

**HAS THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY  
IMPROVED ITS ABILITY TO MAINTAIN SITUATIONAL  
AWARENESS SINCE HURRICANE KATRINA?**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT,  
INVESTIGATIONS, AND OVERSIGHT**

OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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## **HAS THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY IMPROVED ITS ABILITY TO MAINTAIN SITUATIONAL AWARENESS SINCE HURRICANE KATRINA?**

**Wednesday, June 20, 2007**

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT, INVESTIGATIONS  
AND OVERSIGHT,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 1 p.m., in room 1539, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Christopher Carney [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Carney, Clarke, Perlmutter, Rogers, and Jindal.

Mr. CARNEY. [Presiding.] The Subcommittee on Management, Investigations and Oversight will come to order.

The subcommittee is meeting today to receive testimony on "You Don't Know What You Don't Know: Has the Department of Homeland Security Improved Its Ability to Maintain Situational Awareness Since Hurricane Katrina?"

In the early morning hours of August 29, 2005, Katrina's waters overwhelmed the levees around New Orleans and began to fill the city. The National Weather Service knew it and reported it. The Transportation Security Administration knew it and reported it. Local officials knew it and reported it. Indeed, throughout the day of landfall, Federal, state, local and even nongovernmental organizations all were issuing reports that detailed the unfolding catastrophe.

Yet somehow the Homeland Security Operations Center, what DHS called the "nation's nerve center for information sharing and domestic incidents management," did not get or did not process the message.

That evening, even as the National Weather Service was urging New Orleans residents fleeing to their attics to take an axe or a hatchet with them so they can cut their way onto the roof to avoid drowning, the HSOC issued a situation report to the secretary of homeland security and to the president that said, "Preliminary reports indicate the levees in New Orleans have not been breached."

Katrina was the HSOC's first major test, and it failed.

But we are not here today to revisit those mistakes. Instead, we are here to assess what improvements DHS has made to ensure that they do better next time.

(1)

I am pleased to say that there has been significant improvement. Too often, the tendency in Washington is to circle the wagons and refuse to acknowledge error, even when it is staring you in the face.

Today, however, we will hear about how it should have been done. We will hear about what can happen when career public servants do the opposite, when they set pride and ego aside into a cold, hard appraisal of what went wrong and how to fix it.

Our first witness is uniquely positioned to give us this perspective. He was deputy director of HSOC during Katrina and led the difficult effort of trying to right what went wrong. The new National Operations Center has not yet faced a test even close to Katrina, and we won't really know if all the fixes have worked unless or until it does. But I am confident that even if some of the changes do not pan out, we are much better off today than we were on August 29, 2005.

Now, I look forward to the witnesses' testimony.

The chair now recognizes the ranking member from the subcommittee, the gentleman from Alabama, Mr. Rogers, for an opening statement.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for calling this hearing for us to make assessments on what progress we have made in this area.

I first want to thank our witness for being here and the witnesses we are going to have on the second panel.

I especially want to welcome Mr. Jim Walker, the homeland security director from my home state of Alabama. Mr. Walker will outline a number of new programs in Alabama that include streamlining video, as well as a partnership with Google to help maintain situational awareness.

Nearly 22 months ago, Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast. To say the least, there was a breakdown in communication and leadership in response to Katrina, all of which seriously damaged recovery efforts. Several weeks after the storm hit, reviews were launched by DHS, the White House, the House Bipartisan Select Committee and the Senate Committee. These reviews began the process of assessing the failure at all levels of government, especially regarding the response to the flooding in New Orleans.

One of those issues was the operations of the department's Homeland Security Operations Center. The Katrina investigations found a number of failures in how the center performed. In response, Secretary Chertoff restructured this function and created a National Operations Center. We look forward to hearing from our witnesses as to how the new center is performing and how it plans to respond to the next disaster.

We also will hear about model programs at the state and local levels to help maintain situational awareness. Hurricane Katrina proved, tragically, that collecting and sharing information is critical for government agencies when responding to disaster. We need to ensure DHS gets it right.

I would ask unanimous consent that Mr. Jindal from Louisiana be allowed to participate.

With that, I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CARNEY. Without objection, so granted.

Members of the subcommittee are reminded that, under the committee rules, opening statements may be submitted for the record.

I would like to first welcome our guest, our witness, Mr. Frank DiFalco. Mr. DiFalco is currently the director of the Department of Homeland Security's National Operations Center. He joined the department in May 2004 as the deputy director for the Homeland Security Operations Center. Prior to that, Mr. DiFalco served for 26 years in the United States Marine Corps, where he served as an infantry officer and held a variety of command and staff positions. Among other awards, he received the Legion of Merit medal and the Bronze Star medal with a combat V.

Without objection, the witnesses' full statements will be inserted in the record.

I now ask Mr. DiFalco to summarize his statement for 5 minutes. Mr. DiFalco?

**STATEMENT OF FRANK DIFALCO, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL OPERATIONS CENTER, OFFICE OF OPERATIONS COORDINATION, DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

Mr. DiFALCO. Good afternoon, Chairman Carney, Ranking Member Rogers and distinguished committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the DHS National Operations Center.

For background, I would like to state that the National Operations Center, known as the NOC, is part of the DHS Office of Operations Coordination, which is known as OPS, and OPS reports directly to the DHS secretary.

During my time with you today, I will describe the DHS OPS's and NOC's missions, explain the composition of the NOC, and detail the operational improvements that we have made since Hurricane Katrina.

Homeland security presidential directive 5 identifies the secretary of homeland security as the principal Federal official for domestic incident management. The DHS mission includes the responsibility to lead the unified national effort to secure America. Likewise, OPS is an operations staff directorate.

The mission of OPS is directed by Vice Admiral Roger Rufe, United States Coast Guard, retired. The mission is to integrate DHS interagency planning in operations coordination in order to prevent, protect, respond and recover from terrorist threats or attacks, or other manmade or natural disasters.

The NOC is a 24/7 multi-agency operations center. The mission of the NOC is to be the nation's primary national-level hub for domestic situational awareness, common operating picture, information fusion, information sharing, communications and operations coordination pertaining to the prevention of terrorist attacks and domestic incident management.

Also, the NOC serves as a national fusion center, collecting and immediately fusing all source information to quickly determine if there is a terrorism nexus and shares all threats and all hazards information across the spectrum of Federal, state, local, tribal, private sector and other homeland security partners.

The NOC was officially established on May 25, 2006, with the approval of the national response plan notice of change, and it is

codified in section 515 of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 that states that the NOC is the principal operations center for DHS and shall provide situational awareness and common operating picture for the entire Federal Government and for state, local and tribal governments as appropriate in the event of a natural disaster, act of terrorism, or other manmade disaster, and to ensure that critical terrorism and disaster-related information reaches government decision makers.

The NOC enables the DHS secretary and other leaders to make informed decisions and identify courses of action during an event or threat. The NOC is comprised of five elements: the NOC-Watch, the NOC intelligence and analysis, FEMA's National Response Coordination Center, the Office of Infrastructure Protection's Coordinating Center, and the NOC planning element, which is known as the Incident Management Planning Team.

Since 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, the Federal Government has done a tremendous amount to ensure that there are improved and better coordinated efforts undertaken to manage all threats and all hazards incidents. For example, at DHS, we have instituted improved policies, processes, procedures, training programs, and systems to better enable the department to function in support of the secretary as the domestic incident manager. The capabilities developed are based on an incremental approach and is fueled by inter-agency cooperation.

Major examples include: establish the DHS Office of Operations Coordination; establish the NOC; establish a common operating picture known as the COP, which is accessed via the Homeland Security Information Network by Federal and state partners; assign information responsibilities to interagency partners; identify and collect the critical information requirements to better provide key incident information to decision makers; institutionalize the structure and processes for information flow from the field to the national level; establish the permanent planning operations staff within the NOC called the Incident Management Planning Team, who develops national concept plans and provides planning training to the interagency; automate the data entry for incident reports in geospatial displays; and establish and maintain the communications system; deploy and resource a national planning execution system; establish the DHS crisis action process and a phased notification system; establish a NOC training program that includes daily shift drills and is expandable to include DHS and interagency operations centers; provide training to the interagency PFOs and state emergency management personnel on HSIN and COP reporting; participate in major exercises like Ardent Sentry that tested operations processes, procedures and tools like the COP; organize and develop groups to facilitate interagency coordination that include the operations coordination group, the operations centers work group, the senior leadership group, COP users working group, HSIN Management Coordinating Council, HSIN Advisory Council, and daily NOC coordination calls; led the DHS participation at the White House Homeland Security Council's domestic readiness group policy coordination committee; and conducted mission blueprint analysis by outside experts to look at policies, procedures,



processes and organizations and technologies to define the OPS and NOC way forward.

While a lot of improvements have been made, there is much work to be done to continuously improve the unity of effort and operational capabilities in order to ensure mission accomplishment. We have taken the post-Katrina recommendations provided by Congress, the White House, and the GAO very seriously and are making enhancements to DHS operations.

We appreciate the recommendations GAO has recently offered regarding DHS Op Centers, including, one, our collaborative practices; two, that there are no major barriers to executing our mission; and three, the report conclusions including the importance of defining common outcomes and joint strategies.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. [Presiding.] Mr. DiFalco, if you could wrap up please, sir.

Mr. DiFALCO. Yes, sir.

In addition, we look forward to providing additional tours and briefs to the GAO and Congress to enhance visibility on OPS and the NOC.

This concludes my oral statement. I am glad to answer any questions.

[The statement of Mr. DiFalco follows:]

#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF FRANK DiFALCO

Good morning, Chairman Carney, Ranking Member Rogers, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Frank DiFalco, Director of the National Operations Center (NOC) at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Thank you for inviting me to discuss what DHS, the Office of Operations Coordination (OPS), and the NOC have done to increase situational awareness within DHS and among the interagency stakeholders, streamline the information flow process during incidents, and improve our contingency and crisis action planning efforts.

As way of background, I would like to briefly describe the roles of OPS and the NOC. The mission of OPS, which is directed by retired VADM Roger Rufe, USCG, is to integrate DHS and interagency planning and operations coordination in order to prevent, deter, protect, and respond to terrorists threats/attacks or threats from other man-made or natural disasters. The NOC is a 24x7, multi-agency operations center that collects all-threats and all-hazards information across the spectrum of federal, state, local, tribal, private-sector, and other key sources. Its mission is to be the primary national-level hub for domestic situational awareness, common operating picture, information fusion, information sharing, communications, and operations coordination pertaining to the prevention of terrorist attacks and domestic incident management.

DHS takes these missions and the overall responsibilities laid out in the Homeland Security Act and various Homeland Security Presidential Directives seriously. We work every day of the year to ensure the situational awareness needs of DHS, other federal agencies, state and local partners, and other homeland security stakeholders are met. As you know, this is an evolving process. Lessons learned from real-life incidents and exercises are continually applied to improve the way the NOC and other DHS offices work. I hope my time with you today can help you better understand how the operations efforts of the NOC work within an overarching DHS framework.

#### **"Yesterday"**

Since 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, the Federal Government has done a tremendous amount to ensure there are improved and better coordinated efforts undertaken to manage all-hazards incidents. For example, at DHS, we have instituted improved policies, processes, procedures, training programs and systems to better enable the Department to function in support of the Secretary as the Domestic Incident Manager.

I will spend most of my time with you today relating how DHS, and the NOC specifically, has taken positive action prompted by the recommendations from Congress, GAO, and the White House. In addition, DHS, like other federal departments,

looked closely at how we did business, and recognized that we have to continuously improve how we provide a national unified effort and manage domestic incidents. Since Katrina, much progress has been made in providing the Secretary and the President with better situational awareness than what was available during the time immediately following landfall of Hurricane Katrina.

For example, at the time of Katrina, the Homeland Security Operations Center (HSOC) had responsibility for providing situational awareness to the now defunct Interagency Incident Management Group (IIMG), while the Incident Management Division, a component of the IIMG, had responsibility for coordinating the federal response to the incident. The major "gap and seam" identified in this instance was that the HSOC and IIMG reported through two separate chains of command. This resulted in a disjointed information flow and other problems relating to situational awareness and incident management. These challenges have since been remedied with organizational improvements, standardized processes and procedures, inter-agency coordination at several levels, and aggressive training and exercising.

There are many other examples where DHS and other Federal efforts had friction during Katrina. The House, Senate, White House, GAO, DHS and other entities have thoroughly reviewed the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina and chronicled every step of the process from pre-landfall to response and recovery efforts. I think the reports and their recommendations speak for themselves and provide a needed analysis of the Federal, State and local response to this massive natural disaster. DHS took these efforts seriously and implemented many of the recommendations. For example, OPS is in the process of fully implementing the seven applicable White House Katrina lessons learned report recommendations summarized below.

- Establish the National Operations Center (NOC)
- Establish National Information and Knowledge Management System
- Establish a National Reporting System
- Establish a National Information Requirements and a National Information Reporting Chain
- Establish and Maintain a Deployable Communications Capability
- Develop and Resource a Federal Planning and Execution System
- Establish a Permanent Planning/Operations Staff within the NOC

These recommendations have greatly enhanced operations and other areas of the Department, as well as improved the overall capability of the Federal Government to respond to and recover from significant incidents.

#### **"Today"**

Over the past year, we have further improved upon the above recommendations with lessons learned from real world events and exercises. Below, I will provide additional information on each of the following key OPS efforts.

- The NOC
- The Common Operating Picture (COP)
- Department Situational Awareness Team (DSAT)
- The Incident Management Planning Team (IMPT) and the National Planning and Execution System (NPES)
- DHS Crisis Action Process (CAP)
- OPS Mission Blueprint
- Coordination with Other Federal Partners
- Notifications
- Training and Exercises

#### ***National Operations Center and the Common Operating Picture***

OPS has made significant advancements in many operational matters that directly facilitate the Secretary's execution of the Homeland Security Act, Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD)-5, and HSPD-8 responsibilities. To enable us to more efficiently coordinate the offices within the Department and connect them with our interagency partners, we established the NOC and are implementing the COP.

The NOC was officially established on May 25, 2006 with the approval of the National Response Plan (NRP) Notice of Change. The NOC is comprised of five elements: (1) the NOC Watch, which integrates the functions and personnel of the former multi-agency HSOC; (2) NOC Intelligence and Analysis, which incorporated the Office of Intelligence & Analysis (I&A) intelligence watch and warning element; (3) FEMA's National Response Coordination Center (NRCC); (4) the Office of Infrastructure Protection's National Infrastructure Coordination Center (NICC); and (5) the NOC Planning Element (IMPT), that institutionalizes interagency deliberate and crisis action planning processes.

The NOC, in collaboration with the Office of Intelligence & Analysis, fuses all-source information to quickly determine if a threat or event contains a nexus to ter-

rorism. The NOC functions as a national fusion center that synthesizes reporting from State and Local Fusion Centers, law enforcement, critical infrastructure, national level intelligence, emergency response, and private sector organizations. The NOC disseminates homeland security information to senior federal officials, appropriate intelligence and law enforcement agencies, and to other homeland security partners. The NOC serves as the primary focal point for the Secretary and senior administration officials to receive domestic situational awareness relating to natural and man-made disasters, acts of terrorism, and incident management within the United States.

The COP is the principal situational awareness tool within the NOC and is the cornerstone of the National Reporting System. This real-time, web-based tool ties together key homeland security partners primarily at the Federal, State, and Joint Field Office (JFO) levels. The COP was the direct result of the Department's internal reviews following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the White House Katrina lessons learned report. It was initially available for the 2006 Hurricane season and has the following features:

- Is accessible through the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN)
- Provides Federal departments and agencies with the capability to share critical information
- Establishes an inter-agency common operating database
- Develops a shared interagency understanding of the situation
- Provides information integrity for reporting requirements
- Facilitates timely decision making

The COP includes functional screens that address the National and International Situation Summaries, executive actions, requests for information, responder status, chronology of events, critical infrastructure, mapping products, media reports, streaming video from the incident site, the latest incident updates, metrics, and other HSIN information.

As part of our incremental approach, we are advancing the COP capabilities from natural disasters to all hazards and all threats. Our "next steps" are intended to further enhance the COP capabilities from exclusively an unclassified, hurricanes/natural disaster centric tool to include a classified, all-hazards capability. We are currently focusing on the "worst case" scenarios for nuclear/radiological incidents and will use national exercises and real world events to validate and continue its overall development.

#### ***Department Situational Awareness Team***

DSATs are made up of DHS personnel who provide key situational awareness reporting to incident managers by providing data directly from the scene of the incident. This data can include information from streaming video which can be posted on HSIN, satellite communications, and other tools that provide incident managers vital information in near real-time. This capability supports Federal, State, and Local domestic incident managers and allows our collective emergency response to be coordinated with key homeland security partners such as the Principal Federal Official (PFO).

