

**Statement of Michael D. Brown
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Department of Homeland Security**

**Before the
Committee on Government Reform
House of Representatives
on
FEMA's Continuity of Operations Program Management**

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Good morning, Chairman Davis and members of the Committee. I am Michael D. Brown, the Under Secretary for Emergency Preparedness and Response of the Department of Homeland Security. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Federal Emergency Management Agency's role and activities to support the Nation's Continuity of Operations (COOP) planning and program.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was designated as Lead Agent for Continuity of Operations (COOP) planning for the Federal Executive Branch by Presidential guidance on October 21, 1998. Among other things, the Presidential guidance requires Federal agencies to develop Continuity of Operations Plans to support their essential functions. FEMA's role is to provide guidance and assistance to the other Federal Departments and Agencies in this important area. We have taken this responsibility very seriously and have worked hard to provide this guidance through development of Federal Preparedness Circulars (FPCs), establishment of interagency COOP working groups, and other supporting activities. Today I would like to highlight FEMA's role in leading the Federal government's ability to ensure the delivery of essential government services in an emergency through improved COOP planning coordination, enhanced training opportunities, and robust exercise and assessment programs.

As the program expert for the Federal Executive Branch COOP activities, FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security have made significant strides toward ensuring that COOP plans exist at all levels of Departments and Agencies, at the Washington, D.C. headquarters level, and at Regional and Field offices across the country. This effort entails our involvement with hundreds, if not thousands, of various COOP plans and close coordination with the General Services Administration to effectively execute our COOP roles and responsibilities. We have aggressively developed working relationships across the government – to include the Legislative and Judicial Branches – to expand our efforts at providing advice and assistance to other Federal Departments and Agencies in the COOP arena; helping them comply with guidance in Federal Preparedness Circular – 65, the Federal Executive Branch’s COOP implementation guidance document; and establishing numerous interagency COOP working groups at the headquarters and regional levels. These working groups have opened communication channels across the government regarding COOP plans and programs, and have helped organizations develop more detailed COOP planning in order to leverage capabilities and improve interoperability. Moreover, we have developed new COOP test, training, and exercise programs to help ensure that all departments and agencies are prepared to implement their COOP plans.

Significantly, and for the first time, FEMA tested its own COOP plan and capabilities in December 2003 by conducting Exercise Quiet Strength. This headquarters COOP activation involved the notification and relocation of nearly 300 FEMA personnel on our Emergency Relocation Group and successfully demonstrated our ability to perform FEMA’s essential functions from an alternate site under emergency conditions. Exercise Quiet Strength is the first of what will be, at least, a biennial exercise of FEMA’s COOP plan.

As you are no doubt aware, our Office of National Security Coordination is leading Exercise Forward Challenge scheduled for next month. This full-scale COOP exercise will require departments and agencies in the National Capital Region to relocate and operate from their alternate facilities. We began preparing for this exercise in May 2003,

and have conducted numerous COOP related planning, training, and preparedness activities. As a result of our nearly year - long efforts, 38 department and agency headquarters have FEMA trained COOP exercise design teams contributing to Forward Challenge. Also, in preparation for this exercise, FEMA established and tested an Executive Branch COOP alert and notification system that is capable of contacting departments and agencies 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Here, I would like to point out some forty-five departments and agencies plan to participate in Forward Challenge. A prerequisite for their participation in the exercise is for each department and agency to develop their own internal Forward Challenge COOP exercise. As a result, there will be approximately forty-five separate, but linked, COOP exercises conducted concurrently with the main Forward Challenge event. Because of these internal exercises, Forward Challenge preparation has cascaded across the country with departments and agencies as far away as Fort Worth, Texas and Seattle, Washington participating. In addition, a communications test will be conducted as part of Forward Challenge to test communications interoperability to, and between, participating agencies' alternate relocation sites. Approximately, fifty-two separate communications checks for each participating organization are scheduled during the exercise, in addition to the interagency communication and coordination required by the Forward Challenge Master Scenario Events List. This government – wide exercise, like FEMA's own Quiet Strength exercise, will become a biennial training event that will provide a means to assess Department and Agency COOP capability.

