

**Combating Terrorism: Preparing and Funding First Responders**

**Testimony of Adrian H. Thompson, Chief, District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department**

**Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform  
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Good morning Chairman Shays and members of the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations. I am honored to be here to present testimony today. I am Adrian H. Thompson, Chief of the Washington, D.C. Fire & EMS Department. With me is Michael Sellitto, Deputy Fire Chief of Special Operations.

The District of Columbia Fire and EMS Department has been participating in the State Domestic Preparedness Program, administered through the Department of Justice, Office of Domestic Preparedness, and is continuing to receive funding through this source. Although there is a delay from submission to receipt of funds, the money eventually becomes available. We are also making use of the Fire Act grant program and are currently awaiting a decision on a possible award.

The Department also submitted requests to the federal government for financial assistance in 2001, immediately following the terrorist attacks of September 11. Specifically, we requested support in those critical areas where we judged we might have a shortfall if an event were to occur which caused a loss of personnel or response equipment.

We made requests for additional fully equipped fire apparatus. Having a “ready reserve” fleet is

essential for sustained response during a major event, or a multiple site event that would otherwise strip the remainder of the city of essential services. The request also included additional technical rescue and hazardous material equipment, which would allow us to operate in the most effective manner. The monies were appropriated and expended in accordance with our request.

One important issue is the development of nationwide equipment standards, so that emergency equipment can be shared across jurisdictional lines. Depending on finalized standards, equipment bought earlier may have to be replaced to meet them. In addition, with the purchase of many highly technical pieces of equipment comes the added maintenance costs associated with upkeep. As no historical maintenance costs are available with much of this new equipment, it is hard to project the necessary operating budget funding, especially since much of this equipment was obtained after the fiscal year budget was finalized. Another major area in which we saw a need was an inadequate number of personnel with the necessary specialized training to perform the tasks involved in technical rescue and hazardous materials incidents. To fulfill these training needs, we made use of the many excellent federal training programs, including;

- Department of Homeland Security, Office of Domestic Preparedness Programs
- Federal Emergency Management Agency, Emergency Management Institute Programs
- Fire Administration, National Fire Academy Programs

These programs are all worthy of continued funding, as they are the standard by which all other training is measured. All of the above offer free training to agencies such as ours. However, this agency incurs overtime costs whenever we send members to training. Since our agency operates on a 24 hour a day, 7 days a week schedule, overtime is necessary to maintain staffing levels while members are in training. Our September 2001 request asked for specific language permitting use of the appropriated monies to cover this expense. This request was honored, and as a result, we have achieved major accomplishments in the area of specialized training. We now have a greater number of trained individuals, and in many cases, the individuals have been trained to higher levels than we were capable of in the past.

Unfortunately, government training programs do not cover all areas of technical training and it was necessary to contract with private and institutional vendors for some of this training. The increase in

numbers of personnel with specialized training will result in a corresponding increase in re-certification costs to maintain the numbers at the new levels in future years.

All training and procedures must be practiced regularly to ensure readiness. Training drills and exercises are now multi-agency events, and there should be a mechanism to encourage participation from local agencies which serve a support function during emergencies. These support agencies have limited funds to participate in these exercises, and as a result, full participation is not always possible.

#### **Potential shortfalls**

To address equipment needs:

***To keep the latest technology available in areas such as emergency medical services, and biological and chemical field testing, continuing funding for upgrades should be provided.***

To address equipment maintenance needs:

***Consideration should be given to allowing a percentage of future monies to be allocated to equipment maintenance and upkeep.***

To address training needs:

***It is essential that training requests be funded with the specific language allowing us to use the funds for overtime expenses to backfill positions. In addition, first responder agencies should be allowed to contract with the private sector to fulfill needs unmet by the federal programs and to use training funding to support re-certification, as necessary. Finally, funding for training exercises must be available to pay for overtime for support organizations to ensure their participation in exercises.***

We must point out the District of Columbia is unique, in that appropriated monies do not have to go through multiple layers of state, county and local government to get to the point where the first responder can use the appropriated funds. Unfortunately, our colleagues in surrounding jurisdictions have told us that the monies no longer come directly to them, as in the past, and must filter down to them through the many layers of government, thus delaying the receipt of the funds as well as decreasing the ultimate amount they may receive at the first responder level.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our views, I am prepared to answer any questions you may have.