#### ***Incident Management Planning Team & National Planning and Execution System***

The White House Katrina lessons learned report identified two specific recommendations to address planning limitations at the national level. The first recommendation called for the creation of a permanent planning body within DHS. DHS addressed this recommendation through the creation of the Incident Management Planning Team (IMPT). The IMPT is an interagency element that develops strategic level contingency plans predicated on the National Planning Scenarios. These contingency plans unify the interagency prevention, protection, response and recovery actions with respect to an event or threat.

The mission of the IMPT is to provide contingency and crisis-action incident management planning through a collaborative, interagency process in support of the Secretary's unique responsibilities as the principal Federal official for domestic incident management as articulated in HSPD-5, the Homeland Security Act of 2002 and other key homeland security authorities such as the preparedness functions of HSPD-8. It is comprised of two components: (1) a core group of 15 full-time planning representatives from key DHS elements (e.g., TSA, CBP, I&A, FEMA, Coast Guard) as well as other key interagency members (i.e., DOD, DOJ, the FBI, HHS, DOT, DOE, EPA and the American Red Cross); and (2) an "on-call" staff of 38 planners that includes other members from DHS as well as the interagency. The IMPT was established in September 2006 and its members underwent a robust training program to prepare each of them for the planning responsibilities they have been asked to execute.

The IMPT's initial actions have been focused on the development of federal inter-agency concept plans (CONPLANS) that address each of the 15 National Planning Scenarios. The all-threats and all-hazards scenarios include nuclear, chemical, biological, natural disaster and cyber incidents. Each plan developed by the IMPT identifies the specific actions that individual departments and agencies intend to take in the event a given scenario were to occur. The primary value of the IMPT is to identify the efforts of the entire interagency in one comprehensive document. This planning process serves two distinct purposes: it facilitates the ability of Secretary to fulfill his/her coordination responsibilities under HSPD-5 by providing awareness of the individual capabilities that a specific agency plans to deliver; and it also identifies existing seams and gaps that exist within the interagency planning efforts for a particular scenario.

The second recommendation identified the need for a federal planning process to unify the planning efforts that occur across the interagency. DHS addressed this recommendation through its development of the National Planning and Execution System (NPES) which is a formal curriculum based planning process used by the IMPT to build interagency contingency plans. OPS leadership recognized that the success or failure of the IMPT would hinge largely on its ability to develop a planning process that could coordinate the efforts of this interagency group and facilitate the development of a shared planning culture across the federal government. Prior to NPES, few federal departments and agencies adhered to a formal planning process that organized the operational planning efforts within their respective departments. To achieve this goal, OPS created NPES, which integrates current and emerging interagency planning "best practices," is consistent with the NRP, and adheres to the core concepts and terminology addressed in NIMS.

NPES was converted to a curriculum that was taught to each member of the IMPT. The feedback from this training has been overwhelmingly positive and has resulted in numerous requests by interagency members that this training be offered to others within their respective departments and agencies. In addition, many State and Local governments have requested copies of the NPES and related training.

DHS has actively engaged in promoting and sharing NPES throughout the interagency to assist in the development of supporting plans. Over the past ten months, the IMPT has trained over 500 interagency planners on the NPES and more training sessions are scheduled. The DHS Office of the Chief Learning Officer (CLO) and the Center for Domestic Preparedness (CDP) are currently working with the IMPT to develop an accredited NPES Program of Instruction. By formalizing the instruction and subsequently offering it at an accredited institution, the NPES training will become available to a greater number of planners in the near future, advancing its adoption throughout the interagency.

#### ***The DHS Crisis Action Process***

The Crisis Action Process (CAP) is a standard process by which DHS leadership manages a domestic incident response by following a general sequence of events while simultaneously engaging in a continuous cycle of actions. Over the past 6 months, in an effort to bolster preparations for real-world events, a number of refinements have been made to our processes. Two refinements of note are the formalization of the Senior Leadership Group (SLG), which the Director of OPS chairs, and the establishment of the Crisis Action Team (CAT) to manage incidents.

The SLG is comprised of the various DHS Assistant Secretaries that report to the Secretary and other select leaders within DHS. The SLG can be convened by the Secretary at any time and its primary purpose is to facilitate the Secretary's ability to receive input and recommendations from his most experienced leaders during times of crisis. When convened during times of crisis, the Secretary can also issue initial guidance to the SLG members regarding actions he deems appropriate.

The CAT is the main focus of the Crisis Action Process. The CAT is a multi-agency coordination entity comprised of over 60 personnel, many from the interagency IMPT, and is designed to facilitate the Secretary's ability to coordinate interagency operations for threats and incidents in accordance with the responsibilities identified in HSPD-5. The CAT provides the Secretary and the Federal government with an immediate incident management capability and ensures seamless integration of threat monitoring and strategic cross-directorate operational response activities. By incorporating guidance from the Secretary and SLG into its incident management activities, the CAT is able to translate executive level guidance into operational action.

The CAT's incident management activities include, but are not limited to, developing course of action recommendations, conducting national level planning, facilitating access to critical resources, prioritizing incidents and resources, serving as a

central point for information collection and evaluation, and coordinating the flow of information and resources for complex and/or multiple incidents.

#### ***OPS Mission Blueprint Analysis***

OPS conducted a Mission Blueprint Analysis in September 2006. In this Blueprint Analysis, we took a hard look at our policies, processes, procedures, organization and technologies in order to help define the way forward for OPS in order to meet and exceed the Department's capabilities required to fulfill HSPD-5, the Homeland Security Act, and highlighted in the White House Katrina lessons learned review.

The Blueprint analysis was conducted by an outside team that performed a top-down strategic review of the organization, its mission capabilities and perceived future requirements. In addition, the team also employed a bottom-up assessment of existing capabilities and supporting activities. Over 100 individuals within OPS, DHS, and throughout the government were interviewed during the course of the study. This effort provided analysis and recommendations for ensuring OPS more effectively meets its current and emerging integrated mission requirements within DHS and across the larger homeland security community.

#### ***OPS and NOC Coordination within DHS and with Other Federal Partners***

The NOC from its inception adopted an interagency approach to its business process. The NOC, through the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN) and COP training programs, the PFO and JFO support concepts, the deliberate and crisis action planning processes, and the interagency operation directorate and operation center coordination working group venues, has recognized that operations coordination is very much an interagency enterprise. DHS has engaged in interagency coordination at multiple levels and across the core domestic incident management functions as the composition of the NOC and IMPT demonstrate. Further, the OPS, NOC and COP outreach and training initiatives have been interagency focused every step of the way. These have proven invaluable in building relationships, developing skill sets, identifying and integrating interagency requirements, and gaining interagency understanding of the NOC's capabilities and the role the NOC plays in order to help prevent, deter, protect, respond and recover from terrorists threats/attacks or threats from other man-made or natural disasters.

Also, in order to enhance integration and coordination, we established the Daily NOC Elements Conference Call. This conference call provides the NOC Element Directors, Operation Centers (Senior Duty Officers), and staff members a daily forum to highlight operational matters, address process issues, and conduct coordination as appropriate.

Another OPS led effort to enhance DHS and federal operations is DHS's Operations Coordination Group (OCG). This forum provides inter and intra departmental information sharing at the "strategic operations officer" level and includes representatives from DOD's Joint Director of Military Support, NORTHCOM Joint Staff J-3, National Guard Bureau J-3, FEMA, ICE, CBP, USCG, TSA, USSS, and CIS (additional members can be added at the discretion of the Group). This homeland security body enhances information flow and ensures that issues regarding planning, training, exercises, and incident management are properly coordinated in a timely manner. This semi-formal process with established agency and department representation helps foster needed interactions and feedback from peers on operational matters.

Likewise and under the umbrella of the OCG, the NOC led the effort to establish the DHS Operations Centers Working Group. The purpose of this group is to establish an Operations Centers venue to share information, address major issues, integrate efforts, enhance coordination, build relationships, and increase overall operational effectiveness. While this group is initially comprised of DHS OPS Centers, the intent is to expand the group into an interagency forum.

The partnership between the NOC and FBI is growing at a steady pace. For example, the NOC provides Patriot Reports to the FBI which have been useful in developing case leads. These reports often contain unique information provided to the NOC by private citizens. In addition, the FBI has addressed technology issues that inhibited access to their Secret level pre-case data system, Guardian, allowing full use to the NOC. The Program Manager for the developing unclassified version of the system, known as eGuardian, has worked closely to facilitate NOC access and use of that system when it comes on line, including the designation of the NOC as one of the pilot sites.

DOD's NORTHCOM, or Northern Command, has developed as a clear mission partner with DHS and the NOC is the common point of entry between the two organizations. NORTHCOM leadership has visited the NOC, and vice versa, and information sharing is routine—each entity displays the other's common operating picture. DOD is becoming increasingly integrated into the NOC COP during an inci-

dent providing the best form of information sharing as early as possible. In addition, OPS has detailed a member of the Senior Executive Service to be the Department's representative at NORTHCOM and NORTHCOM has provided a senior representative to DHS.

#### **Notifications**

Notifications are a critical NOC function and as part of an ongoing review of its processes and procedures, OPS implemented the DHS Operational Phase System on March 1, 2007. The four operational phases under which the NOC now operates are: Steady-State; Phase 1—Awareness; Phase 2—Concern; and Phase 3—Urgent. The new system enables recipients to quickly understand the conditions of the situation for which they receive a notification message, understand the corresponding severity of the event/threat, and provide key information in standardized formats.

#### **Training and Exercises**

We have recently established a comprehensive NOC Training Program. The NOC Training Program consists of daily (one per shift) operations drills that enhance the NOC's capability to detect and evaluate events, conduct the proper notifications, develop deliverables, and execute national level reporting responsibilities. The NOC plans to expand its training program to involve DHS and interagency operations centers.

The NOC has come a long way since Katrina. However, just having new tools, programs and processes are not enough. It is vital to participate in exercises and table-top discussions to validate current efforts and to integrate lessons learned. The NOC participates in major exercises and uses these venues to accomplish training and exercise objectives and spearhead operational improvements. In particular, during the month of May 2007, OPS and other DHS components participated in the DOD exercise Ardent Sentry which was designed to test and validate DOD Homeland Defense operations and Defense Support to Civil Authorities (DSCA) operations. Ardent Sentry consisted of numerous scenarios for which OPS had established roles and responsibilities. Two scenarios provided significant OPS participation including a hurricane making landfall in Rhode Island and a 10 kiloton nuclear detonation in Indianapolis, Indiana.

In regards to the hurricane scenario, OPS was able to exercise national information flow and test the ability of the NOC and all its elements to prepare, coordinate and publish situation reports (SITREPS) and executive summaries (EXSUMS) before the 2007 hurricane season. The 10 kiloton explosion allowed for testing the DHS CAP, testing the CAT concept of operations, testing the IMPT's Improvised Nuclear Device Contingency Plan, and developing the classified COP requirements that include secret, law enforcement, and proprietary information. Finally, this was an excellent opportunity to exercise together with NORTHCOM and keep DHS and DOD on track to improve our national incident management capability.

#### **Information Flow—Hurricane Example**

To help provide some additional information on how our tools, policies and procedures are brought to bear in an incident, I will illustrate what happens when possible hurricane approaches. If a Tropical Wave, Depression, or Storm is projected or forecasted to impact the United States or a U. S. Territory, the first step the NOC will take is to transition to Phase 1—Awareness. Upon this transition, the NOC will transmit a DHS notification message, prepare and disseminate a NOC Incident Report, and establish a National Situation Summary on the COP. The NOC will maintain and continually update the COP and also disseminate NOC Update Reports at 0600 and 1800 daily.

When a Hurricane or severe Tropical Storm is projected or forecasted to impact the United States or a U.S. Territory, the NOC will transition to Phase 2—Concern. Upon this transition, the NOC will conduct the same actions for a Tropical Wave, Depression, or Storm. In addition, EXSUMs will be initiated and disseminated at 0600 and 1800 daily. SITREPs will commence when the Hurricane or severe Tropical Storm is 24 hours from landfall and will be disseminated at 0600 and 1800.

Although the NOC may transition to Phase 3—Urgent due to the projected severity at landfall of a Hurricane or severe Tropical Storm, no differences exist between Phase 2 or 3 reporting or information requirements. The primary differences that do exist between Phase 2 and 3 involve operational posturing. For example, the Crisis Action Team will most likely be activated during an event that would meet the Phase 3 threshold.

When a tropical event ends or no longer poses a significant threat to the United States or a U.S. Territory, the NOC will transition back to the Steady State Phase and will transmit a close-out DHS notification message and terminate reporting.

#### **Conclusion**

Mr. Chairman, please know that DHS is committed to ensuring that all possible steps are being taken to address the various threats and incidents that can endanger our citizens. DHS will continue to work together with all partners across the homeland security spectrum, including Congress, to ensure the best policies, practices, processes, and technologies are integrated into the daily DHS operations framework.

The efforts described earlier, like the COP and the NPES, are now part of the day-to-day operations of DHS, OPS, and the NOC. They allow for better national reporting, situational awareness, information sharing, operations coordination, unity of effort, and mission accomplishment for all-threat and all-hazard events. We will continually enhance our efforts and operational effectiveness by implementing lessons learned during real-world events and exercises.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today and I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Thank you. I want to thank you for your testimony.

I will remind each member that you will have 5 minutes to question Mr. DiFalco.

Now, I will recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Mr. DiFalco, we know that during Hurricane Katrina, HSOC received reports of massive flooding and levee breaches from numerous sources. We also know that the director of the HSOC and other senior DHS officials were not aware of either the reports or the flooding itself. What we don't know is what happened in the layers between where the reports come into the HSOC and where they are sent to the senior leadership.

Why didn't the reports reach the officials, if you know?

Mr. DiFALCO. When the reports came in during Katrina, it was basically 35 to 40 agencies forwarding their situation reports, sending them in. We were sorting through them there.

Since then, we have developed a common operating picture and information management program to make sure that key information that comes in gets put on the common operating picture so it is available for everybody to see at real-time, because it is on the Homeland Security Information Network. So everybody can see it real-time. We know it is in. We are able to check it and confirm it with other agencies that are providing reports.

In addition to that, we have outfitted the National Operations Center with information knowledge management officers—excuse me—incident management officers that monitor the common operating picture in these reports that come in.

Additionally, part of the common operating picture is a spot report forward, and the spot report is a report of something that is urgent that comes in that cannot wait until the next reporting cycle. It goes up on nat boards for everyone to see also.

So we have taken steps to make sure that information that comes in gets highlighted, while we are de-conflicting it. So it is being passed and everybody is seeing it at the same time while we are trying to either de-conflict the information or confirm it.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. “De-conflict” meaning there are different kinds of reports coming in to you and you are trying to figure out which one is correct? What do you mean by “de-conflict”?

Mr. DiFALCO. Yes. An example during Katrina was that the levees were breached. OK, well, some of the reports that came in said they were toppled. Some said that they weren't breached, but they had breaks in them that were letting water through, but there

wasn't a complete breach. In that case, we were trying to confirm it with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to see exactly what the situation was.

Sometimes the information comes in and it is opposite. It says there is no breach and there is a breach, as an example. So, OK, we don't know what is ground truth. The systems and the information integrity pieces we put in place for the common operating picture and for basically national reporting for a hurricane identifies subject matter experts who provide the information. So if we get information from a different source, we are able to go to them more quickly and de-conflict or get a confirmation on that particular part of the information.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. OK. Thanks.

I am glad to hear of improvements that have been made using this COP program in the National Operations Center, and I look forward to further improvements. But I am concerned about NOC's use of this common operating picture through HSIN, through the Homeland Security Information Network.

Recently, we had a hearing and we received a GAO report which described HSIN's ongoing problems, including not having a clear mission and not having all first responders and similar stakeholders on the network.

How are you able to reconcile the problems with HSIN with the importance of the sharing that you have through your common operations picture and your NOC center?

Mr. DiFALCO. HSIN is critical to that information sharing. It is a Web-based network. It is real-time. Everybody that is on it sees the information at the same time. So it is simultaneous distributed information.

HSIN was ruled out on threat conditions when it was first put out, and at the time it was needed to get a network out there that everybody could be on. The business practices and the processes or procedures were gapped. That was life at the time, and that is the way it is during some operations during threat conditions.

We are working outreach efforts. There is a program office set up to help stabilize and to work through those particular gaps on HSIN. There is also a HSIN Advisory Council set up and a requirements council was set up to make sure that we get everybody's input and make the corrections that you are referring to.

The one thing I would like to say on HSIN, though, it is the only network out there that has all the Federal, state, local, tribal, private sector players on it. We get a lot of questions as to, well, we are using different types of systems. We are using WebTA or there are different networks. Why aren't we including DOD networks? The reality of the situation is each agency has their own network or state and local have their own network that they are using. But HSIN is the only network that allows everyone on it.

If it is a law enforcement network, you have to be a law enforcement officer to be on it. DOD does not want the private sector on the network, and those types of things. So when you start peeling back the onion, HSIN is the only network that allows the full complement across the spectrum of homeland security partners to be on it. It is the common operating network that we are using for homeland security.



Mr. PERLMUTTER. Thank you.

My 5 minutes have expired, so now I would like to recognize the ranking member of the subcommittee, Mr. Rogers, from Alabama for his 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you.

