

Stephen Sellers Remarks
Commission on the National Guard and Reserves
September 20, 2006

Good afternoon. It's my privilege this afternoon to represent the Governor's Office of Emergency Services before the commission.

I'd like to begin my remarks by briefly explaining the roles of local, state and federal agencies in the response to emergency preparedness and response in California.

The OES mission is to ensure that California is ready and able to mitigate against, prepare for, respond to, and recover from the effects of emergencies that threaten lives, property and the environment.

OES coordinates the activities of all state agencies relating to preparation and implementation of the State Emergency Plan, which outlines the organizational structure for state management of the response to natural and manmade disasters. OES assists local governments and other state agencies in developing their own emergency preparedness and response plans, in accordance with the Standardized Emergency Management System and the State Emergency Plan, for earthquakes, floods, fires, hazardous material incidents and nuclear power plant emergencies.

During major emergencies, OES may call upon all state agencies to help provide support. Due to their specialized capabilities and expertise, the California National Guard, