

WELCOMING ADDRESS

Mr. Scott B. Gudes, Acting Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere, and Acting Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Remarks. Welcome to the Forum on Risk Management and Assessments of Natural Hazards. I want to thank Sam Williamson and Margaret Lawless for giving me the opportunity to say a few words before you jump into this very important work. The theme for the Forum really hits the mark: "Toward a Safer America: Building Natural Hazard Resistant Communities Through Risk Management and Assessments." With this in mind, this group is taking on a very important task, one that will aid in mitigating losses attributed to natural hazards--I applaud all of you for your efforts. As I'm sure you are all aware, the losses due to natural hazards have been staggering over the last several years:

- From 1989 to 1993, the average annual losses from disasters were \$3.3 billion.
- From 1993-1996, the annual losses rose to \$13 billion!
- As a comparison, waging the Persian Gulf War cost the United States and its allies \$60 billion.

In NOAA, we continue to play a significant role in the overall effort to mitigate losses caused from natural hazards. Optimal decision-making in agriculture, construction, energy, transportation, and water resource management must be based on reliable predictions of extreme weather phenomena. In March, the nation's premier severe weather experts will discuss their latest research findings and forecasting techniques during the National Severe Weather Workshop. This Workshop is being sponsored by NOAA's Storm Prediction Center, Central Oklahoma Chapter of the American Meteorological Society, the Oklahoma Chapter of the National Weather Association, and the Oklahoma Emergency Managers Association. The more these hazards are understood and prediction capabilities improve (understanding and predicting these hazards are principal NOAA responsibilities), the more effective risk assessment and mitigation strategies will become.

Each year, more and more Americans are at risk from a variety of natural hazards that affect the coastal environment. Indeed, the coastal environment is also of extreme importance to NOAA. In fact, NOAA maintains a national network of monitoring programs that detect, quantify, and forecast changes in coastal environmental quality. In the past 30 years, there has been explosive growth along the Nation's coastal margins such that today more than 50% of U.S. citizens live in the coastal zone (coastal waters and the adjacent lands of the coastal states, including islands, territories, and the Great Lakes states). Many of these citizens build their homes, businesses, schools, and hospitals in locations that are particularly vulnerable to catastrophic and chronic coastal hazards such as hurricanes, severe storms, coastal erosion, ocean flooding, riverine flooding or landslides.

Of note, NOAA's National Ocean Service recently released a report prepared by the U.S. Global Change Research Program's National Assessment of the Potential Consequences of Climate Variability and Change. The report, entitled: "The Potential Impacts of Climate Change on Coastal and Marine Resources," highlighted shoreline erosion as a key issue of climate change.

The report states, "Globally averaged, sea-level will continue to rise, and the developed nature of

many coastlines will make both human settlements and ecosystems more vulnerable to flooding and inundation."

As always, NOAA will continue to play a vital role in warning the public and emergency managers of many of the natural hazards and will partner with other agencies to aid in mitigating the losses and impacts of these hazards. I appreciate your participation and truly hope you have an informative, successful Forum.