



The Leon & Sylvia Panetta Institute for Public Policy

**CATASTROPHIC DISASTER – CALIFORNIA IS NOT PREPARED FOR
THE WORST CASE SCENARIO**

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE CALIFORNIA LITTLE HOOVER
COMMISSION BY THE HONORABLE LEON E. PANETTA**

It is important to note that we have come a considerable distance since September 11th in homeland security and counter-terrorism preparedness. However, these activities have occurred at the expense of preparing for other real risks and hazards that face our state and country. While many have expressed concern about the over-emphasis on terrorism preparedness, one only needs to review lessons learned in the wake of Hurricane Katrina to understand how this over-emphasis and targeted funding on terrorism has resulted in an erosion of preparedness and planning for other hazards. It was clear from the Katrina response that there was a failure of coordination, command & control and the lack of a clear understanding by our political leaders and emergency responders as to their responsibilities and authorities. While we are more aware of the threats and to some degree procedures associated with the response to terrorism today, there is a tremendous need to re-emphasize our efforts on all-hazards preparedness and planning by clarifying roles and responsibilities, building on our existing systems and authorities, re-assessing

capabilities, enhancing all-hazards training and exercises and re-prioritizing the application of resources.

California has historically been a leader in the field of emergency management planning, preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. Being disaster prone, California has been tested over and over again, having to deal with earthquakes, fires, floods, landslides and human caused events like civil unrest. Since September 11th however, emphasis and preparedness funding for terrorism has over shadowed all other preparedness activities.

It is necessary to re-evaluate the State's all-hazard preparedness efforts by building on our existing Standardized Emergency Management System and focusing resources and funding equally to update and upgrade efforts wherever possible. This will require a statewide re-assessment of capability to determine what gaps exist in our current ability to respond to disasters and what can we realistically expect from the federal government and how long will it take to arrive. This will also require the identification and implementation of balanced preparedness and planning performance measures that will serve as benchmarks for state and local governments and the private sector.

In addition, substantial effort and resources need to focus on catastrophic disaster planning, or worst case scenario planning. Until we understand what gaps exist in our response mechanisms and address them, we will not be fully prepared to deal with the worst case scenario. California must review the lessons of Hurricane Katrina and the recent Asian Tsunami and incorporate those lessons in planning and preparedness efforts. Emphasis needs to be placed on those areas that present significant challenges in catastrophic disasters, such as clear understandings of

inter and intra agency authorities and coordination systems among all levels of government and the private sector, the need for managing and supporting large numbers of responders, regional communication plans, long term solutions for massive housing needs, management of large scale commodities and large scale evacuation strategies.

Part of achieving the ability to adequately prepare, respond and recover from any disaster, is the essential need to design and facilitate all-hazard training and exercises. This must include statewide all-hazard drills and exercises that should be realistic and challenging and include problems that are not readily understood or fixable. While there have been drills and exercises for terror related events in recent years, there have been no organized state sponsored exercises for hazards other than terror. The State of California has as a part of its Office of Emergency Services, an emergency management institute. This emergency and crisis management training facility has been nationally and internationally recognized for outstanding achievements in disaster training and education. Yet, although this valuable resource exists at a critical time in our history for emergency preparedness, it has been de-valued and starved for funds rendering it essentially ineffective. This situation provides a good example of an existing, proven capability that should be expanded to meet the states all-hazards training and exercise needs.

In the area of response planning our ability to coordinate and ensure for overall command and control is essential. While it is important to address the concerns related to the threats of terrorism, a true outcome of the establishment of homeland security appears to have resulted in confusion as to the lines of authority and blurred the role of OES and OHS. This has and continues to cause confusion on

the part of state and local agencies as to who is charged with the coordination of resources and actions. It has also resulted in unnecessary duplication of efforts, increased levels of frustration and wasted time and money. These are all factors that are generally manageable in day-to-day government bureaucracies, but will be crippling during emergencies when command and control and lines of authority need to be clearly understood.

While the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS), established as the operating model in 1995 exists and provides the organizational and operational structure for emergency management, pre-established regional communications plans are sporadic and in most cases do not exist. No plan exists yet at the regional or statewide levels to address interoperability of various local, state and federal responders during mutual aid required events. This is a looming problem that requires significant time, leadership and coordination among public and private organizations to address.

Key Recommendations:

We can learn much from the recent catastrophic disasters. There needs to be a revived statewide and national emphasis and discussion on what are best practices for dealing with all-hazard emergencies and wherever possible, identification and implementation of standardized procedures and protocols. To that end, I would like to offer the following key recommendations to enhance the level of California's preparedness:

- Establish an independent Commission to review the State of California's emergency management capability.
- Implement a statewide coordinated Emergency Alert and Warning System.