I understand that the NOC has an intelligence analysis function now. Could you tell me how you coordinate this intelligence gathering information with others? Or do you?

Mr. DiFALCO. Yes, we do. The NOC has it. The IA, intelligence analysis component, is integrated into it. It was also integrated into the HSOC, the Homeland Security Operations Center. It stayed integrated into the NOC-Watch, which is located at the NAC there. They are integrated into the IC community. They receive all information that all the intelligence community agencies receive. We get it there. We are tied in there also with NCTC and all the other agencies.

So that comes in. The overall fusion mission for the NOC is to take intelligence information and fuse it with state and local incident management, all-source information, fuse it, do a quick look on it, determine if there is a terrorist nexus to it, and then keep that information available for IA to conduct longer-range analysis on it, like trend analysis, pattern analysis.

Mr. ROGERS. Do the locals have a chance to interface with you to gather information?

Mr. DiFALCO. To receive that information? Yes, that is one of our primary missions is information sharing. We do that. If it is information coming in from an intelligence agency or any agency, we always request appropriate tear-lines to make sure that we can share it with state and local.

For us to have the information at the NOC and not being able to pass it to the right people is worthless, so we want to make sure that we are able to do that, and we do that. That is our intent.

Mr. ROGERS. OK. I understand also that the NOC now includes FEMA's National Response Coordination Center. How does this organizational structure work?

Mr. DiFALCO. OK. The NOC operates as a matrix organization. There are five elements. We coordinate and work together because the NRCC, as an example, is still the component operations center for FEMA as a component, and conducts their coordination and their efforts within FEMA.

The fact that they are integrated into the NOC means that we have very close coordination with them. We do daily conference calls with them. They are on the NOC portal, which is our collaboration portal for internal processing. They are on the common operating picture. They feed it. They are part of the daily operations that we do.

That is one of the key things is the training that I mentioned earlier. We conduct training within the NOC. We are expanding to the NOC elements. The exercises include the NRCC, all the elements of the NOC. We work on a daily basis together. We want to basically train like we fight, so we make sure that we are using the same network, same procedures on a daily basis that we are going to use during an emergency.

Mr. ROGERS. Where is the NOC physically located?

Mr. DiFALCO. The elements of the NOC are in different locations. The NOC-Watch is at the NAC, the Nebraska Area Complex in DC. The NRCC is located at the FEMA headquarters. The NICC, the National Infrastructure Coordinating Center, is located at TSOC.

Mr. ROGERS. And TSOC is?

Mr. DiFALCO. I am sorry. TSOC is the TSA building out at Herndon, Virginia. The planning element, the IMPT, is also located at the Nebraska Area Complex.

Mr. ROGERS. OK. And you made reference a little while ago to the Homeland Security Operations Center. Tell me a little bit about how you interact with that entity in the event of—let's get away from terrorist acts—hurricanes coming.

Mr. DiFALCO. Do you mean the Homeland Security OC or the NCTC?

Mr. ROGERS. Homeland security.

Mr. DiFALCO. Basically, sir, the NOC absorbed the Homeland Security Operations Center. At one time, and during Katrina, what I mentioned earlier was that an operations directorate was stood up. Before Katrina, operations functions were spread out throughout DHS. So that was brought together under one directorate.

Mr. ROGERS. That is what I was getting at. You absorbed it is the bottom line.

Mr. DiFALCO. Yes, we did.

Mr. ROGERS. OK. I have no further questions.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Now, the chair will recognize the congresswoman from New York, Ms. Yvette Clarke.

Ms. CLARKE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for attending today's hearing.

I think that we have all acknowledged that the inability of the Homeland Security Operations Center to give accurate, real-time situational awareness to top decision makers is central to the "why" of the department and its failures in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

While it is tragic that DHS responded so poorly to that disaster, I am glad to see at least in this particular instance the department has been willing to admit its mistakes and take the initiative in improving its procedures.

I agree with my colleagues that the work being done by the National Operations Center is very promising. However, we will never know whether NOC can be successful until our nation is put in the very unfortunate circumstance of dealing with another event of the magnitude of Katrina. By then, it may be too late to make the improvements before lives will be put on the line and put at stake.

Mr. DiFalco, what sort of testing have you done to ensure the success of NOC operations? And how is this different from the testing and exercise performed by the HSOC?

Mr. DiFALCO. It is basically in three areas: the planning, training, and exercises. That is simulation, trying to work through and simulate real-world conditions for the efforts that you just mentioned. The planning element—

Ms. CLARKE. Let me just ask about the simulation. How is that done? Is it sort of table-top exercises?

Mr. DiFALCO. It includes table-top exercises and live exercises where we are actually processing information from field units, just like we would during an actual incident.

The planning element did not exist. One of the major gaps was that there was no planning done at the national level, no integration of the plans. Each of the agencies were doing their own plans, and basically it was in a cylinder fashion. They would do it for their agencies, but it wasn't coming together at the national level. That has been filled now with the IIMPT, the Interagency Incident Management Planning Team. They are conducting the planning at the national level, integrating plans and bringing that together.

They also established the crisis action process for DHS. They provide crisis action planning, which was not available during Katrina. Those have been exercised during actual exercises like Ardent Sentry and Vigilant Shield and the other major exercises that have been going on. We conduct training in addition to that. That is internal training within the NOC. Every day, every shift there is a drill that goes on to make sure that we can process the information and get the word out. And then we conduct outreach training not only in planning, but also in reporting, common operating picture, HSIN, with everyone from the Federal through state and local partners.

We participate in all major exercises, and some regional and other exercises depending on the situation. We always play like we fight in the exercises. We use the actual networks, actual people, and the actual processing and structures that we will be doing during an incident. We take the lessons learned and feed them back in and make adjustments to improve the process.

The other thing that we started is basically an operational posturing procedure. It is a notifications procedure. It helps with situational awareness and building up to an incident. When an incident happens, there is steady-state. There is phase one awareness, phase two concerned, phase three urgent. We do notifications based on those phases in 12 different thresholds for the incidents or emerging incidents.

So we are able to take the information, process it in NOC, post it on HSIN and COP, get the word out to those groups at the Federal down through state and local levels as to what is going on, and they are able to see the information in near real-time within like 25 minutes.

Ms. CLARKE. Mr. DiFalco, my time is running down. I just had a question around municipalities. I know that there is such a wide range across this nation. How are we getting feedback from the local level about their planning and their integration into the overall national plan to mobilize?

I think that was one of the things that sort of frustrated people when they saw the unfolding of the event known as Katrina, that the municipalities seemed to be so powerless or felt they were so powerless in being able to move their own citizenry under those conditions. Has there been anything done that provides the municipalities with a standard response, emergency preparedness training? Can you give us just a little indication of that?

Mr. DiFALCO. Yes. The IMPT-level planning is strategic level. Underneath that is operational level, even though it is nationwide,

but it is operational level, and includes FEMA. The particular things you are talking about, FEMA has done outreach to the major municipalities and states to take a look at their plans and offer help with the planning, and incorporate them into the operational level plans. That will feed up into the strategic level as appropriate or if needed.

Training teams for planning are available and have gone out. I think we have trained over 400 agency people in different regions. But that is really done at the component level and FEMA is the heavy lifter for that.

Ms. CLARKE. OK. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Mr. DiFalco, I think we will take another pass. All of us will ask you a few more questions if we have any more questions. I would like to start by just getting a chain of command here, going back to that basic. We have all sorts of organizations and task forces and initiatives and acronyms and everything else. Who do you report to?

Mr. DiFALCO. I report to the operations director. I report to the deputy director, Wayne Parent, who works for Admiral Rufe.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. So who is the top of the command for you, in responding to an incident or an event?

Mr. DiFALCO. Within operations, it is Admiral Rufe.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. OK. And then who reports to you? Is there a clear line of command to you?

Mr. DiFALCO. In the operations center?

Mr. PERLMUTTER. In the operations center or in responding to an event, because I think one of the things that just in looking at your statement and reviewing what happened with Katrina, there were different lines of command going on and they weren't really talking to each other.

It is not that I think this has got to be strictly military right up the command. There ultimately has to be a buck stopping someplace, and I want to make sure that all that information gets to somebody if that is really needed.

Mr. DiFALCO. That is needed. What we call it is information flow and coordination, and that is done through the center. The information comes from the other operations centers from not only DHS, but the interagency. As you know, command and control doesn't work interagency because it is really command coordination, just because it is the interagency environment.

We work every day with the interagencies and the other op centers to make sure we are getting the information flow into the NOC. That has come a long way since Katrina. Before Katrina and even during it, to include exercises, a lot of the committees and panels or things that we would go to when we were developing an exercise, as an example, DHS was a lot of times an afterthought. It wasn't built into it. It was like, oh, you know, we do our own stuff, and that unifying effort was not there, and we are really trying to push that.

Now, when we go to meetings and stuff like that, everybody understands better the DHS role, the role of HSIN and COP and those type of things, and are actually integrated in. So there is not a reporting chain of command like that for the op centers, but we

all work together on a daily basis to make sure that information comes in.

Yes, interagency friction is still there. OK, that is kind of inherent in just the nature of the operations in the interagency world, just like it is with state and local or anything else. That friction is there. I think we taken some good steps toward jointness, comparing it to the military jointness, having jointness in the interagency. That is where this needs to go so that everybody is on the same sheet of music and cooperating. I think some big steps have been made in that direction.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. My last question is, you were talking about you have had some major exercises. You have had some table-tops and different kinds of drills. Have you had any events that have triggered the whole NOC operation coming into effect? Maybe it was a hurricane that blew by last year or some other kind of an event like that.

Mr. DiFALCO. Yes. In 2006, the hurricane season, that happened on several occasions for what we thought were emerging hurricanes, where the information people were deployed; information was flowing in; EOCs were providing information; JFOs were beginning to get set up. But then they never materialized into a full-blown hurricane, so then we would pull back.

So we are leaning forward doing that, and that happened consistently and worked very well during last year's hurricane season. The exercises are an example. The Ardent Sentry, the one we just finished, had a full-blown hurricane in it, with the JFO, principal Federal officials, the whole shooting match. And that information flow came in and we processed it.

The nuclear incident piece of that involved the JFO and a PFO, and basically the terrorist spectrum part of it, the threat piece, with all the information coming into the NOC, to include us using the crisis action process to process that information, provide courses of action, and do incident management planning.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Last one—I already said last one—but the tuberculosis patient who crossed the border a couple of weeks ago, is that something where your center would be involved? Did you guys get called into that?

Mr. DiFALCO. Yes, we did. We were involved in that from the time we were notified on it. The coordination that we did there was bringing together HHS, which includes, of course, the Centers for Disease Control and the FDA, the Federal Drug Administration, and all their agencies, coordinating them with TSA, Transportation Security Administration, CBP for the borders piece, and trying to bring that all together into one picture.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Thank you.

Mr. Rogers, if you have any further questions?

Mr. ROGERS. I didn't until you asked yours. I want to follow up on what he initially pursued, and that is where the buck stops.

I understand that your office is coordinating information, but there has to be, in the words of the president, the "decider." Who is making decisions about what course of action to take that overrides this friction that you made reference to?

Mr. DiFALCO. OK. The system is set up so that decisions are made at the lowest level, including in the field. The best oper-

ational piece is to have the decisions made and de-conflicted and worked out at the lowest levels. As they bubble up, they either can't resolve them or don't have the resources to resolve them, or maybe aren't thinking of them because it is outside the scope, but at the higher levels you can see it coming—as those bubble up or become apparent, then they go through layers.

Basically, if it can be handled by the operations directorate, coordinating with the senior leadership group which is the secretary's components and the staff, then the decision is made there if it is at that level. If it needs to go up to the secretary, then he will have to make the decision. From there, it can go up to the domestic readiness group at the Homeland Security Council.

So it is an echelon chain that we can move the information up and down to make sure the right decision-makers are involved.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. I would like to thank you, sir, for your testimony, and the members for all their questions.

The members of the subcommittee may have additional questions for you, which we will present to you in writing. We would ask that you respond to them as quickly as you can.

Thank you very much for your time and your testimony.

Mr. DiFALCO. Thank you.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. I would now like to ask that the second panel join us.

I would like to welcome our second panel.

Our first witness is Eileen Larence. Ms. Larence is director for homeland security and justice at the GAO. Her specific issue areas are largely focused on the sharing of homeland security information and the protection of the nation's critical infrastructure. Ms. Larence has 29 years of experience managing a broad range of issues at the GAO.

I will go through the whole panel.

Our second witness is Colonel Terry Ebbert—good to see you again—the director of homeland security for the city of New Orleans. As such, he is assigned the operational and planning responsibility for the police department, the fire department, Office of Emergency Preparedness, and emergency medical services. Colonel Ebbert has over 40 years of experience in professional leadership positions. He is a twice-wounded combat veteran and the recipient of the Navy Cross, one of our nation's highest awards for valor.

Our third witness is Mr. Darrell Darnell, who became the director of the Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency for the District of Columbia on March 19 of this year. He has 30 years of military, Federal and private sector experience, including positions at the United States Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security. Mr. Darnell is also a 2006 senior fellow at George Washington University's Homeland Security Policy Institute.

Our final witness is Mr. Jim Walker, the director of the Alabama Department of Homeland Security, where he has served since January 20, 2003. Prior to that position, Mr. Walker was a lieutenant colonel in the United States Army, where he served for over 20 years. His assignments include details as the aide-de-camp for the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and operations brief to Gen-

eral Colin Powell, and as an aide to former President Ronald Reagan.

Without objection, the witnesses' full statements will be inserted in the record.

I now ask each witness to summarize his or her statement for 5 minutes, beginning with Ms. Larence.

**STATEMENT OF EILEEN LARENCE, DIRECTOR, HOMELAND SECURITY AND JUSTICE ISSUES, GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE**

Ms. LARENCE. Mr. Perlmutter and Ranking Member Rogers, I am pleased to be here today to discuss the results of our review of several homeland security operations centers, and the opportunities they have to better collaborate across their participating agencies.

Doing so is vital because the mission of the centers is critical, to ensure that DHS is aware of developing situations, manmade or natural, that threaten the nation, and has the information it needs to help manage incidents that may result.

Hurricane Katrina demonstrated we were not ready, and your oversight of progress in fixing the problems Katrina exposed is important and timely. As part of this oversight, Congress asked GAO to review the functions of operations centers within DHS. We reported the results of that review in October 2006 and recommended ways the department could promote more collaboration in the centers. We recently followed up on DHS's response to those recommendations.

We also obtained an overview of initiatives the department has undertaken in response to congressional and administration after-action reports and recommendations. While we have not fully evaluated these initiatives because they are so new, they do present several oversight questions.

Based on our work, I would like to make two key points this afternoon. First, the three multi-agency 24/7 operational watch centers we reviewed that are housed within DHS components such as Customs and Border Protection or the Transportation Security Administration, and to some extent the National Operations Center that Mr. DiFalco just discussed, could better collaborate across the components of the staff of these centers to achieve their common mission of providing situational awareness and incident management during a crisis.

To date, the department has implemented some, but not all, of our recommendations. For example, we recommended that the operations centers in our review could better implement six actions GAO identified from the private sector as best practices for agency collaboration.

We recommended that the operations directorate issue guidance to these different various centers about how to implement these best practices, and include, for example, making certain that all agencies understand the center's common goal and outcome, that they have clearly documented the joint strategies that they are going to use to get there, and that they clearly define and document each person's role in achieving that outcome.

For example, it is important that the role of each center's watch standard—and these are the persons that actually do the 24/7 sur-

veillance—that their roles be documented and understood by all so that they understand their jurisdictions and their responsibilities and they avoid confusion, especially during emergencies and crises.

We also pointed out that centers could better assess the number and capabilities of staff they need compared to what they have on-board, leverage the expertise and plan ways to fill any gaps. DHS agreed with the recommendations at the time, and have taken some action on them. To its credit, the National Operations Center is addressing some of these best practices, such as defining their watch standard roles and implementing protocols for reporting information during an incident.

However, the operations directorate does not plan to issue the guidance that we recommended. It maintains it doesn't have any authority or control over the other operations centers within DHS. These individual centers themselves are not implementing the recommendations on their own. We maintain that full implementation of our recommendations would not exceed the NOC's authority, would be consistent with their priorities, and quite frankly, relatively easy to implement, and would produce benefits.

For my second point, while the operations directorate and center deserve credit for the changes they are implementing in response to Katrina problems and recommendations, we must acknowledge that the changes are still new and evolving, and DHS must address several challenges and next steps, so continued oversight will be critical.

For example, as Mr. DiFalco enumerated, the directorate and center report that they are instituting a lot of new teams and processes and protocols to manage incidents under any significant scenario, including terrorist threats, but they still need 2 years to develop the plans for all 15 of these scenarios.

They are implementing the common operating picture, and they are also establishing information requirements for each of these planning scenarios that I just discussed. They are establishing clear reporting channels for this information. They have identified who is in charge of validating the information that is first reported up. And they have established templates and deadlines for providing this information to senior leaders.

