

White House Says It Learned Lessons from Hurricane Katrina
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The Bush Administration on Thursday released its review of The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina.

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In the 228-page report, the Bush Administration notes that there were major flaws in the response on the government's part to the disaster. More than 100 recommendations are noted to change how the government responds to a disaster.

The President's charge to evaluate the Federal government's response to the storm resulted in the report and recommendations released by the Administration, The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned. The product of an extensive review, led by the President's Homeland Security Advisor, Fran Townsend, the report identifies deficiencies in the Federal government's response and lays the groundwork for transforming how the Nation - from every level of government, to the private sector, to individual citizens and communities - pursues a real and lasting vision of emergency preparedness and response.

The report identifies the systemic problems in Federal emergency preparedness and response revealed by Hurricane Katrina - and the best solutions to address them. Where actions at the State and local level had bearing on Federal decisions or operations, they are included in order to provide full context.

The Lessons Learned report includes:

- * 17 lessons the Executive Branch has learned after reviewing and analyzing the response to Katrina;
- * 125 specific recommendations to the President, which have been reviewed by relevant Federal departments and agencies, and will now enter an implementation process; and
- * 11 critical actions to be completed before June 1, 2006 - the first day of the next hurricane season.

The President's Charge: The Government Will Learn The Lessons Of Hurricane Katrina

President Bush ordered a comprehensive review of the Federal response to Hurricane Katrina. In his Sept. 15, 2005, address to the Nation from Jackson Square in New Orleans, the President made clear that the Federal government would learn the lessons of Hurricane Katrina so we as a Nation can make the necessary changes to be "better prepared for any challenge of nature, or act of evil men, that could threaten our people."

According to the White House, Hurricane Katrina was a deadly reminder that the Nation must do better in responding to emergencies. Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent sustained flooding of New Orleans exposed significant flaws in national preparedness for catastrophic events and our capacity to respond to them. Emergency plans at all levels of government - including the 600-page National Response Plan that set forth the Federal government's plan to coordinate all its departments

and agencies and integrate them with State, local, and private sector partners - were put to the test and came up short.

The Federal Response To Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned

We Are Not As Prepared As We Need To Be At All Levels: Federal, State, Local, Community, And Individual. Hurricane Katrina obligates us to re-examine how the Federal government is organized to address the full range of potential catastrophic events - both natural and man-made.

Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath provide us with the imperative to design and build a unified system. The Lessons Learned report confirms the imperative of integrating and synchronizing the Nation's homeland security policies, strategies, and plans across Federal, State, and local governments, as well as the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based groups, communities, and individual citizens.

To achieve this, the report identifies three immediate priorities:

- * First, we must implement a comprehensive National Preparedness System to make certain that we have a fully national system that ensures unity of effort in preparing for and responding to natural and man-made disasters;
- * Second, we must create a Culture of Preparedness that emphasizes that the entire Nation - at all levels of government, the private sector, communities, and individual citizens - shares common goals and responsibilities for homeland security; and
- * Third, we must implement corrective actions to ensure we do not repeat the problems encountered during Hurricane Katrina.

A Comprehensive National Preparedness System

The Existing National Preparedness System must be improved to minimize the impact of disasters on lives, property, and the economy. Pursuant to the National Strategy for Homeland Security, the President directed the creation of a comprehensive national preparedness system in Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8 (HSPD-8), starting with a national domestic all-hazards preparedness goal.

In response, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has developed an Interim National Preparedness Goal. We must now translate this Goal into a robust preparedness system that includes integrated plans, procedures, training, and capabilities at all levels of government.

The System must also incorporate the private sector, NGOs, faith-based and other grassroots groups, communities, and individual citizens. The objective of our National Preparedness System must be to achieve and sustain risk-based target levels of capability to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from major natural disasters, terrorist incidents, and other emergencies.

The Response To Hurricane Katrina Revealed A Lack Of Familiarity With Incident Management, Planning Discipline, And Field-Level Crisis Leadership.