- Evaluate and update the State Resource Information Management System.
- Develop public/private partnerships for public education and awareness programs.
- Clarify existing ambiguities with DOD and DHS as to expectations and resources for federal military support.
- Emphasize and enhance all-hazard training and exercises.
- Conduct analysis on the expenditure of the state share of federal terrorism funds to ensure adequate state and local coordination.
- Pursue and implement comprehensive all-hazard disaster mitigation and prevention program.

Establish an independent Commission to review the State of California's emergency management capability

State should establish an independent commission, much like the Gilmore Commission and the Hart/Rudman Commission on the federal level to review the State's emergency management capability, including the ability to adequately address all-hazard preparedness, catastrophic planning, training, response and recovery. This commission would make policy recommendations on improvements and funding and/or validate existing capabilities to the Governor and the Legislature.

Implement a statewide coordinated Emergency Alert and Warning System.

As was found in the 2003 Fire Siege in southern California and then again in the 2005 Tsunami alert along the northern California coast, the State lacks a coordinated and comprehensive emergency alert and warning system that includes real time crisis information dissemination procedures to relay life saving

information from the federal or state government, through the region and the local government down to the citizen.

Evaluate and update the State Resource Information Management System.

Emergency resource information management computer systems at the local, region and state levels are outdated, cumbersome and slow. Put in place in the mid 1990's, these systems have not been significantly upgraded. This capability serves as the backbone for requesting and tracking emergency resources from local to OES to state and federal agencies. It provides a critical component to the ability of State to coordinate disasters. The State should conduct an analysis as to the effectiveness of the current resource information management system and then have an independent verification and validation of the State's system undertaken to ensure for proper effectiveness.

Develop public/private partnerships for public education and awareness programs

A large part of the success of the government to respond to and recover from disasters is the ability of its citizens to understand the hazards that they face and to take responsibility for personal and community disaster preparedness. California must work harder to prepare its citizen for disasters. Public education and awareness programs for all-hazards personal and community preparedness is a cornerstone to the State comprehensive emergency management program. To achieve this objective, public/private partnerships should be developed to incorporate the business community in public outreach campaigns and adequate resources must be allocated to ensure our citizens fully understand the hazards they face.

Clarify existing ambiguities with DOD and DHS as to expectations and resources for federal military support.

Currently, Federal Military Support to Civil Authority is not reliable or fully understood as shown by recent events where requests of military assets to support civil disaster responses have not been consistently or reliably filled. This was the case during the 2003 Fire Siege in southern California and again during Hurricane Katrina in 2005. During the 2003 fires, both the State Coordinating Officer and the Federal Coordinating Officer approved a request for an unmanned Predator over flight of the fire area. This was a critical mission that only the military could support, yet the resource was never provided. As apart of catastrophic disaster planning and exercises, the OES should begin discussions with DOD and the DHS to clarify existing ambiguities as to expectations and resource support timelines. In addition, disaster response exercises should be developed involving and interfacing military assets with state and local government representatives.

Emphasize and enhance all-hazard training and exercises.

To be fully able to deal with disasters and emergencies, our states responders, emergency managers and political leadership need to be well informed and well trained. This can only be achieved by having a substantial training and exercise program. Emphasis needs to be placed on re-energizing and supporting the State's existing emergency management training capabilities to ensure for all-hazard training and exercises, the facilitation and delivery of exercises and a more robust outreach to state agencies and local government.

Conduct analysis on the expenditure of the state share of federal terrorism funds to ensure adequate state and local coordination.

Currently of the terrorism grants coming into California, 80% is passed through to local government and 20% is retained by the State. Much attention has been given to the allocation and use of terrorism grant funding to local governments, however,

this has not been the case for the State's share. In order to maximize effectiveness, an expenditure analysis of the State's share, in relation to the amount of local funding must be undertaken to ensure adequate state and local coordination. For example, these funds may be best used to fill regional voids in response capability and improved statewide coordination.

Pursue and implement comprehensive all-hazard disaster mitigation and prevention program.

In closing, my final recommendation to this body would be that of need for mitigation and prevention. The impact of Hurricane Katrina yielded 37 Billion in FEMA related costs, 275,000 homes destroyed, 650,000 people displaced, 18,750 businesses destroyed and more than 1000 people killed. Historically it has been shown that for every one dollar invested in mitigation programs up to seven dollars in disaster related costs are saved. California needs to pursue a comprehensive and robust all-hazards disaster mitigation and prevention program. Beyond public education, this program must include strategies and incentives for state agencies and local government, businesses and home owners to harden and retrofit facilities, homes and business to make them safer and less susceptible to the impact of disasters. Given the hazards that California faces, it is critically important that the State dedicate more effort and resources than is currently being provided in this area.

Thank you