While we have not evaluated the implementation and effectiveness of these initiatives in detail, our review demonstrates that DHS has accomplished a lot. It still has a lot of work to do, and raises several oversight questions.

For example, the department focused its initial efforts on making changes in time for the 2006 hurricane season, but now must focus on other scenarios. Will it get the commitment it needs, especially from its own components and other Federal agencies? And will it be able to sustain this commitment over time, especially for resources? And was it ready for the recent TB scare? And would it be ready for a pandemic?

Is the new planning process redundant to FEMA's planning process? Has DHS resolved its organizational instability that stakeholders said delayed progress? Will it be able to resolve the problems that continue to plague its Homeland Security Information Network, and maintain enough users to make the system viable? Some DHS components, for example, are concerned about the lack



of security features and other issues with the system, and have asked DHS for waivers to use alternative networks instead.

Finally, we and DHS itself acknowledge that the agency must implement ways to measure the effectiveness of its initiatives as insurance against future disasters. We commend DHS for testing its initiatives through a series of live exercises, but we also maintain that implementing more systematic measures, including soliciting feedback from state and local stakeholders—my peers on the panel—is important, as Katrina demonstrated, since they are our first line of defense and critical to incident management.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my remarks. I would be happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

[The statement of Ms. Larence follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF EILEEN R. LARENCE

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate the opportunity to participate in today's hearing to discuss our work on assessing the relationship among various operations centers of components of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the agency's overall National Operations Center in carrying out the important mission of maintaining situational awareness.

When DHS was established as an organization, we recognized the challenges it would face in trying to integrate 22 legacy agencies into one new corporate entity. Therefore, in January 2003 we placed the integration and transformation of the department on GAO's high-risk list—composed of those federal agencies, programs, or activities that pose the highest risk to the nation—because we recognized the country could not afford to have DHS fail. The Department's transformation remained on our high-risk list for 2007 because DHS had still not fully addressed its integration, management, and programmatic challenges.<sup>1</sup> Placing it on this list obligates us to continue to monitor how well the integration and transformation is succeeding.

With similar concerns, as well as concerns with the response to events that have occurred since, such as hurricanes Katrina and Rita and continuing terrorist threats, the Congress has been overseeing DHS's transformation. As part of this oversight, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs requested that we identify the DHS operations centers (established to conduct monitoring and surveillance activities that can help detect, deter and prevent terrorist acts), to determine if any centers are redundant, and assess the functions and customers of these centers. Also, as part of this oversight, the Committee recognized that Hurricane Katrina demonstrated that the department's main operations center—the Homeland Security Operations Center—was not ready to effectively coordinate the sharing of information in a time of crisis and needed repair; therefore, it made a series of recommendations to address the problems identified and has been monitoring the agency's efforts to ensure DHS makes these changes.<sup>2</sup>

In response to the Senate Committee's request for GAO to review operations centers, we decided to assess those centers within DHS's component agencies that, first, conduct operations 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year (24/7/365), and that, second, have a broader security mission that DHS has determined requires higher levels of collaboration from many stakeholders, including DHS component agencies, and other federal, state, and local agencies. These centers are the Air and Marine Operations Center and the National Targeting Center, sponsored by U.S. Customs and Border Protection; the Transportation Security Operations Center sponsored by the Transportation Security Administration; and the National Operations Center Interagency Watch, the successor to the Homeland Security Operations Center, run within the Office of Operations Coordination at DHS. We assessed the extent to which they implemented key practices that our work has shown helps to enhance and sustain collaboration,<sup>3</sup> since such collaboration is important

<sup>1</sup> GAO, *High Risk Series: An Update*, GAO-03-119 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 2003); *High Risk Series: An Update*, GAO-07-310 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, *Hurricane Katrina: A Nation Still Unprepared*, United States Senate, (Washington, D.C.: May 2006).

<sup>3</sup> GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, GAO-06-15 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 2005).

to one of the main functions of each center, namely, sharing information needed to develop and maintain situational awareness of potential crises and terrorist activity nationwide. These key collaborative practices include defining and articulating a common outcome and joint strategies to guide multi-agency activities such as information sharing, and assessing staffing needs to leverage the resources other agencies contribute to the centers. We found that these practices can help agencies overcome barriers to collaboration, such as overprotection of jurisdiction and resources, as well as, incompatible procedures and processes that can result in agencies operating in a fragmented and uncoordinated way, wasting resources, and limiting effectiveness.

Based on our work on operations centers, we issued a report in October 2006 with recommendations for the Operations Directorate develop and provide guidance to the centers to encourage that they implement these key collaborative practices as a means to enhance their ability to meet their missions.<sup>4</sup> Today, we would like to, first, briefly review the collaboration issues and recommendations we presented in our report, then, give an update of DHS's efforts to respond to these recommendations.

In addition, we are aware of the Congress's concerns about the performance of the Homeland Security Operations Center during Hurricane Katrina, and the recent efforts made in response to these and other concerns identified in hurricane after-action studies and reports. Because these efforts to some extent affect DHS's response to our recommendations, we briefly describe some of the steps DHS recently reported to us that it has taken to address problems Katrina exposed, although it is too early to assess these actions to determine how well they are being implemented since a number of them are relatively new.

#### Scope and Methodology

To determine the extent to which operations centers managed by different offices and components within DHS had implemented key practices that our work has shown can enhance collaboration among federal agencies, during our original work, we reviewed transition, management integration, and planning and policy documents from the department. We also reviewed strategic plans, as well as annual performance reports and planning documents from DHS and its component agencies. In addition, we reviewed and analyzed the results of studies undertaken by DHS to assess and improve coordination and collaboration at the multi-agency centers as well as reports from GAO, the Congressional Research Service, the DHS Office of Inspector General, and others that addressed the integration, coordination, and collaboration of departmentwide program functions. To determine the extent to which they reflect how DHS has encouraged the use of the key collaborative practices, we also met with the acting director and other responsible officials from the Office of Operations Coordination to discuss its role and responsibilities.

To obtain updated information on DHS's efforts to implement our recommendations, we visited the National Operations Center, the National Infrastructure Coordination Center, the National Response Coordination Center, and Transportation Security Operations Center and met with center managers. In addition, we spoke to officials at the National Targeting Center. We also received a series of briefings on organizational and operational changes implemented since Hurricane Katrina and reviewed documentation provided to explain these changes. We relied on these visits and briefings for updated information on DHS's response to our and post-Katrina after action report recommendations; we did not verify the accuracy of DHS's officials' statements or the effectiveness of the implemented actions. We conducted our original and additional audit work in accordance with generally accepted government accounting standards between October 2005 through September 2006, and March 2007 through June 2007, respectively.

#### Summary

In our October 2006 report, we reported that the centers had the opportunity to better implement most of the key practices we identified that enhance collaboration. While we did not identify any major problems or barriers to executing their missions, enhanced collaboration could further ensure robust situational awareness and support to incident response. For example, we found that while DHS had implemented one key collaborative practice—leveraging its resources—by having staff from multiple agencies work together at the four operations centers, it could better implement the following collaborative practices:

- Defining and articulating a common outcome or joint strategies. This helps to provide, for example, a compelling rationale for agencies to collaborate.

<sup>4</sup> GAO, *Homeland Security: Opportunities Exist to Enhance Collaboration at 24/7 Operations Centers Staffed by Multiple DHS Agencies*, GAO-07-89 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 2006).

- Assessing each center's needs in order to leverage resources, especially human resources or staffing needs. This helps to ensure efficiencies and that the functions of a center are not compromised by the workforce limitations of a single agency.
- Defining roles and responsibilities, especially of the watchstanders<sup>5</sup> in each center, those staff who come from other agencies and have the important job of conducting surveillance activities. This helps to ensure that people at the same center in the same role perform their responsibilities consistently. Because of the potentially critical, time-sensitive need for decisive action at 24/7/365 operations centers, it is important that the roles and responsibilities of watchstanders are described and understood by both the watch staff as well as the officials responsible for managing the operations centers.
- Establishing compatible standards, policies, and procedures, such as those for DHS's Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN)<sup>6</sup>—the primary network DHS uses to share incident management and homeland security information across DHS, and with other federal, state, and local partners. This would provide a means to operate across agency boundaries and help ensure effective communications among the centers.
- Developing mechanisms to monitor and evaluate results of joint operations, such as conducting joint exercises and assessing the after-action reports. This helps management, key decision makers, and both stakeholders and customers obtain feedback to improve governing policy and operational effectiveness.
- Reinforcing agency accountability for collaborative efforts by recognizing joint efforts and outcomes achieved in published strategic and annual performance plans and reports. Joint accountability and recognition can provide an incentive to collaborate.

We found that the Operations Directorate, established in November 2005 to improve operational efficiency and coordination, provides DHS with an opportunity to more fully implement these key practices. Therefore, we recommended that the Secretary of DHS charge the Director of the Operations Directorate with developing and providing the guidance necessary to help ensure the four centers take the following six actions to implement best practices for collaboration and help better position the centers to achieve their common missions:

- Define common outcomes and joint strategies for achieving their overall mission;
- Conduct staffing needs assessments to better leverage resources within centers;
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities for watchstanders so that they understand each person's expected duties and contributions, especially during an emergency;
- Apply standards, policies, and procedures to promote the more extensive use of DHS's information network to improve communications;
- Prepare mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the results of joint and collaborative efforts to ensure effectiveness; and
- Address the results achieved by collaborative efforts in strategic and annual performance plans and reports to increase accountability.

At the time of our report, DHS agreed with these recommendations, but according to DHS officials, has yet to implement them. In recent meetings, DHS said that they believe some changes at the National Operations Center are responsive to several of these recommendations. For example, the center is taking steps to better define the role of watchstanders, and DHS has designed a strategy and set of initiatives to improve the usefulness of the information network. However, according to Operations Directorate officials, they have not been directed by DHS to issue the overall guidance we recommended. They also do not plan to issue such guidance at this time because they stated they do not have any administrative, budgetary, or operational authority or control over the other three component centers. While we un-

<sup>5</sup>For the purpose of our report, we used the term "watchstander" to refer to an individual required to work full-time on a rotating 24-hour schedule, 7 days per week, to maintain situational awareness, conduct information assessment and threat monitoring to deter, detect, and prevent terrorist incidents. A watchstander may also act as a liaison between his agency and other agency representatives at the center, and may manage response to critical threats and incidents.

<sup>6</sup>The HSIN is an unclassified, Web-based system that provides a secure, collaborative environment for real-time information sharing that includes reporting, graphics, and chat capabilities, as well as a document library that contains reports from multiple federal, state, local, and private-sector sources. HSIN supplies suspicious incident and pre-incident information, mapping and imagery tools, 24x7 situational awareness, and analysis of terrorist threats, tactics, and weapons.

derstand that these centers have missions unique to their sponsoring agencies and are not subject to the Operations Directorate, providing these centers guidance that is not mandatory but strongly endorsed on ways to better collaborate internally would enhance their effectiveness within their own centers as well as in providing the national center the information it needs, especially during a time of crisis.

DHS officials said another reason they had yet to implement our recommendations is in part because, instead of focusing on these intra-department collaboration issues, DHS has been giving priority to fixing critical inter-agency and inter-governmental issues that hindered its ability to respond to major, national incidents and disasters, particularly Hurricane Katrina. DHS officials said there were a number of post-Katrina initiatives underway which could build relationships among the centers so that they are more disposed to implement the recommended key collaborative practices in the future. For example, DHS points to its efforts to:

- Establish standard roles and procedures among all stakeholders, both within and outside DHS, for reporting information during a major incident. Now, according to DHS, information must be verified and clarified at the field and headquarters level before it is placed on its information network.
- Create the Common Operating Picture—a real-time, web-based tool designed to provide a common view of critical information during a crisis—within DHS's Homeland Security Information Network.
- Create working groups of partners within and outside of DHS to enhance information flow on planning, training, and incident management, to resolve interdepartmental conflicts, and to facilitate decision-making at higher levels.

While it is too early to assess to what extent DHS has successfully implemented and institutionalized these initiatives since some are only recently established, they appear to be designed to address several key recommendations from congressional and administration Post-Katrina assessments.<sup>7</sup> DHS acknowledges it still has a substantial way to go to fully implement these initiatives and measure their results, but it has recently tested some of these initiatives during interagency training exercises and has plans to do more of these tests in the future. Continuing to focus on efforts to measure how well these initiatives are working, and, as importantly, to what extent key stakeholders, such as state and local governments and the private sector, anticipate that these initiatives will meet their needs is critical, given that Hurricane Katrina demonstrated these stakeholders are the first responders and key to effective disaster response and recovery. Finally, it is clear that Congressional oversight has been and will continue to be a key driver in accelerating DHS's efforts to be better prepared to respond to and manage national incidents.

#### **DHS's Four Multi-Agency Operations Centers Have Unique Missions and Responsibilities, but Also Have Opportunities to Enhance Collaboration**

In our October 2006 report on DHS multi-agency operations centers, we found that they were not unnecessarily redundant in that they have distinct missions but also contribute to the larger effort, carried out by the National Operations Center, to provide national situational awareness and incident management across DHS. In terms of key collaborative practices, DHS had implemented one practice—leveraging its resources—by having staff from multiple agencies work together at the four operations centers, but could take advantage of other relevant practices we have found to be important to enhancing and sustaining collaboration among federal agencies. We also reported that the establishment of the Operations Directorate provided DHS with an opportunity to more consistently implement these practices. As of June 2007, DHS had taken some actions but had not yet implemented our recommendations for several reasons, including the stated concern that the Operations Directorate does not have authority over component centers. Nevertheless, we continue to see merit in the wider use of the key collaborative practices we identified and a role for the Directorate to encourage their use across centers.

#### **The Centers Do Not Define and Articulate Common Outcomes and Joint Strategies, a Key Practice Intended to Enhance and Sustain Collaboration**

At the time of our review, the three DHS components responsible for the four multi-agency centers had not developed or documented common goals or joint strategies that incorporated all the agencies within the centers and that our work has shown could, in turn, enhance collaboration among these agencies. Officials at the multi-agency operations centers we visited said they did consider formally documenting working agreements but concluded it was not essential since all of the agencies involved were part of DHS. While this may be true, documenting common outcomes can provide a compelling rationale for agencies to collaborate and docu-

<sup>7</sup> Executive Office of the President, *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned*. February 2006.

menting joint strategies ensures everyone is working in concert toward the end results that collectively need to be achieved. Our work shows that agencies strengthen their commitment to collaborate when they articulate agreements in formal documents such as memorandums of understanding, interagency guidance, or interagency planning documents.

Last year, officials from the National Operations Center said that the lack of formal agreements is a reflection of the speed with which the center was established and the inherent flexibility offered to DHS agencies in order to get them to staff the operation center positions. While recognizing the benefits of such flexibility, it is important to balance the trade-off of ensuring that all participants understand the common goals and objectives to be achieved. In addition, within DHS, external and internal memorandums of agreement and other interagency joint operating plans are often used to document common organizational goals and how agencies will work together. For example, the Office of Investigations at Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection's border patrol have a memorandum of understanding that governs the interaction between the two components as they carry out their missions to investigate and reduce vulnerabilities in the customs and immigration systems and to protect our borders, respectively, and formalizes roles and responsibilities in order to enhance information sharing. In addition, the DHS Office of Inspector General has reported that memorandums of understanding are valuable tools for establishing protocols for managing a national-level program between two organizations.<sup>8</sup> For these reasons, we recommended that the Operations Directorate develop and provide guidance to the three agencies that sponsor the operations centers to help ensure they define common goals and joint strategies that incorporate all the agencies working at the centers.

In our recent follow-up to our recommendations, DHS officials said that they had not issued such guidance, but pointed to several other post-Katrina actions DHS was taking that it believes are examples of common strategies and plans that are put into action daily and that enhance collaboration, and thus, situational awareness. For example, DHS said it has developed national reporting requirements and a coordinated national reporting chain for submitting homeland security information during a crisis, in part in response to Hurricane Katrina lessons learned. The national reporting requirements and reporting chain is to define procedures that component centers, among others, are to follow for inputting and confirming information used during a crisis.

In addition, our past work has demonstrated that agencies should involve non-federal partners, key clients, and stakeholders in defining and articulating outcomes and decision-making. Along those lines, DHS has created or plans to create several working groups with state, local, and private sector members to enhance information flow for incident management, and facilitate decision-making at higher levels. For example, the Director of the Office of Operations said DHS plans to establish a HSN Advisory Council to provide a forum for providing feedback on ways to improve information sharing among communities of interest.

#### **The Centers Are at Varying Stages of Assessing Staffing Needs; Doing So Could Help to Ensure Centers Have Enough Staff to Leverage Resources to Increase Efficiency**

The extent to which officials responsible for managing the four multi-agency operations centers had conducted needs assessments to determine the staffing requirements of each center as a means to leverage resources varied at the time of our review. For example, CBP officials conducted an evaluation in June 2005 that addressed the Air and Marine Operations Center's capabilities and continuing staffing needs related to its personnel, but it did not clearly address the need for, or responsibilities of, U.S. Coast Guard staff assigned to the center. Transportation Security Operations Center and National Operations Center officials said they had not documented a needs analysis for staff from other agencies. They said they viewed cross-agency staffing as a historical edict based on a general assumption that such expertise was needed to fulfill the mission of their operations center, and believed that the supporting agency providing the staff best knew the staffing requirements to fulfill its role at the centers. Our work has shown that identifying and leveraging resources, including human resources, ensures efficiencies and that the functions of a multi-agency operations center are not compromised by the workforce limitations of a single agency.