Going forward, the Federal government must clearly articulate national preparedness goals and objectives. It must create the infrastructure for ensuring unity of effort. The Federal government must manage the National Preparedness System for measuring effectiveness and assessing preparedness at all levels of government.

The Lessons Learned report outlines five elements that are critical for a National Preparedness System:

- * Building and integrating the Federal government's operational capability for emergency preparedness and response;
- * Strengthening DHS's capacity to direct the Federal response effort while providing resources to responders in the field;
- * Ensuring unity of effort and eliminating red tape and delays in providing Federal assistance to disaster areas;
- * Strengthening homeland security education, exercises, and training programs; and
- * Ensuring that homeland security assessments, lessons learned, and corrective action programs are institutionalized throughout the Federal government.

Creating A Culture Of Preparedness

The Creation Of A Culture Of Preparedness will emphasize that the entire nation shares common goals and responsibilities for Homeland security. A Culture of Preparedness must build a sense of shared responsibility among individuals, communities, the private sector, NGOs, faith-based groups, and Federal, State, and local governments. Our homeland security is built on a foundation of partnerships.

The Lessons Learned report outlines four principles to guide the development of a Culture of Preparedness:

- * A prepared Nation will be a long-term continuing challenge;
- * Initiative and innovation must be recognized and rewarded at all levels;
- * Individuals must play a central role in preparing themselves and their families for emergencies; and
- * Federal, State, and local governments must work in partnership with each other and the private sector.

Ensuring That The Federal Government Does Not Repeat Problems Encountered During Hurricane Katrina

Changes must be made immediately to prepare for the 2006 hurricane season. The 2006 hurricane season is just over three months away. Even while the process to implement the lessons learned from Katrina is underway, there are specific steps the Federal government can and should take now to be better prepared for future emergencies.

The Lessons Learned report recommends 11 critical actions to strengthen Federal response capabilities before June 1, 2006, many of which the Administration has already begun to implement:

- * Ensure that relevant Federal, State, and local decision-makers, including leaders of State National Guards, are working together and in close proximity to one another in the event of another disaster;

- * Ensure that for events preceded by warning, we are prepared to pre-position an interagency Federal Joint Field Office (JFO) to coordinate and, if necessary, direct Federal support to the disaster;
- * Ensure situational awareness by establishing rapid deployable communications, as well as instituting a structure to consolidate Federal operational reporting with DHS;
- * Embed a single Department of Defense point of contact at the JFO and FEMA regional offices to enhance coordination of military resources supporting the response;
- * Designate locations throughout the country for receiving, staging, moving, and integrating military resources to ensure the most effective deployment of Federal disaster relief personnel and assets;
- * Identify and develop rosters of Federal, State, and local government personnel who are prepared to assist in disaster relief;
- * Employ all available technology to update and utilize the national Emergency Alert System in order to provide the public with advanced notification of and instruction for disasters and emergencies;
- * Encourage States to pre-contract with service providers for key disaster relief needs, such as debris removal and the provision of critical commodities;
- * Enhance the mechanism for providing Federal funds to States for preparations upon warning of an imminent emergency;
- * Improve the delivery of assistance to disaster victims by streamlining registration, expediting eligibility decisions, tracking movements of displaced victims, and incorporating safeguards against fraud; and
- * Enhance ongoing review of State evacuation plans and incorporate planning for Continuity of Government to ensure the continuation of essential and emergency services.

Transforming The Federal Response To Future Emergencies

The lessons of Hurricane Katrina cannot be learned and put into action without change. As the Federal government works to implement the near-term critical activities and 125 recommendations, State and local governments, the private sector, NGOs, faith-based and community organizations, the media, communities, and individuals should undertake a review of their respective roles and responsibilities in preparing for and responding to catastrophic events.

The report concludes, Together, we will strengthen our ability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, and recover from catastrophic events. The lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina and the recommendations set forth in today's report will yield preparedness dividends that transcend Federal, State and local boundaries. Their full implementation will help the entire Nation achieve a shared commitment to preparedness.