Our support for COOP exercises and training is not limited to the Washington, D.C. area. Working with the Federal Executive Boards (FEBs), FEMA has conducted interagency COOP exercises in Denver and Chicago, and additional exercises are scheduled in Kansas City on April 29th and Houston on June 14th. To help facilitate this effort, FEMA has developed a generic interagency COOP exercise template that can be easily adapted for use in the field. These exercises are an important component of the COOP preparedness and assessment process, as they assist Federal departments and agencies with the identification of strengths and weaknesses in their COOP plans and programs. We believe this COOP exercise program provides departments and agencies across the

country a format and methodology to ensure plans are completed, tested, and assessed to determine compliance with the standards outlined in Federal Preparedness Circular - 65. More importantly, it helps ensure the Federal government's ability to deliver essential services during any emergency.

Mr. Chairman, you specifically asked me to address what steps FEMA is taking to assess each of the Executive agencies' COOP plans and what steps we are taking to address deficiencies in those plans. Through our strong working relationships and through new and ongoing COOP initiatives, we are leading the government's COOP program to ensure improved coordination and provide enhanced planning guidance. In that regard, FEMA established the Interagency COOP Working Group in the National Capital Region. It is comprised of 67 separate departments and agencies. Also participating in this Interagency COOP Working Group are COOP planners from the Library of Congress, the GAO, the U.S. Senate, the D.C. Department of Transportation, the U.S. Courts, and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. This Interagency Working Group meets monthly and provides an excellent forum for sharing ideas on the spectrum of COOP preparedness issues. FEMA has also encouraged departments and agencies to establish their own internal COOP Working Groups. At the Regional level, FEMA has used a phased approach to establish COOP working groups with many of the Federal Executive Boards and Federal Executive Associations across the country. FEBs in New York City, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Oakland/San Francisco, Houston, Albuquerque, Kansas City, Denver, Atlanta, and Seattle are examples of where FEMA has begun the process of establishing COOP Working Groups as forums for providing COOP program advice and guidance. In addition, we are revising the Federal Preparedness Circular for COOP, combining all previous COOP FPCs and including new and more definitive planning guidance into this circular. The goal is to have a single-source document that all departments and agencies can refer to for their COOP programs. The new FPC incorporates many of the GAO's recent recommendations for improvement and includes detailed information on how to identify essential functions, and discusses the importance of interdependencies between departments and agencies. To further assist the departments and agencies in their COOP planning, the new FPC also provides

examples of high impact programs that should be considered agency essential functions and stresses the importance of prioritizing these functions. It includes detailed guidance on how agencies should develop their Orders of Succession and Delegations of Authority, as well as information on identification and preparation of alternate facilities. Guidance on establishing redundant emergency communications, identifying vital records and databases, and development of COOP test, training, and exercise activities is also included. This revised document includes and updates all previous guidance that had been included in FPC 66, Test, Training, and Exercise Program for Continuity of Operations, and FPC 67, Acquisition of Alternate Facilities for Continuity of Operations. It also includes new, detailed information on six additional COOP elements outlined in FPC 65 and mentioned in the recent GAO report on continuity of operations.

I would also briefly mention the COOP Readiness Reporting System that we have begun fielding. This classified system will assist us in providing more accurate and timely information on government – wide COOP capabilities. Should you find it necessary, we can provide you with a classified briefing on this program.

Mr. Chairman, the ability of the Federal government to deliver essential government services in an emergency is of critical importance. In general, we agree that improved planning is needed to ensure delivery of essential services. However, I believe the Federal government is currently poised to provide those services in an emergency that requires the activation of COOP plans. This capability was effectively demonstrated during Hurricane Isabel and during the holidays' elevated Code Orange alert. In both instances we were very pleased to find that all Departments and agencies were well postured to immediately transition operations to alternate facilities.

Thank you for your time and I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.