<sup>8</sup>Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, Office of Inspections and Special Reviews, *An Assessment of the Proposal to Merge Customs and Border Protection with Immigration and Customs Enforcement*, OIG-06-04 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 2005).

Since our report, DHS said it is updating mission requirements for the Operations Directorate and will subsequently assess the National Operations Center's staffing needs, although DHS did not say when that assessment would be completed. On the other hand, Officials at the National Targeting Center and the Transportation Security Operations Center told us they have not assessed cross-component staffing needs because they considered such assessments to be the responsibility of the agency providing staff. Nevertheless, we maintain that such assessments continue to be useful to ensure efficiency and that operations centers have the correct mix of staff to perform their missions. Therefore, while we understand that the Operations Directorate has taken the position it does not have control over the component center resources, we maintain that providing guidance to component agencies to assist them in conducting such staffing needs assessments would allow the component sponsoring the center to leverage resources more efficiently to meet the operational needs of the center.

**Not All Centers Have Established a Definition of Watchstander Roles and Responsibilities for All Agencies at Each Center; Doing So Would Help Ensure Staff Understand Each Others' Duties during Emergencies**

Our work has shown that collaborating agencies should work together to define and agree on who will do what and how they will organize their joint and individual efforts, and that this facilitates decision-making. Agencies use handbooks, charters, standard operating procedures, and other methods to document these agreements. We found, however, that while three of the four multi-agency operations centers had developed descriptions for the watchstander position staffed by their own agency at the time of our review, only one center—the Air and Marine Operations Center—had developed a position description for staff assigned to the center from another DHS agency. For example, at this center, officials require that Coast Guard staff meet a standardized set of requirements for radar watchstanders. The other centers relied on the components that provide staff to define their watchstanders' roles and responsibilities. While we recognize components may be in the best position to define how their staff should contribute, we maintain that it is important that each watchstander's position within a center be clearly defined and communicated so that staff understand not only their individual role, but each other's responsibilities and span of control, as well as their expected joint contributions, most critically during major events. In addition, because of the potentially time-sensitive need for decisive action at 24/7/365 operations centers, it is important that the roles and responsibilities of watchstanders are described and understood by both the staff and the officials responsible for managing the operations centers to enhance and sustain collaboration. Further, a definition of the watchstander role and responsibilities is important for supporting agency officials who must make staffing decisions about assigning qualified and knowledgeable personnel to the centers.

According to DHS, since our report, it has taken steps to further define the role and responsibilities of the watchstanders in its National Operations Center and documented them in its Standard Operating Procedures, as well as to develop Memoranda of Agreements with the components that will codify the role of the watchstanders they provide to the National Operations Center. Such an action, like that of the Air and Marine Operations Center with regard to Coast Guard watchstanders, helps ensure that the staff received from partnering organizations possess the necessary skills to support the operations center to which they are assigned. Given that DHS has recognized the importance of this key practice within these two instances, we continue to maintain it is important for DHS to ensure the other centers likewise have clearly defined and communicated the roles and responsibilities of watchstanders.

**DHS Has Taken Some Steps to Provide Centers with Standards, Policies, and Procedures, Especially for Information Sharing, to Operate across Agency Boundaries, but Challenges Remain**

Since January 2005, we have designated information sharing for homeland security a high-risk area because the federal government still faces formidable challenges in analyzing and disseminating key information among federal and other partners in a timely, accurate, and useful manner.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Hurricane Katrina demonstrated that the inability to share information during a disaster can impair the speed of response and recovery efforts. Each operations center shares information so as to understand threats, maintain situational awareness, and facilitate the management of responses to incidents. One of the key technical tools DHS has decided to use to provide for this information-sharing is the HSIN, and organizations

<sup>9</sup> GAO. *High-Risk Series: An Update*, GAO-07-310 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 2007).

participating in multi-agency operations centers need to be connected to the network and have the training and guidance that enables its use, among other things. DHS implemented HSIN in 2004 and reports that 18,000 individuals across DHS, other federal agencies, as well as state and local government and private entities are authorized to use it. However, we, the DHS IG, and the department itself have identified continuing concerns with this system, which is used for sharing a variety of information, including law enforcement and emergency response information used to support situational awareness and incident response.

In April 2007, we reported<sup>10</sup> that DHS did not fully adhere to collaborative practices or Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance in coordinating its efforts to implement HSIN through state and local information-sharing initiatives. OMB guidance requires DHS to foster such coordination and collaboration as a means to improve government performance, including enhancing information sharing and avoiding duplication of effort. Key practices to help implement the guidance include establishing joint strategies and developing compatible policies and procedures to operate across agency boundaries. However, DHS did not fully adhere to these practices or guidance in coordinating its efforts on HSIN with key state and local stakeholders. As a result, the department faces the risk that, among other things, effective information sharing is not occurring and that its HSIN system may duplicate state and local capabilities. The department has efforts planned and underway to improve coordination and collaboration, but these efforts have just begun or are being planned with implementation milestones yet to be established. As a result, we made recommendations to the Secretary of Homeland Security to ensure that HSIN is effectively coordinated with state and local government information-sharing initiatives. The Inspector General's June 2006 report had similar findings that DHS did not provide adequate guidance, including clear information sharing processes, training, and reference materials, needed to effectively implement HSIN<sup>11</sup> so that stakeholders were sure of how to use the system.

The HSIN program manager pointed to a number of initiatives being implemented to address these challenges. These actions include the issuance of a strategic framework and implementation plan, creation of a Mission Coordinating Committee to define component information requirements for the network, and, as mentioned previously, the planned establishment of a HSIN advisory committee comprised of experts, users, and other stakeholders involved in homeland security operations around the country. This committee is intended to provide DHS with comments and feedback on how the HSIN program can better meet user needs, examine DHS's processes for deploying HSIN to the states, assess state resources, and determine how HSIN can coordinate with these resources. Nevertheless, the program manager also identified challenges in getting components to participate in the process of identifying user needs, and said that the department still faced challenges in gaining widespread acceptance and use of this tool. Furthermore, one component that sponsors a key portion of HSIN, the Preparedness Directorate, is considering whether to continue to support and maintain portals to provide connectivity to private sector owners and operators of critical infrastructure sites, or whether to pursue other alternatives, raising questions about the overall utility of HSIN. Finally, the DHS Office of Inspector General plans to conduct an evaluation of the HSIN beginning later this year as a follow-up to its 2006 report to determine the progress the Department has made in fixing the shortcomings identified.<sup>12</sup>

### **Three of Four Centers Had Not Developed Methods to Monitor and Evaluate the Results of Joint Efforts**

With the exception of the Air and Marine Operations Center, the multi-agency centers had not developed methods to monitor and evaluate the results of joint efforts at the time of our review, a key practice for ensuring collaboration. For example, the Office of Management and Budget's assessment of the National Operations Center for 2005 determined that center officials had not established effective annual or long-term performance goals, a first step in an effective performance management and measurement process. Nor were performance measures or other mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate the joint efforts of multiple DHS agencies at the

<sup>10</sup> GAO, *Information Technology: Numerous Federal Networks Used to Support Homeland Security Need to Be Better Coordinated with Key State and Local Information-Sharing Initiatives*, GAO-07-455 (Washington, D.C.: April 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, Office of Information Technology, *HSIN Could Support Information Sharing More Effectively*, DHS/OIG-06-38 (Washington, D.C.: June 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, Office of Information Technology, *Homeland Security Information Network Could Support Information Sharing More Effectively*, OIG-06-38, June 2006.

Transportation Security Operations Center and the National Targeting Center. Without annual goals and a means to measure performance, it is difficult for an organization to determine how well it is functioning and identify how it could be more effective. Likewise, our work has shown that developing performance measures and mechanisms can help management, key decision makers, and both stakeholders and customers obtain feedback to improve operational effectiveness and policy.

To date, DHS has not provided guidance to the multiagency centers to help implement mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the results of collaborative efforts. However, as we further discuss later in this statement, the Operations Directorate said the National Operations Center, and, as relevant, other centers, have participated in, and will be participating in, exercises to test some of the changes the centers have implemented. These exercises provide a means to monitor and evaluate collaboration during real or hypothetical events, and the after-action reviews or lessons learned reviews conducted such as Katrina after-action reports and recommendations, as well as its own exercises and lessons learned, such as the exercises to test and revise HSIN and the Common Operating Picture (COP). The center director also described several new inter-agency groups designed to improve operations that also offer a means to monitor and evaluate results as well.

#### **The Centers Are at Various Stages of Using Joint Agency Planning and Reporting to Reinforce Accountability for Collaborative Efforts**

In our prior work, we determined that neither DHS nor the component agencies responsible for managing multi-agency operations centers consistently discussed, or included a description of, the contribution of the centers' collaborative efforts in the components' strategic or annual performance plans and reports. Our work has shown that federal agencies can use these plans and reports as tools to drive collaboration with other agencies and partners, as well as to establish complementary, consistent, and reinforcing goals and strategies for achieving results. Published strategic and annual performance plans and reports make agencies answerable for collaboration, and help to ensure that Congress has the information necessary to monitor, oversee, and effectively make investment decisions.

In terms of using strategic and performance plans to reinforce collaboration, the most recent DHS strategic plan, issued in 2004, neither included a discussion of performance goals for, nor addressed the joint operations of, the multi-agency centers. On the other hand, the Air and Marine Operations Center's strategic plan for 2005 generally discussed the importance of strengthening collaboration with other component agencies and included a goal to strengthen component agency partnerships to maximize homeland security strategies.

In terms of using published reports to increase accountability for collaboration, CBP's 2005 annual report on the operations of the National Targeting Center did include a section dedicated to the contributions of personnel from other DHS components. But, reports from the other components that manage the centers did not address the roles and contributions of supporting agencies in accomplishing the centers' missions. Thus agencies are missing an opportunity to reinforce the value of partner agency contributions and investments. Likewise, reports from the DHS agencies that provide staff to these centers also did not address their participation in their own performance reports.

#### **DHS's Operations Directorate Has Given Priority to Fixing the Problems that Hurricane Katrina Exposed**

According to DHS officials, the Operations Directorate and the National Operations Center have been focused on responding to the congressional and administration reports and corresponding recommendations generated in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. These reports pointed to a number of failures and problems attributed to the predecessor to the National Operations Center—the Homeland Security Operations Center—including unclear roles and responsibilities; problems with the flow of information in and out of the center, especially to senior leadership; a lack of planning; problems confirming and validating information, and clarifying conflicting information; and untimely reporting. The reports concluded that as a result, senior leaders in the Department and the Administration were not aware of problems with the levees and flooding as early as they should have been. To address these problems, the after action reports made a series of recommendations, including the:

- Creation of a national operations center to provide national situational awareness, facilitate incident management, and a common operating picture;
- Establishment of a permanent planning element for incident management and a national planning and execution system; and
- Creation of a national reporting system as well as national information requirements and a reporting chain.



In response to these concerns, among others, DHS reported that it made a series of changes to its operations, organization, and procedures for sharing information in order to maintain situational awareness and provide for incident management. The changes included giving priority to improving coordination with external stakeholders, such as other federal agencies, state and local entities who are the first responders and ultimately manage recovery efforts, and its own components and their respective operations centers. The DHS National Operations Center staff with whom we spoke maintained that implementing these changes could in turn create an environment where the components and centers may be more disposed to implementing the key practices for improving collaboration that our work has identified.

To address problems with collecting, analyzing, and timely disseminating of critical information during an incident that Katrina exposed, DHS officials said the Operations Directorate and the National Operations Center established several initiatives within the last year or so. Among other things, these initiatives included a new notification system aimed at providing protocols for sharing information on a graduated scale (from steady state to awareness, concern, and finally urgency). The Operations Directorate and the National Operations Center also defined a reporting structure, ranging from more real-time, unvetted information available from and to a wide range of stakeholders to reports intended to be more complete, vetted and validated through designated lead agencies and higher-level summaries geared for more senior leadership. DHS has initially developed these protocols and processes for sharing information for hurricane response and recovery and is expanding them to other scenarios and concerns.

One other major DHS initiative to better share information for situational awareness and decision support that responds to key post-Katrina recommendations also depends on HSIN. DHS has created the Common Operating Picture within HSIN as a web-based tool designed to be available to all HSIN users, including key federal, state, and joint field office homeland security partners, to provide the information needed to make critical decisions during crises. Initially, DHS created COP templates to address hurricane disasters in time for the 2006 hurricane season. The tool includes, among other things, current summaries of specific situations, the location and operational status of critical infrastructure, media reports, and streaming video from the field that provides a real-time picture of developments, especially at an incident site, to enhance situational awareness. DHS also has created COP Training Teams that provide training and technical support to DHS components, and other partners. DHS said training was provided to 17 states on the Gulf and East coasts in 2006, the most hurricane-prone areas of the country. However, DHS is still resolving operational issues with COP. For example, DHS reported in January 2007 that a comprehensive backup capability for the COP was under development but that the Department was prepared for contingencies related to power, telecommunications and server outages. DHS also reported that it continues to develop information requirements for use in other scenarios, such as pandemics and incidents involving nuclear devices, among others, as well as to further refine the system.

DHS officials said they have created several new working groups and organizational entities within the Operations Directorate or National Operations Center aimed at improving capabilities. The new units include:

- Senior Leadership Group. It is comprised of key DHS officials across the major components and intended to provide a forum for the Secretary to obtain critical advice from those with the most direct incident management responsibilities, to communicate decisions, to facilitate the integration and coordination of intradepartmental operational missions, activities, and programs at the headquarters level; and to assist in resolving intradepartmental issues. The group convenes as necessary, such as during an actual incident or major exercise, although the Secretary or the Director of Operations Coordination may convene the group at any time.
- Incident Management Planning Team—consisting of 53 members drawn from 22 DHS components, 25 partner departments or agencies, and the American Red Cross—that has begun the coordination of existing plans and the use of resources for domestic disasters. According to DHS officials, the team is developing plans for the most likely, and then the most dangerous, of the National Planning Scenarios—the 15 all-hazards planning scenarios for use in national, federal, state, and local homeland security preparedness activities that are representative of the range of potential terrorist attacks and natural disasters and the related impacts that face our nation.
- Disaster Situational Awareness Teams. These teams are to be comprised of field staff from Immigrations and Customs Enforcement since they can be more

easily deployed and are to be at a site within 24 hours to provide situational awareness reporting and other assistance.

- **Crisis Action Teams.** These multi-agency teams, whose membership overlaps in part with the new planning teams, are to provide interagency incident management capabilities and to, among other things, recommend courses of action, help prioritize incidents and resources, and serve as a central point for information collection, evaluation, and coordination, especially for complex or multiple incidents.

Finally, DHS has completed a study of its operational capabilities and gaps to guide its future mission and initiatives. Called the Operations Mission Blueprint, DHS operations staff said the results are still under review; therefore, that they could not provide us with a copy. Part of this study includes a plan to consolidate DHS operations centers in headquarters and its components in a facility located at the St. Elizabeth's West Campus in Washington, D.C.<sup>13</sup> The plan cites a number of organizational benefits to collocating facilities, including enhancing collaboration by bringing together a large number of DHS executives and line employees currently dispersed across the region.

While DHS provided us with background briefings, some supporting documentation, and some after action reports on the initiatives we have outlined, we did not evaluate the extent to which they have been implemented and are effective at addressing the problems Katrina identified, in part because they are so new and in some cases still concepts. DHS officials themselves, however, identified some challenges and next steps in implementation. These include, for example, continuing to outreach to and better integrate DHS components as well as other stakeholders in planning and implementation, such as state, local, and private sector partners.

As to this latter challenge, DHS has tested several of its new initiatives, such as the COP, through daily use, as well as interagency exercises. For example, through an exercise conducted last year, the National Operations Center identified opportunities to improve implementation of the COP. DHS recently completed two other exercises and plans additional exercises this fall and over the next two years that can also provide helpful performance information. We agree that the use of exercises, and more importantly the after-action and lessons learned analyses and recommendations to fix identified problems, are good methods to help determine how well initiatives are working, especially when testing under live, real-time circumstances is not possible.

Complementing this with more systematic performance measures and ways to obtain feedback from key users and stakeholders on how well the initiatives meet their needs would also be helpful. For example, officials noted that there are systematic methods for evaluating what has been achieved. The objectives of the HSIN implementation include providing measurable performance metrics as well as obtaining stakeholder feedback through its new Advisory Committee, when constituted. Implementation of the system is to be based on both agency and industry best practices. Following through on implementation of these types of measures and feedback loops is particularly important for state and local stakeholders, as Katrina demonstrated, since they are the first responders and key to effective incident response planning and implementation.

