

Testimony of  
**Henry Renteria**

Director  
California Governor's Office of Emergency Services  
October 26, 2005

U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology and Homeland Security

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Good morning Chairman Kyl, ranking member Feinstein and subcommittee members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before today on this important subject. As this brief video depicts, in California because of our many natural disasters, we, like the Gulf Coast States have learned some lessons through experience. There is no doubt that a catastrophe like Hurricane Katrina would severely tax the emergency management systems and people of any state.

We have learned these fundamental principles about disasters:

1. We cannot predict what the next disaster will bring. Each disaster has its own unique set of issues, so our emergency response system must be flexible. The answer to ten different disaster scenarios is not ten individual plans.
2. All disasters require common capabilities that must always be addressed by public safety agencies.
3. Finally, to be truly prepared for any disaster we must focus on investment in these key areas: organizational systems, training our personnel, communications and resource acquisition. These areas are critical to all disaster hazards, regardless of cause.

## Systems

Because the next event--be it infectious disease outbreak, earthquake or terrorism--cannot be predicted with any true accuracy, we have learned that the best way to ensure our readiness is to develop sound and flexible systems that can be applied throughout the disaster spectrum. Ten years ago California adopted the Standardized Emergency Management System, or SEMS. As the video depicted, SEMS is a standard organizational structure used by all cities, counties, and state agencies during a disasters. SEMS also provides for standardized command and control, communications, terminology and mutual aid. Mutual aid in California is executed through a "bottom up" approach whereby a local incident commander requests additional assistance through a tiered process--surrounding local jurisdictions first, then the state, then the federal government. This structure is commonly understood, organized, and streamlined to prevent unnecessary delay and provide access to assistance once resources are exhausted.

Also we recognized many decades ago that mutual aid between states during disaster is critical. Emergency management is fundamentally a local and state government issue. The federal government does not have the unique capabilities that states do to directly assist people during a disaster crisis. Therefore, we believe that is the best interest of the nation for the federal government to support mutual aid compacts between the state, like the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC).

In addition to the many natural and technological disasters that have tested our capability to respond and recover, California agencies have conducted numerous emergency management exercises, hundreds in just the past year.

## Training

With each disaster and with each exercise we learn more and improve our capability. But the basic system remains unchanged because it has proven its effectiveness. One aspect of that system is standardization of training. My office in cooperation with law enforcement, firefighters, emergency medical providers and others have developed standardized training delivered through a training academy. In addition, each discipline, such as fire and law enforcement, has developed its own standard training that includes the common elements of SEMS.

As a result of having a standardized system, our planning at the state level has focused on assisting local governments and not preparing plans that sit of a shelf. Particular attention is concentrated on cities and counties as they primarily attend to human needs during disaster, or any emergency for that matter. We have found that a common, all-hazards planning approach is the most effective means to address the many disasters we are at risk to, whether they occur all at once or separately. In most cases the consequences of disasters will be similar; for example, an evacuation plan addressing special needs populations will apply whether there is flood or a terrorist attack.

A testament to the lessons learned and applied in California is the federal government's recent adoption of California's SEMS system, known as the National Incident Management System (NIMS). In doing so they recognize that the success of SEMS is not based upon a top-down approach to disaster management, but rather a recognition that management of disasters occurs like the disaster itself--from the bottom-up.

## Communications

As we saw in 9/11 and again with Hurricane Katrina, communications between emergency responders and organizations is critical. California started developing interoperable communications many years ago to support mutual aid at all government levels; however we still have work to do to ensure the necessary communication protocols and technology are maintained and current. The Governor has initiated projects at both the state and local government level to further improve and plan for our expanding emergency communications needs. We also must ensure redundancy when traditional means of communication fail. California as a result of our

experiences has implemented a number of communications means and protocols to retain contact between local, state and federal government--such as radio, satellite, phone, internet. We have also recently expanded our alert and notification system with local government, and are upgrading our statewide satellite voice and data communication service.

## Resource Acquisition

Part of the communications equation in any disaster is the ability to request and acquire resources. In California, we have been fortunate to have technology in place, known as Response Information Management System (RIMS) that enables information sharing on resource needs between jurisdictions. But even this system would be severely taxed by a catastrophic disaster. The federal government should support these state developed systems that are designed to best assist first responders.

## People

Finally, one of the most important lesson is that people, and not government, are the true first responders. It will take more than government systems and resources to address the most catastrophic disasters. Therefore, California has implemented initiatives such as a comprehensive individual disaster preparedness campaign and legislation which allows integration of the private sector into emergency management. The more that individuals, families and workers are trained and educated to be aware, be prepared and have skills to be and/or assist emergency responders, the quicker and more effective our response will be.

## Lessons Learned

There is no doubt that hurricanes Katrina and Rita have been a wake up call to all. While we have strong emergency systems, we know that the largest scale disasters, such as these hurricanes or a catastrophic earthquake in California, will impact hundreds of thousands of people and stress our ability to preserve life and safety and recover our economy. We must also plan for the next disaster, not the last; reinforce our strengths and anticipate our vulnerabilities.

Our state and nation are rich in resources to assist in a disaster--from local government up to military assets. However, we will fail our citizens if there is not a system, organization and infrastructure in place to get this support where it is needed.

Since 9/11 we have invested significantly in emergency preparedness. But, the human toll of Katrina shows we may not have invested wisely. What can be learned from this is that the development of local emergency organizations, reinforcement of training, and investment in communications systems are what will best prepare us for the next disaster--be it hurricane, act of terrorism, or the next earthquake.

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## Background Information

Terrorism, Technology and Homeland Security

Members:

Membership: (7:6)

### Republican Members

Jon Kyl, AZ (Chairman)

Orrin G. Hatch, UT

Charles E. Grassley, IA

John Cornyn, TX

Mike DeWine, OH

Jeff Sessions, AL

Lindsey O. Graham, SC

### Democrat Members

Dianne Feinstein, CA (Ranking Democrat)

Edward M. Kennedy, MA

Joseph R. Biden, Jr., DE

Herbert Kohl, WI

Russell D. Feingold, WI

Richard J. Durbin, IL

Jurisdiction: (1) Oversight of anti-terrorism enforcement and policy; (2) Oversight of Department of Homeland Security functions as they relate to anti-terrorism enforcement and policy; (3) Oversight of State Department consular operations as they relate to anti-terrorism enforcement and policy; (4) Oversight of laws related to government information policy, electronic privacy and security of computer information, Freedom of Information Act, and

Privacy Act; (5) Oversight of encryption policies and export licensing; and (6) Oversight of espionage laws and their enforcement.

Purpose of the hearing: 10:30 a.m., SD-226: Judiciary committee, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology and Homeland Security Subcommittee. Hearing is to examine emergency preparedness relating to terrorism.