologies FEMA should invest in. Furthermore, the DEC Technology Roadmap makes every effort to comply and align with the DHS Technology Roadmap to ensure operability and interoperability with future DHS joint program office tactical communications initiatives while also supporting FEMA's unique emergency communications support role. A robust disaster emergency communications architecture enhances reliability, resiliency, survivability, redundancy, and security based on a unified IP platform and compatibility with all users in the first responder community. It begins with a snapshot of current capabilities and carefully considers FEMA's future preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery mission requirements, as well as the Agency's current capabilities. The DEC Division

is committed to enhancing FEMA's response and recovery capabilities by creating a modernized, interoperable communications infrastructure supporting voice, video, and data.

Additionally, DEC Division works with each FEMA region, supporting the establishment of state-specific emergency communications plans that identify current communication resources and gaps, and enhance communications interoperability by facilitating the coordination of Federal, state, tribal, and local communications during an incident. To date, the Regions have delivered 39 state and three territory communications plans with DEC Division support; and plans to deliver six additional state plans and two Regional plans by the end of FY2012.

The DEC Division has supported the establishment of Regional Emergency Communications Coordination Working Groups (RECCWG) in all of FEMA's 10 regions. These RECCWGs are comprised of federal, state, tribal, and local organizations and work closely with the DHS – OEC and the FCC to evaluate inter- and intra-state interoperability programs, share best practices, and advise FEMA Regional Administrators on the state of regional emergency communications capabilities. In s short amount of time, the DEC Division has made great strides in improving local, tribal, state, regional, and national emergency communications capabilities and will continue its efforts into the future.

New Innovations in Communications with the Public

FEMA is committed to improving and updating the means by which we communicate with the public in the wake of disasters. The Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) is a modernization and integration of the nation's alert and warning infrastructure. The current Emergency Alert System (EAS) is built on technology that is more than five decades old. FEMA created IPAWS to modernize the EAS and expand the Primary Entry Point (PEP) station system. The PEP system is a nationwide network of broadcast stations and other entities that is used to distribute a message from the President or designated national authorities in the event of a national emergency.

The National EAS Test, which occurred on November 9, 2011, was an essential step toward improving the EAS. This was the first time that an EAS test was coordinated nationwide, testing the capability to communicate emergency information simultaneously across the United States, and served as an opportunity for us to discover the true limitations of the EAS on a national level. We discovered some shortcomings and were surprised at the extent of success in other areas. The next steps are reviewing the data, analyzing trends, developing action plans and metrics, executing those plans, measuring the outcomes, and reassessing our progress. An important focus is making the EAS fully accessible. We are working closely with the disability community to accomplish this goal.

In addition to modernizing the EAS, IPAWS has:

- Built on the development work done by the cellular industry and the Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) and deployed the Open Platform for Emergency Networks, or IPAWS- OPEN, which can be used at no cost by State, local, territorial, and tribal public safety partners to share and disseminate emergency alerts.

- Adapted the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP), the CAP Profile, and the C-interface, which improve interoperability by establishing data exchange language standards and will continue to work with industry and S&T to develop new standards and seamlessly integrate current and future technologies into IPAWS;
- Expanded traditional alerting and warning communication pathways; and
- Continued to work with the Department of Commerce and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to deliver alerts through All Hazards NOAA Weather Radio.

Looking forward to fiscal year (FY) 2012, FEMA's goals are to expand IPAWS' interface standards for new social media dissemination and communications networks; add redundancy in the dissemination network, which allows one message to travel disparate paths; and ensure at least 90 percent of U.S. residents are covered by at least one means of communication by the end of the fiscal year.

In addition to modernizing the EAS, FEMA is developing PLAN (Personal Localized Alerting Network), also referred to as the CMAS (Commercial Mobile Alerting System), to allow individuals with an enabled mobile device to receive geographically targeted messages alerting them of imminent threats, AMBER alerts, or emergency messages from the President. CMAS/PLAN leverages extensive work done by the cellular industry and S&T to deliver these messages avoiding the delays commonly found in text-message based systems. This is a critical capability given the recent delays this region saw in disseminating text message alerts after the earthquake this past August.

CMAS / PLAN is scheduled to become operational in New York City and Washington D.C. by the end of this year, with nationwide roll-out of operational capability beginning in April 2012. FEMA is working with the cellular industry and S&T to conduct test and pilots of this capability over the next several months to ensure its success.

Conclusion

The ability to effectively communicate during and immediately following a disaster is essential to fulfilling our mission. For that reason we have completely overhauled the way we communicate with each other and with the public in a disaster environment. We are leveraging cutting-edge technology as well as important social media tools to reach even more U.S. residents. We will continue to work with our federal partners to ensure that emergency communications are as up-to-date and wide-reaching as possible

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today. Eric and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.