### Concluding Observations

Our prior work demonstrated that the three component multi-agency operations centers we reviewed have a critical mission to meet for their own agencies, as well as a common mission to support the National Operations Center, the key hub for sharing information on nationwide situational awareness and for coordinating federal support during major disasters. Centers rely on staff from multiple agencies to achieve their missions, so it is important that the centers can collaborate effectively among the agencies within a center. Our work provides a blueprint of key practices the centers could use to achieve this collaboration, and also demonstrates that they have opportunities to implement these practices more extensively. The payoff can include assurance that all staff clearly understands roles and responsibilities, especially during a crisis, and that centers have a common goal for achieving their joint missions, the right staff from across agencies to do so, and ways to evaluate results achieved and implement needed corrective actions. In turn, this can better position DHS, and the nation, to prevent, mitigate and respond to a critical event, help the Congress to fulfill its oversight and homeland security responsibilities, and help the department better integrate into a cohesive unit. While we understand that the Directorate does not control component centers and is reluctant to issue guidance to

<sup>13</sup> Department of Homeland Security, *National Capital Region Housing Master Plan: Building a Unified Department*, Washington D.C., October 2006.

them on ways to implement these best practices as we recommended, we continue to think that the Directorate can reinforce these practices through such guidance and example, not only as it works with external stakeholders, but also with its internal component centers. We believe the Directorate could be more proactive to accelerate implementation so that centers achieve anticipated benefits sooner given current priorities and available resources.

We also understand that the department set its priorities to first focus on fixing the problems Katrina exposed, as the Congress and Administration tasked, and recognize that such focus has, and will continue to be, a key driver in effecting change to improve situational awareness and incident management capabilities at DHS. We also believe that the initiatives DHS is implementing in response appear to be the proper steps moving forward, given that they focus on better planning for disaster response and better information sharing, as well as include the necessary key players. However, while these initiatives are aimed at putting the right players, processes, protocols, and practices in place, both we and the department recognize that implementation is early, measures of effectiveness must still be put in place, and challenges must be overcome.

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, this completes my prepared statement. I would be happy to respond to any questions that you or any members of the subcommittee may have at this time.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Thank you. I have been a little lax with the time, but that is because there are only two of us here, so I figure let you finish. So thank you. But try to keep your remarks within the 5 minutes, but as you can see, there is latitude as well.

Thank you very much, Ms. Larence.

Now, Colonel Ebbert for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF COLONEL TERRY J. EBBERT, USMC, RET.,  
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY AND PUBLIC  
SAFETY, CITY OF NEW ORLEANS**

Colonel EBBERT. Mr. Chairman and committee members, it is a pleasure to appear today before this committee. I am currently serving as the director of Homeland Security for the city of New Orleans. My tenure predates Katrina and includes nearly 2 years of recovery since the storm.

Your discussion today on maintaining a common operating picture at every level of government during emergency response is clearly vital, as situational awareness is the foundation of success in responding to major disasters.

The failures of having accurate situational awareness had a negative impact on initial response to Katrina. Its shortfalls have been well documented, so there is little value in returning to the days of late August 2005. My thoughts are to the improvements made and the challenges still facing all of us who have the responsibility to respond to major emergencies.

The topic areas important to situational awareness are: one, communications; two, mission and plans; three, logistics; and four, command, control and coordination.

The foundation of multiple layered situational awareness is good communication. This encompasses personal face-to-face, voice and data communications. One of the difficult issues of poor communications during Katrina has been addressed in Southeast Louisiana with the operational testing of our new Region I interoperable radio system. We are one of the only major urban areas with a shared radio system. We are able to talk across six parishes with over 40 local, state and Federal agencies on one shared system. No agency owns the system and it is managed by a governing board

made up of one member from each of the parishes and one state representative.

I want to single out Secretary Chertoff for his grant and contract technical support. Without his support and FEMA loaned radios, this system would never have been deployed. We truly have one of the finest systems in the Nation and it has already improved our situational awareness on daily issues, major events, and emergency exercises. This new tool, along with additional Federal, state and FCC backup, has ensured that we will be able to communicate in a future crisis.

Formal local, state and Federal emergency plans form an important leg in our ability to maintain a common operating picture throughout emergencies. If everyone understands the mission and how they intend to carry it out, constant conversation is not required. All of our plans at every level have been improved over the last 3 years. Technical assistance through the Department of Homeland Security contractors has been a tremendous assistance to me and my staff because they brought with them the understanding of the requirements of all levels of government.

Areas which need continued improvement are: understanding at every level of government what capabilities-based planning is all about; and two, the need for increased emphasis on mission—which I qualify as risk management—versus compliance or risk avoidance, and the importance of those in planning for initial response.

The third leg of obtaining a common operating picture is the understanding that this is a logistics war. We will win or lose on our ability to save lives, stabilize infrastructure, and provide security based on our ability to manage people and material. We have no national logistics system which ties together local, state and Federal agencies.

It is a matter of concern that this nation has not developed such a system. If we created this capability, everyone at every level would have at their fingertips a complete status of all logistics. This information is the vital situational awareness upon which emergency managers must have to make decisions if we are to prevent failure during the next major emergency response. We have a logistics system in the military and we must develop a counterpart for universal use in civilian response.

Command and control up the chain of command is a somewhat hazy subject for those of us at the local level. We have expended major resources to ensure that we stay current with the national incident management system. This has assisted greatly in improving our command coordination at every level. It is a sound foundation that has already produced a much improved staff functioning.

We utilize incident command, unified command, and area command, but when we get to the senior level at the joint field office, it shifts to a coordination agency. In major disasters, the mission requirement is greater than the capacity to respond. I don't believe that situation can be coordinated. Somebody has to be in charge and somebody has to be able to direct.

In closing, I would like to state that the Department of Homeland Security has continued to support Southeast Louisiana and we are improving in every capacity. I do think we must work together to solve the critical issues I addressed earlier. We are a great na-

tion with the intellectual and material capacity to provide for the safety and security of our citizens.

Thank you very much for the honor of testifying today.

[The statement of Colonel Ebbert follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF COL TERRY J. EBBERT, USMC (RET)

Mr. Chairman and Committee members, it is a pleasure to appear today before the Committee on Homeland Security. I am COL Terry J. Ebbert, USMC (Ret) and currently serve as the director of Homeland Security for the City of New Orleans. I have the responsibility for the Police Department, Fire Department, Office of Emergency Preparedness and during emergencies Emergency Medical Services (EMS). My tenure predates Katrina and includes nearly two years of recovery since the storm. Your discussion today on maintaining common operating picture at every level of government during emergency response is clearly vital, as situational awareness is the foundation of success in responding to any major disaster.

The failures of having accurate situational awareness had a negative impact on initial response to Katrina. Its shortfalls have been well documented so there is little value in returning to the days of late August 2005. My thoughts are to the improvements made and the challenges still facing all of us who have the responsibility to respond to major emergencies.

The topic areas important to Situational Awareness are:

1. Communications
2. Mission/Plans
3. Logistics
4. Command, Control and Coordination

The foundation of multiple layered situational awareness is good communication. This encompasses personal face-to-face, voice and data. One of the difficult issues of poor communications during Katrina has been addressed in Southeast Louisiana with the operational testing of our new Region 1 Interoperability Radio System. We are one of the only major urban areas with a shared radio system. We are able to talk across six parishes with over 40 local, state and federal agencies on one shared system. No agency owns the system and it is managed by a governing board made up of one member from each of the parishes and one state representation.

I want to single out Secretary Chertoff for his grant and contract technical support. Without his support and FEMA loaned radios, this system would never have been developed. We truly have one of the finest systems in the nation and it has already improved our Situational Awareness on daily issues, major events and emergency exercises. This new tool along with additional federal, state and FCC backup has ensured we will be able to communicate in a future crisis.

Formal local, state and federal emergency plans form an important leg in our ability to maintain a common operating picture during emergencies. If everyone understands each other's mission, and how they intend to carry it out, constant conversation is not required. All of our plans at every level have improved over the last three years. Technical assistance through Department of Homeland Security contractors has been a tremendous assistance because these contractors understand the requirements of all levels of government. Areas, which need continued improvement, are:

- Understanding of "Capabilities Based Planning"
- Need for increased emphasis on Mission (Risk Management) vs. Compliance (Risk Avoidance) in planning for initial response

The third leg of obtaining a common operating picture is the understanding that emergency response is a "Logistics War". We will win or lose our ability to save lives, stabilize infrastructure, and provide security based upon our ability to manage people and material. We have no national Logistics system, which ties the local, state and federal agencies together. It is a matter of concern that this nation has not developed such a system. If we created such a capability, every one at every level would have at their fingertips, a complete status of all logistics. This information is the vital situational awareness upon which emergency managers must have to make decisions if we are to prevent failure, during the next major emergency response. We have a military logistics system and we must develop a counterpart for universal use in civilian response.

Command and Control up the chain of command remains a hazy subject for those of us at the local level. We have expended major resources to ensure that we stay current with the National Incident Management System (NIMS). This has assisted greatly in improving our command coordination at every level. It is a sound foundation that has already produced a much improved staff functioning relationship. I believe we still have a shortfall in cases of catastrophic incidents. We utilize incident

command, unified command, area command, but when we get to the senior level (Joint Field Office) staff, it shifts to a coordination agency. In major disasters, the mission requirement is greater than the capability. I don't believe that such a situation can be "coordinated", someone has to have the power to "direct". Someone has to be in charge.

In closing, I would like to state the Department of Homeland Security has continued to support Southeast Louisiana and we are improving in every capacity. I do think we must continue to work together to solve the critical issues addressed earlier. We are a great country with the intellectual and material capacity to provide for the safety and security of our citizens. Thank you very much for the honor and opportunity to address this committee.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Thank you, Colonel.

And now we will turn to Mr. Darnell for his testimony.

**STATEMENT OF DARRELL DARNELL, DIRECTOR, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA HOMELAND SECURITY AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY**

Mr. DARNELL. Good afternoon, Mr. Perlmutter, Ranking Member Rogers. I am pleased to have the opportunity to testify before you today about the District of Columbia's perspective on the extent to which the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has improved its ability to maintain situational awareness since Hurricane Katrina, as well as the district's efforts to establish and maintain situational awareness and create a common operating picture.

In the almost 6 years since the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, the district and the national capital region have worked together, along with our Federal partners, to ensure that our city and our region are among the more prepared in the nation. We have responded by implementing planning, training and exercise activities that bring together district, Federal, state and local government entities to create a coordinated prevention, protection, response and recovery structure.

The uniqueness of the national capital region demands coordination among a large city, two states, multiple local jurisdictions, and the three branches of the Federal Government. For the district, which functions as a city, a state and a county, this means developing coordination between the district and its neighboring states of Maryland and Virginia, between the district and the multiple jurisdictions of the NCR, as well as between the district and the multiple Federal agencies located within the city.

This routine systematic collaboration is essential to the NCR on a day-to-day basis and absolutely critical to successful response to a major event on the scale of Hurricane Katrina. As part of our commitment to collaboration and coordination, NCR leaders established a senior policy group to lead decision making and coordination between local and state governments, as well as the Federal Government.

This group works with our chief administrative officers who represent local government leadership to provide a coordinated and institutionalized process for defining and meeting needs across the region.

The District of Columbia employs a number of interconnected systems to achieve and maintain situational awareness and establish a common operating picture with its regional partners, including the Federal Government. As a starting point, information flows into our EOCs, our emergency operations centers, through 911 sys-

tems and a variety of other methods, including a system that has been adapted from a civil defense application to natural hazards and terrorism warnings and alerts.

The National Warning System, or NAWAS, is a 24-hour continuous private line telephone system that links Federal, state and local EOCs and was developed in the 1950's to warn of an imminent enemy attack or accidental missile launch in the U.S. NAWAS is now used routinely to convey information about natural and manmade hazards, as well as to coordinate responses to day-to-day events.

NAWAS is comprised of segments and the local portion is known as WAWAS or the Washington Area Warning System. DC's homeland security and emergency management agency serves as a network control for all users in the national capital region, and coordinates all requests for the addition of warnings to the system. As such, the district serves as both a hub and a conduit of information between and among states and jurisdictions across the nation, as well as the Federal Government.

My agency, HSEMA, and the surrounding states, jurisdictions and Federal partners, use WAWAS on a daily basis, demonstrating its worth while simultaneously preparing every day for an event as devastating as Hurricane Katrina.

Another piece of the puzzle, and one implemented after August 2005, is WebEOC. WebEOC is a tool designed to achieve a common operation picture among diverse agencies and jurisdictions. All of the NCR jurisdictions, as well as several dozen Federal agencies, including the DHS, DHS's FEMA, the United States Secret Service, and the Coast Guard, have joined the network and are able to quickly and easily share information in real-time.

WebEOC users have the option to post information relevant to the region to a common page that participant EOCs can all see. This system is the primary vehicle for sharing information and achieving situational awareness in the national capital region on a daily basis.

Finally, the district is in the process of establishing a fusion center for information sharing and analysis. The ultimate goal of the fusion center will be to provide a mechanism where law enforcement, public safety and private partners can come together with a common purpose and improve the ability to safeguard our homeland and prevent criminal activity. By routinely analyzing disparate pieces of information, the fusion center will be a major contributor to enhanced situational awareness and achieving a common operating picture.

The response to Hurricane Katrina exposed a number of areas for improvement at all levels of government, even for those of us who were tangentially involved. Since that time, we have worked closely with DHS to close gaps and improve existing prevention, protection, response and recovery protocols. In an effort to work closely with DHS to embrace the lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina, three successes stand out: full staffing of personnel in FEMA region III and in the Federal coordinating officers corps, as well as ongoing revisions to the national response plan.

To that end, we in the national capital region are pleased to see FEMA's region III headquarters fully staffed and have a full com-

plement of FCOs. We have been working closely with our DHS partners to refine plans and procedures and ensure that our staffs are trained appropriately and participate in regular exercises.

I have more to say, but my time is up. Thank you.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. If you would like an additional minute, please go ahead.

Mr. DARNELL. Just 1 minute. Thank you.

While we have noticed improvements since the National Operations Center was established to coordinate and integrate the national response and provide a common operating picture, we believe there is still room for progress.

One of the early challenges in homeland security in general, and with situational awareness in particular, was the lack of information flow between the Federal Government and state and local governments. The dearth of information most acutely affected the district as the seat of the Federal Government and the national capital region, home of the numerous Federal agencies.

While the reluctance to share information is gradually being overcome, we are now facing a different challenge: that of information redundancy. We often receive information from multiple sources within DHS, which can lead to information overload.

Since the initial and arguably most difficult aspect of the information sharing challenge has been addressed, we are looking forward to working with our Federal partners to establish guidelines and protocols to streamline the flow of information. We believe minimizing redundancy and ensuring the accuracy of the information are the essential goals that we should be trying to achieve.

While achieving situational awareness relies heavily upon established personal relationships, practice, policies and procedures, we are all dependent upon technology to enable efficient and effective information sharing.

To that end, it would be helpful for DHS to continue to work toward establishing guidelines and criteria for interoperable communications technology. While the authorized equipment list and the standardized equipment list are useful tools, an evaluation of continually evolving technology—sort of a Consumer Reports-like approach—would be invaluable.

Further, this availability of guidelines and resulting research and analysis would encourage consumers at the state and local levels to invest in technology that enables interoperability between and among jurisdictions, states and the Federal Government.

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today on this important issue. I am available for any questions that you may have. Thank you for the additional time.

[The statement of Mr. Darnell follows:]

#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF DARRELL L. DARNELL

Good morning, Chairman Carney and members of the subcommittee. I am Darrell L. Darnell, Director of the District of Columbia Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA). I'm pleased to have the opportunity to testify before you today about the District of Columbia's perspective on the extent to which the U. S. Department of Homeland Security has improved its ability to maintain situational awareness since Hurricane Katrina as well as the District's efforts to establish and maintain situational awareness and create a common operating picture.

HSEMA's mission is to administer a comprehensive, community-based emergency management program in partnership with residents, businesses and visitors to the



District of Columbia. The goal is to save lives, protect property and safeguard the environment.

I have 30 years of military, federal and private sector experience, including positions at the U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Community Oriented Policing Service (COPS), and at the Department's Office for State and Local Domestic Preparedness Support (OSLDPS). I also have served as Director of the U. S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Headquarters Operational Integration Staff's Preparedness Division. Additionally, I was a 2006 Senior Fellow at the George Washington University Homeland Security Policy Institute.

Since assuming leadership of HSEMA on March 19 of this year, I have been involved in a broad range of activities, including strengthening relationships with community leaders and members of the private sector as well as continuing to work with our regional and federal partners to ensure that the District and all of the stakeholders in the National Capital Region (NCR) maintain the level of cooperation and collaboration that has enabled us to successfully address the myriad public safety and preparedness issues we face in the NCR.

#### **Collaboration and Coordination in the National Capital Region**

The National Capital Region is composed of the District of Columbia; Montgomery and Prince Georges counties in Maryland; Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William counties in Virginia; and all cities in Maryland or Virginia within those counties.

