

Testimony
Of
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Before The
Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations
Of The
Committee on Government Reform
Of The
United States House of Representatives

September 15, 2003
Stamford, CT

Thank you to the members of the Subcommittee, and especially to Chairman Shays, for the opportunity to speak before you today, here in my hometown of Stamford, on a subject that is so important to me and so vital to local governments in Connecticut and across the nation. I would also like to thank you all for your assistance in organizing the tabletop exercise that is occurring today, in this very building. That event is an example of how the federal, state, and local governments should be working together to ensure that our communities are ready to respond to terrorist threats and other emergencies. At the same time, it is an opportunity to examine our interactions on the ground at the time of an emergency, and to identify areas for improvement. I have every confidence that the emergency planners and responders in the City of Stamford will find willing partners in the state and federal agencies represented here today in that effort.

As I am sure you all know, responding to a disaster of any kind is an enormously complex undertaking. The decisions that must be made early and often during a disaster are extremely difficult, and are only made more difficult by lack of resources, lack of time, and lack of information. The federal government needs to step forward, as they are doing today, to fill those needs.

There is no question that many of my constituents have been frustrated by the time it has taken for government at all levels to come to terms with the threats that we face in the post-September 11 world. We may never be fully comfortable that we have prepared enough. However, some of the initiatives that have very recently come forward from the federal government are welcome and will certainly help to move us all in the right direction.

First, the funding for equipment for first responders has begun to produce some results. Although there was a considerable period when those funds seemed to get lost in our state capital, there now appears to be more rapid fulfillment of our needs for personal protective equipment, specialized vehicles, metering equipment, and other items.

Second, we are beginning to see real progress in the very difficult work of coordination and training. Today's exercise is a great example of that. I think that all of us involved in government have become aware that homeland security requires that we build a comprehensive network of individual and institutional networks, between jurisdictions, between levels of government, and between governments and the private sector.

Finally, I would like to make the point that local governments can be overwhelmed. Certainly a terrorist attack could overwhelm our emergency responders, which is why we have state and federal emergency response systems. But also on a day-to-day basis, local governments are responsible for a wide range of services with very limited resources. The federal government should be mindful of how thinly we locals are already stretched when they look at how to increase security. For instance, help with overtime will enable us to train our responders better. As another example, first responders in nearby communities – and in some cases within one community – remain unable to communicate. Local governments lack the resources, the regulatory authority, and the expertise in many cases, to fix the problems with interoperability that we face.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.