In the almost six years since the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, the District and the NCR have worked together along with our federal partners to ensure that our city and our region are among the most prepared in the nation. We have recognized the unique challenges resulting from living in our target-rich region and we have responded by implementing planning, training and exercise activities that bring together District, federal, state and local government entities to create a coordinated prevention, protection, response and recovery structure.

In August 2002, the U.S. Office of Homeland Security, the Mayor of the District of Columbia and the governors of Maryland and Virginia convened a homeland security summit to bring together local, state, regional and national leaders in the NCR to announce eight commitments to action that had been developed and agreed upon by senior-level federal officials, the mayor and the two governors.

The eight commitments are:

- Citizen involvement in preparedness;
- Decision-making and coordination;
- Emergency protective measures;
- Infrastructure protection;
- Media relations and communication;
- Mutual aid;
- Terrorism prevention; and
- Training and exercises.

In the five years since the summit, the NCR and its federal partners have been successful in realizing many of the goals outlined in these commitments. Of particular relevance to today's discussion is commitment two: decision-making and coordination.

The uniqueness of the NCR demands coordination among a large city, two states, multiple local jurisdictions and the three branches of the federal government. For the District, which functions as a city, a state and a county, this means developing coordination between the District and its neighboring states of Maryland and Virginia, between the District and the multiple jurisdictions of the NCR as well as between the District and the multiple federal agencies located within the city. This routine, systematic collaboration is essential to the NCR on a day-to-day basis and absolutely critical to successful response to a major event on the scale of Hurricane Katrina.

As part of the NCR commitment to collaboration and coordination, the NCR leaders established a Senior Policy Group to lead decision-making and coordination between local and state governments, as well as the federal government. This group works with the region's Chief Administrative Officers, who represent local government leadership, to provide a coordinated and institutionalized process for defining and meeting needs across the region.

Specific to situational awareness, the Council of Governments' Emergency Managers Committee established a subcommittee known as the NCR Operations Center Coordination Group in August 2006. In addition to the NCR jurisdictions, current membership includes DHS and the Department of Defense's U.S. Army Military District of Washington/Commander, Joint Force Headquarters-National Capital Re-

gion. Through this standing body, the practitioners at the state, local and federal levels regularly seek ways to enhance information sharing and collaboration. Since the technological impediments to information sharing have largely been conquered, this body has turned its attention to establishing common agreements between Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) about what is expected in an incident and ensuring verification and dissemination processes.

This subcommittee and other bodies have worked continuously to achieve the ultimate goal of this systematic, day-to-day coordination: situational awareness that leads to a common operating picture among all key stakeholders. As such, achieving and maintaining situational awareness has been an area of focused, dedicated effort since 2002. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina provided an unnecessary reminder of the criticality of the efforts to routinely share information to establish a common operating picture. Similarly, we have worked with our federal partners to avoid situations where errant aircraft may be shot down within the District borders but District officials not notified and where federal facilities such as the Capitol are evacuated without notification of District officials. While isolated incidents have proved a challenge, on the whole, the District, the National Capital Region and DHS have made great progress toward the goal of achieving and maintaining situational awareness.

#### Achieving Situational Awareness

The District of Columbia employs a number of interconnected systems to achieve and maintain situational awareness and establish a common operating picture with its regional partners, including the federal government. As a starting point, information flows into EOCs through 911 systems and a variety of other methods, including a system that has been adapted from a civil defense application to natural hazard and terrorism warning and alerts. The National Warning System (NAWAS), a 24-hour continuous private line telephone system that links federal, state and local EOCs, was developed in the 1950s to warn of an imminent enemy attack or accidental missile launch on the U.S. NAWAS is now used routinely to convey information about natural and man-made hazards as well as to coordinate responses to day-to-day events.

NAWAS is comprised of segments, and the local portion is known as WAWAS, the Washington Area Warning System. DC's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency serves as the network control for all users in the NCR and coordinates all requests for the addition of warnings to the system. As such, the District serves as both a hub and conduit of information between and among states and jurisdictions across the nation as well as the federal government. HSEMA—and the surrounding states, jurisdictions and federal partners—use WAWAS on a daily basis, demonstrating its worth while simultaneously preparing every day for an event as devastating as Hurricane Katrina.

Another piece of the puzzle—and one implemented after August 2005—is a tool designed to achieve a common operating picture among diverse agencies and jurisdictions called WebEOC. All of the NCR jurisdictions, as well as several dozen federal partners—including DHS's FEMA, the U.S. Secret Service, and the Coast Guard—have joined the network and are able to quickly and easily share real-time information. WebEOC users have the option to post information relevant to the region to a common page that participant EOCs can see. This system is the primary vehicle for sharing information and achieving situational awareness in the National Capital Region on a daily basis.

While WebEOC is used throughout the region for day-to-day operations, it can provide a specific forum for collaboration during a major event. Specific agencies and jurisdictions are granted access to a customized site where event-specific information is exchanged among those with a need to know, enhancing capability while protecting sensitive information.

Expanding beyond the EOCs, information is shared widely through the Regional Incident Communication and Coordination System (RICCS), which is used to provide immediate text notification and update information during a major crisis or emergency to those not physically located in an EOC. RICCS provides alerts, notifications, and updates via email, cell phone, pager, and wireless device. RICCS ensures that situational awareness is not limited to those in command centers and, by including key players in the field, broadens the exchange of information.

An additional, crucial element of situational awareness is public messaging. Because of the unique relationship between the National Capital Region and the federal government, managing public information in a way that ensures adherence to the joint information system is essential. Regional Emergency Support Function 15 (RESF-15) includes public information officers from NCR jurisdictions as well as representatives from DHS and other regional stakeholders such as Washington Met-

ropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), the American Red Cross and the Board of Trade.

The DHS Office of Public Affairs has provided RESF-15 members with key contact information and initial emergency coordination procedures for use during incidents and emergencies of all types. Additionally, Public Information Officers (PIOs) have access to the State Incident Communications Conference Line (SICCL), an emergency line maintained by DHS to share public information with all states.

As part of the effort to promote a unified public message throughout the region, members of RESF-15 have created a virtual joint information system that allows them to share information and formulate messages collectively so that the goal of "one message, many voices" is achieved.

Finally, the District is in the process of establishing a fusion center for information sharing and analysis. The ultimate goal of the fusion center will be to provide a mechanism where law enforcement, public safety and private partners can come together with a common purpose and improve the ability to safeguard our homeland and prevent criminal activity. By routinely analyzing disparate pieces of information, the fusion center will be a major contributor to enhanced situational awareness and achieving a common operating picture. Integral to the success of the District's fusion center is close, regular collaboration with existing fusion centers in our partner jurisdictions in the National Capital Region as well as with DHS's National Operations Center.

#### **Working with DHS**

The response to Hurricane Katrina exposed a number of areas for improvement at all levels—federal, state and local—even for those of us who were only tangentially involved. Since that time, we have worked closely with DHS to close gaps and improve upon existing prevention, protection, response and recovery protocols. In the effort to work closely with DHS to embrace the lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina, three successes stand out: full staffing of personnel in FEMA Region III and in the Federal Coordinating Officers (FCO) corps as well as the ongoing revisions to the National Response Plan.

In *The Federal Response To Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned*, the White House recommends: "Below the headquarters level within DHS, we must build up the Department's regional structures. . . Homeland security regional offices should be the means to foster State, local and private sector integration." To that end, we in the National Capital Region have been pleased to see FEMA's Region III headquarters fully staffed and have a full complement of FCOs. We have been working closely with our DHS partners to refine plans and procedures and ensure that our staffs are trained appropriately and are participating in regular exercises.

Since August 2006, DC HSEMA has participated in four exercises with DHS that have included enhancing situational awareness and achieving a common operating picture as primary objectives. These exercises include:

- FEMA Region III Hurricane Exercise—May 2006
- TOPOFF 4 Command Post Exercise—June 2006
- Tactical Communication Interoperability Plan (TCIP) Exercise—September 2006
- NCR Regional Response 07—April 2007

These exercises all proved worthwhile and we look forward to continued national-level training and exercise opportunities.

#### **Areas for Improvement**

While we have noticed improvements since the National Operations Center (NOC) was established to coordinate and integrate the national response and provide a common operating picture, we believe there is still room for progress. One of the early challenges in homeland security in general, and with situational awareness in particular, was the lack of information flow between the federal government and the state and local governments. The dearth of information most acutely affected the District, as the seat of the federal government, and the National Capital Region, as the home of numerous federal agencies. While the reluctance to share information is gradually being overcome, we are now facing a different challenge: that of information redundancy. We often receive information from multiple sources within DHS, which can lead to information overload.

Since the initial—and arguably most difficult—aspect of the information-sharing challenge has been addressed, we are looking forward to working with our federal partners to establish guidelines and protocols to streamline the flow of information. Minimizing redundancy and ensuring the accuracy of the information are essential, while vetting it and reducing duplication before dissemination are ongoing goals.

While achieving situational awareness relies heavily upon established personal relationships, practiced policies and procedures, we are all dependent upon technology

to enable efficient and effective information sharing. To that end, it would be helpful for DHS to continue to work toward establishing guidelines and criteria for interoperable communications technology. While the Authorized Equipment List (AEL) and the Standardized Equipment List (SEL) are useful tools, an evaluation of continually evolving technology—a Consumer Reports-like approach—would be invaluable. Further, this availability of guidelines and resultant research and analysis would encourage consumers at the state and local levels to invest in technology that enables interoperability between and among jurisdictions, states and the federal government.

I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today on this important issue and am available for any questions you may have.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Thank you, Mr. Darnell.

I would now like to turn to Mr. Walker for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF JAMES WALKER, JR., DIRECTOR, ALABAMA  
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

Mr. WALKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And a special thank you to Mr. Rogers, not just for the important work that you do on this committee, but for the leadership that you provide to the citizens of Alabama here in the Congress. It is a pleasure to be before you today, sir.

Situational awareness is really relevant to where you stand. I spent 20 years in the United States Army and was convinced that a soldier standing in a post somewhere, that the rest of the Nation is there to support him, and that he is the frontlines for this country. Well, after our country was attacked on September 11, 2001, that dynamic changed just a bit. The defender of this country is not just a soldier, sailor, airman or Marine. It is a police officer, a sheriff's deputy, or a firefighter or emergency medical technician, a 911 operator, and on and on and on.

So as the director of homeland security for the state of Alabama, we are charged with the mission of what is it that we are doing to get the right equipment and the right information into the hands of the people that are at the tip of the spear.

I also have the privilege of administering the state homeland security program family of grants. The Congress has been kind enough to send millions of dollars to the state of Alabama. We think we have used it wisely.

One of the areas where we have seen a sea-change of growth in our state is in the area of improving situational awareness, and our ability to communicate with one another.

If you read the 9/11 Commission report, two of the hijackers were stopped in a little town in Alabama, but the deputy pulled them over had no idea of knowing who they were or where they were headed. Situational awareness improvements occur when you have a system in Alabama now, where even in rural communities, a police officer can make a stop and use his personal digital assistant, his BlackBerry, his cell phone or any other mode available to him, and know who is facing and who that person is, their picture, where they live, their cars that are registered, who lives with them, et cetera. That is a sea-change of information as it relates to situational awareness for the cop on the street.

For his supervisor, it is the ability for that police officer to be able to reach him via a reliable radio system so that his supervisor then in turn knows what he is faced with. So this is the way we back it up from the tip of the spear to the state level.

With our emergency management community, we have a Lotus-based software called the emergency management information tracking system that allows us to keep track of requests from our locals so that we know where personnel and resources are in the pipeline that can come to support the state.

So for us, it is the ability of trying to take care of ourselves, and then in being able to turn around to a Federal partner and say, we can't handle this in Alabama and we need your assistance and support.

One of our newest flagship programs that I would like to tell my friend from Louisiana, his state just purchased last week, was a program developed in Alabama that is called Virtual Alabama. It uses a Google Earth platform.

What we are able to do, sir, is take visualization pictures, GIS data that all counties fly around the country for tax parcel records, et cetera, but we are able to take these pictures and load them on a license that we have been given by Google, where we can firewall it and secure this information. We have a picture of what the state of Alabama looks like on the ground.

Once you see that picture, you can start layering and tailoring information that is relevant to you in the county. If you are a sheriff, it is the location of every registered sex offender and whether or not where he is living violates his parole by being close to a school or a bus stop or a daycare center. If it is a firefighter, it is being able to draw in floor plans of schools and buildings, so that when you show up on the scene, you know what you are faced with.

A most recent example was the tornadoes that affected us in Enterprise, Alabama. After Hurricane Katrina hit, my governor was incredibly frustrated because he wanted to see the pre-imagery, the imagery of Mobile County before the storm hit and mirror it up against the pictures that were taken after the storm passed through. We couldn't do that. Had we had that information available, using a platform like Virtual Alabama, we could have provided assistance to the folks on the ground by knowing where their house was, what the tax assessed value, and we could start helping these folks get back on with their lives earlier.

Since we have instituted Virtual Alabama, after the tornado in Enterprise, we had the before pictures of Enterprise High School, and then within 10 hours, we had the Civil Air Patrol up with a camera taking pictures and we could overlay the before picture with the after picture, and all of the tax data and tax records we could put on top, and the FEMA teams that come through writing checks can start making an immediate difference in the lives of displaced people.

So it is an incredibly effective tool that really is only limited by the imagination of the users. So I can look at you and say, look, we are making positive impact in the lives of the first responders in our state today, using Virtual Alabama, improving our interoperable communications, giving better situational awareness to our criminal justice system, but there is still lots of work to do.

So for all of the resources that you provide Alabama to tackle these problems, I thank you very much. I would ask you, don't stop now. We have more work to do. There is much to be done, and I

appreciate the opportunity to share with you a handful of the things that we are doing in Alabama.

I look forward to any questions that you might have, Mr. Chairman.

[The statement of Mr. Walker follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAMES M. WALKER, JR.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

As Director of the Alabama Department of Homeland Security, one of my responsibilities is to administer the State Homeland Security Grant Program appropriated by Congress and managed through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Since its creation on June 18, 2003, the Alabama Department of Homeland Security has administered four fiscal years of federal homeland security grant dollars totaling \$115 million (\$34.5 million in FY03, \$36.8 million in FY04, \$28.1 million in FY05, and \$15.6 million in FY06).

I would like to express my gratitude to the Congress, President Bush, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for the homeland security grants we've received in Alabama. It is my belief the receipt and responsible distribution of these grant funds in Alabama has saved lives and effectively served our citizens. Thank you for making these grants available.

With homeland security grant dollars and the visionary leadership of Governor Bob Riley, Alabama has built 54 regional mutual aid teams to provide standardized prevention, response, and recovery capabilities. We've improved interoperable communications capabilities among public safety disciplines. We've exponentially improved information sharing and situational awareness within our criminal justice, law enforcement, emergency management, and public safety communities. We are able to provide specialized prevention and response equipment to any law enforcement agency in the state. We've conducted exercises and training events to test our capabilities, and we've built teams of stakeholders in each of our 67 counties so that everyone can contribute to making our citizens safer.

The heart of our state homeland security program is having the tactics, techniques, and procedures in place that will ensure first responders and decision makers have the right information and the right equipment available when they need it. Advances in situational awareness and asset management have experienced a sea change of improvements in Alabama during the past four years.

Within our response and recovery community, the Alabama Emergency Management Agency uses EMITS (Emergency Management Information Tracking System), a Lotus Notes-based software.

EMITS provides a platform local and state agencies use to monitor operational information, make requests for personnel and resources, and track the status of existing requests for support. Situational awareness reports are forwarded to our Regional Operations Center in Thomasville, Georgia, daily or as requested. If we anticipate an incident cannot be met with existing state resources, a FEMA liaison is dispatched to our State Emergency Operations Center to coordinate the federal response. We believe it is imperative that the federal government not deploy assets or resources without first coordinating with the state.

The ability for public safety officials to reliably communicate using radio networks is essential to gaining and maintaining a clear situational picture. Alabama has enhanced interoperable radio communications by upgrading existing systems and utilizing a common bridging platform to connect disparate radio systems across the state. Investing in one comprehensive statewide radio system with a common platform was not an affordable option for us. Instead, we leveraged technology by installing frequency bridges in each of Alabama's 67 counties. This allows local agencies using different frequency bands to communicate. During a large-scale event where local interoperability can become overwhelmed, we have positioned eight regional communications vehicles throughout Alabama. In addition to having bridging technology, these vehicles have satellite communication connectivity, Internet access, and streaming video cameras.

In Alabama we have developed an effective situational awareness framework in which to manage public/private sector programs and operational data. The program is called Virtual Alabama. It is an affordable visualization tool using Google Earth technology that employs the power of a secure Internet-based application to make a positive, immediate difference to first responders. The advantage to our first responder population is that Virtual Alabama is free for their use, and inexpensive to the state. Local and state officials can layer and tailor secure information about

their jurisdictions and feed it into a broader database that will give state and federal decision makers valuable and timely information.

With existing state GIS (Geographic Information System) and orthophotographic data, we are able to transform massive amounts of useful information into a common operational picture. Examples of real-time applications include emergency evacuation routing, vehicle and asset tracking, critical infrastructure mapping, plume modeling, real-time sensor feeds, real-time streaming video, risk visualization, and post-event imagery placed alongside pre-event imagery.

Virtual Alabama is less than a year old, yet we've already incorporated data from more than half of Alabama's 67 counties. To date, we have more than 1,085 subscribers using Virtual Alabama, and hope to have all 67 counties participating by the end of 2007.

Finally, Alabama has made remarkable strides toward improving information sharing and situational awareness within our criminal justice and public safety community. We've wisely invested our LETPP (Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program) homeland security grant funding to upgrade outdated 1980s-era flat file computer architecture. Alabama's hard-wired terminal architecture has now been replaced with a real-time, 21st century Internet-based system available to all 850 statewide law enforcement agencies, law enforcement officials, and other emergency responders throughout the state. This improved capability also includes a homeland security reporting system for providing information from the "cop on the beat" to our information fusion capability. We can take NCIC (National Crime Information Center) information and other criminal justice information and transmit it electronically to law enforcement officers with data terminals or any type of cell phone, Blackberry, or other personal digital assistant device. Additionally, this service is free of charge to local law enforcement and encourages their participation in sharing, gathering, and disseminating information.

In the weeks and months ahead, Alabama will continue to develop and identify new requirements and systems to better serve our citizens. However, we must be able to rely upon federal assistance via the State Homeland Security Grant Program to further our efforts. We've made great strides, but important work remains.

Thank you again for the privilege of appearing before you. I look forward to addressing any questions you may have.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Thank you, Mr. Walker.

I thank all the witnesses for their testimony.

I now remind each member, Mr. Rogers, that he will have 5 minutes to question the panel. I will begin with my 5 minutes of questions.

I would like to start with the three gentlemen who are in charge of the emergency management for their state and their city. I will start with you, Colonel. If Katrina were bearing down on New Orleans or the Gulf Coast today, what difference will we see within our ability to respond?

Colonel EBBERT. Obviously, we have several areas, one, the individual areas and the individual plans which we have worked on, which are local, meaning 14 parishes and two states. The state of Mississippi is very much involved.

So the detailed evacuation plans that have been put in place that did not exist down to the detail of moving 25,000 people without the capacity to leave the city is a huge effort on the part of the region, as well as the state and the Federal Government, with the funding of bus, aviation and rail assets to be able to move those people in a 24-to 30-hour block of time, is a monumental, a very, very complex plan that we have worked on and we scheduled. Last Friday, we just exercised it across the parishes, and so we feel comfortable in that concept.

The second thing is the improvement in communications and our capacity to talk and communicate, not only with our regional areas, but with the state and the state to the Federal Government has improved dramatically. We have the advantage of being hit once,

is you still have a relatively strong organization of Federal resources located both in Baton Rouge and in the city of New Orleans in the way of FEMA.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Let me ask these two gentlemen if they would agree with that.

You know, if we had another plane flying into the side of the Pentagon, how quickly can everybody communicate?

Mr. DARNELL. I think it is dramatically improved since 9/11, sir. In fact, in our emergency operations center, we have a direct line with the FAA towers at Reagan National Airport, Dulles, BWI, and also contact with some of the smaller airports in the region. So that information, say, for example, if a plane gets inside the 25-mile no-fly zone, we immediately have that information in real-time as that is coming through those towers.

So we no longer have to wait for the towers to give us a call. We are hearing that information so we can begin the process of whatever actions we feel we need to take.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Mr. Walker, with your tornadoes, you probably have the most recent experience as to how the communications works.

Mr. WALKER. Mr. Chairman, 3 years ago a lot of well-meaning police officers and fire chiefs around our state had invested in radio systems, but they were often disparate systems that couldn't communicate. A firefighter couldn't communicate with a police officer who couldn't communicate with a sheriff who couldn't communicate with the state.

We have leveraged technology and we put bridging equipment, which basically fuses together all of the different radio systems in a county that now allows them to speak to one another, without buying new radios. It was a cost-effective approach. We did it in all 67 of Alabama's counties.

In addition to that, when you have something happen like a tornado, you need some sort of a regional capability because as state and Federal assets start arriving on the scene, the locals, their system will become overwhelmed. So we have some regional communications vehicles. They are Alabama products, where we were able to quadruple our capability, have streamlining video to the scene, so that my governor can sit in his office, if that is where he is, and watch the scene unfold on one of his assets, and he doesn't have to rely on cable news.

But the biggest thing for the most recent one was that we have become such creatures of habit. Our first responders, they have their radios, the ways to communicate. They will tend to rely on that dad-gum cell phone. And in the town where this tornado hit, there were about 300 hits an hour on the cell phone tower, and when the tornado came through, it went to about 3,000 an hour. It overwhelmed the system, and there was kind of a brain-lock for about 10 to 15 minutes. Nobody knew what to do until they said, oh my goodness, I have this radio over here and it is working just fine.

So that is a product of education and training, but the systems that we had in place worked, and communication has improved. In Alabama, locally we have done well. We still have some challenges



with agencies that have statewide responsibility and our ability to reach outside the region.

When you look at a multi-state incident like Katrina, what we learned was when there is total architecture failure, having more satellite communications on the ground made all the difference. Because during Katrina, it was those folks that had satellite communications who could speak back to areas of assistance. If you didn't, you couldn't use a cell phone and you couldn't use a radio. So we have made some investments in improving our satellite communications.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Last question, for you, Ms. Larence. To what extent is information sharing within the NOC compromised by this HSIN system and its ongoing problems?

Ms. LARENCE. I guess our concern is that recently both the intelligence and analysis office and the critical infrastructure protection office asked for waivers from HSIN, at least for a couple of years. The critical infrastructure protection piece is important because that was the link for the private sector to report information about the status of critical assets around the country into the NOC.

So we are concerned about to what extent the users are hanging in there with the system. We are concerned that one of the major challenges the program manager said she continues to face is, quite frankly, getting support within the components of DHS itself to use the system and support it.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Thank you.

Now, I recognize the ranking member, Mr. Rogers, for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROGERS. I thank the chairman.

I wanted to follow up with Mr. Walker about the interoperability. You said you now in all 67 counties have the ability for the various first responders to communicate. How about across county lines?

Mr. WALKER. The regional commu-van that we have, once they arrive on the scene, will provide for that. We still have challenges going county to county and building the regions of the state. When we started the process, we thought we have got to build from the ground up. So we obviously put our emphasis on the counties.

So the counties I believe are in pretty good shape. We have two of our 67 counties that require a little bit more love than others, so we are struggling through it. But it is bringing counties together. We have the capability to do it, but not 24/7 day to day. We have to get to that point and we are not there yet, sir.

Mr. ROGERS. You talked about the Google, the before pictures and the after pictures. The before pictures, are those pictures that are in the database from tax records? Why would there be a picture of Enterprise High School that you could pull, unless somebody thought to go and do it before they thought a tornado was coming?

Mr. WALKER. One of the things that frustrated our governor in Alabama was the millions of dollars that we would spend flying the state. Different agencies with planes and contractors taking pictures of the state of Alabama, but then in a crisis when we needed the pictures, we couldn't get our hands on them.

So the governor says, "I am not spending another penny until I know what we have." So he turns to his homeland security director as the honest broker and says, "Look, figure out a way to show me what we have, and then we will know how to plan forward."

So we set out, and I have actually got an honest-to-goodness rocket scientist on my staff that the Army has loaned us from Huntsville. He sat in a room and canvassed the country for the best product that is forward-learning.

That is why we partnered with Google. So what we are able to do is the pictures that our counties have, and they all have the data. They do it for building roads, keeping track of where folks and the growth are, and you capture this on the Google Earth platform, and then you have a picture. It may be a year old or it may be 2 years old, and then you give it back to the county.

And then you have the most recent data, either at the six-inch, one-foot, one-meter level, and then when something happens, if you are able to go up immediately and capture the new pictures, you marry them together and you will know where the damage occurred. We even gave a license to the small town in Kansas that was 95 percent destroyed, loaded in their before pictures and their after pictures, and I think that if you will talk to our friends at FEMA, they were much quicker at being able to help these folks get checks and get their lives back together.

Mr. ROGERS. Mr. Darnell, I was a little concerned when we heard our last speaker talk about operational awareness across the country, to hear you say that you didn't see that we had adequate operational awareness, situational awareness between DC and its contiguous states. Did I misunderstand what you were trying to communicate?

Mr. DARNELL. I believe so, sir. I believe have situational awareness across the jurisdictions that make up the NCR through or WebEOC, through my EOC being a central hub for the region, and some other systems. I think where we need to improve, quite frankly, is with the Federal Government.

For example, in their COPS, their common operating picture system, we are not hooked into that. And being the seat of the Federal Government and the Federal agencies in the country, it is my hope that DHS would allow us to be a part of that system, and currently we are not.

The second point I would like to make with respect to the HSIN system that Mr. DiFalco spoke about, while I think it is a good system and has the potential to do a lot of things, I think the problem, at least from a state and local perspective, or my perspective quite frankly, is that there are a lot of different portals on there with a lot of different information. So it is not the most user-friendly system that you have, where you can go in and really find relevant information very quickly.

I would echo Ms. Larence's comments, being a former DHS employee, the challenge really is trying to get those agencies within DHS to really take a look at how we can efficiently use that system and put relevant information that we can use at the state and local level.

Mr. ROGERS. OK. My last question, and my time is about up, is you made reference to several successes, but I wanted to say you didn't make reference to any glaring deficiencies that still remain. You did talk about that there had been a lack of info flow, but now there was a redundancy problem. Is that what you are making reference to now?

Mr. DARNELL. Yes, pretty much. It sort of manifests itself in a lot of different ways. For example, I received six e-mails on the same piece of information just prior to coming here from DHS. It would be my hope that if we have a National Operations Center, as I thought it was designed, that that would really be the conduit for information—

Mr. ROGERS. Exactly.

Mr. DARNELL. —that would come out of DHS into our fusion centers and our EOCs. But instead, we have a myriad of offices out at DHS sending us the same information, and you are almost forced to open all of it for fear that you will miss something.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Thank you, Mr. Rogers.

And now the chair will recognize the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Jindal, for 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. JINDAL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you also for allowing me to participate. I apologize. I have been in and out due to other committee responsibilities.

I have several questions. I am only going to ask one because the hour is late. It is, I would thank Terry, the colonel, for coming up here to testify. After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck, it was obvious the response wasn't as coordinated and as organized as it could have been. The White House issued its own assessment in the Federal response to Hurricane Katrina, lessons learned, identifying critical flaws, including an absence of regional planning and coordination.

As the colonel noted, perhaps the problem is not just a lack of coordination, but a lack of direction. According to the administration's own report, the Department of Homeland Security did not maintain the needed personnel or resources in its regional offices. This led to reduced communications and understanding of on-site needs, further delaying an effective response.

Better planning at a regional level should not just consist of forward-leaning coordination between different levels of government, but an integrated partnership fostering clear communication that would define the point of contact with the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Defense, and others states.

One of the things that was evident to us on the ground was that the Coast Guard, which has a robust regional and local presence, was very proactive in responding to those storms. One of the things I have asked consistently, even before the storms, is about the department's plans for implementing its regional structure to improve the flow of communications between Washington and local emergency management offices.

I would like the colonel to start with his perspectives on how a more robust implementation of the department's regional office strategy could be helpful going forward, with future storms, future disasters. And if some of the other witnesses would like to comment as well, but I would like to give the colonel a chance to talk about how a more robust regional implementation can be helpful moving forward.

Colonel EBBERT. I think it is very difficult for the Federal Government to have a span of control that is capable of dealing with an incident anywhere in the Nation today, because basically you

have incident command at the lowest level and you may have a unified command, an area command, working with the state, but when you move to that next level, you get into a coordination agency, and coordination to catastrophic response, I don't believe, is adequate.

I think one of the things that is needed is the capability to have a presence in the planning, exercising of emergency plans across this country, and it cannot be done direct from Washington reaching all the way down to a local level, passing through the state.

I believe an analogy I would draw is that when an emergency happens, the flow of the Federal Government's response in a command and control capacity is to a pickup game with contractors and multiple people designated to arrive on the scene, introduce themselves to each other, and then try to introduce themselves to the local and state agencies. At the same time, you are dealing with saving lives, stabilizing infrastructure, and trying to provide security.

So I think we have to create a capacity and capability to regionalize at least so you are playing the game with people who you know who is their number, and you can't play the Super Bowl and draw people out of a hat. Even though they are professionals, they have never played together and they don't know the game plan.

So I think the regional approach to regional transportation planning, regional sheltering, regional command and control are absolutely necessary if we are going to be able to exercise in an emergency, a catastrophic one, which by my definition is when it is greater than the capacity to respond, you have a catastrophic situation and you have to have somebody in charge and know how to execute it.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. We will take one more pass. I have a question for Ms. Larence.

Your testimony says that the operations directorate has not issued guidance to other operations centers to improve collaboration. DHS maintains that the operations directorate does not have the authority to do so. Who within the department has the authority to issue such guidance, if you know?

Ms. LARENCE. The centers within the components themselves are owned by their parent companies. We understand that. They have the unique mission to serve their parent company, a tactical mission. But all these centers share a common mission with the National Operations Center. The National Operations Center depends on the information they are providing for their situational awareness.

So we think that they have an incentive, in fact, to try to ensure that these other centers have a standardized way to approach communication and information sharing. So all our recommendations asked them to do was voluntarily issue guidance that the other centers could use to try to ensure this consistency. So we disagree that there is really an issue about jurisdiction here or controller authority.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. OK. The ability that the Office of Operations and Coordination should have the authority to kind of—

Ms. LARENCE. Yes, we were kind of perplexed by their response because if they are the Office of Operations and Coordination and

they are not coordinating the operations centers within DHS themselves, then what are they coordinating. So, yes.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. OK. Colonel, you said something when you were talking about you have two roles. You have the mission role to act and to move, and then there is always the follow up, which is the compliance side, to get everybody to dot the i's and cross the t's. Both parts play an important role in the government.

Then you said this is a logistics war and we have no system in place. Did I hear you wrong?

Colonel EBBERT. We don't have, that I am aware of, any national logistics system where I, at the lowest level, would enter data that would be available at the time I entered it for the Federal Government to know that it exists, and a status, and we are talking a common operating picture. I believe in responding to emergencies.

This is a war of logistics. It is men and materiel and the movement thereof. You don't have a common operating picture, if you don't understand all this equipment and resources that you are moving around. We need to have a system that I have to enter data into, the state has to enter data into, and it is consolidated so anybody up the chain or down the chain of command knows what is happening in every locale based upon their logistic request.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. And we don't have that.

Colonel EBBERT. We don't have that.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. It doesn't work with this National Operations Center or COP?

Colonel EBBERT. It doesn't exist today.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. OK. Last question. We talked about the Virtual Alabama. I used to think it was Sweet Home Alabama. Sorry. That is bad.

[Laughter.]

I was, as part of a DHS field trip or something, I saw this virtual map and you could use it for parade routes and try to figure out line of sight, if the president were having his inaugural parade, things like that. Is it something that is also computer-driven and can give almost a 3-D exposure? I was just curious what that was.

Mr. WALKER. Yes, sir. That is actually a new component that has come along. We are partnering with Google with it. There are some really smart folks out there now and they are able to have us look at this topographic data from an oblique angle, and also routes, we can do plumbing data.

One of the other fascinating parts of the Virtual Alabama is we have cameras. I know Mr. Rogers is a big fan of cameras. We have cameras around the state through the Alabama Department of Transportation and some of our private sector partners that have manufacturing entities and others. If they will allow us access to these cameras, we can use Virtual Alabama to access cameras with real-time information.

So the tunnel going into the harbor at Mobile, if you were a decision maker, you can be in Montgomery and watch what is unfolding. So you can do route planning. You can do plume data if there were an explosion. You could take a look at the temperature and the wind direction, and know where it is going to go. That would give firefighters and police officers the ability to know where the evacuation areas are ahead of time.

These are things that we practice and rehearse. With respect to my friend's comment about logistics, in Alabama, it is 72-hours. We preposition supplies and we plan for 72 hours. We know that the Federal Government is a big battleship, and by the time you get it turned in our direction, it is going to take a little while. So we plan on being self-sustaining for 72 hours. We have learned through four hurricanes over the last 3 years, we have I don't know how many thousands of cots, meals ready to eat, ice contracts let, water on standby, warehouses full right now.

So I don't know how ready we are for hurricane season this year, but we are pretty doggone ready, but you can't anticipate the unforeseen.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. My time has expired.

Mr. Rogers for any further questions?

I would like to thank the panel for their testimony and for responding to our questions. The testimony has been valuable for us today and gives us some food for thought.

Members of the subcommittee, if they have any additional questions for the witnesses, will present those to you in writing. We ask that you respond to those as expeditiously as possible.

Hearing no further business, the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:25 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

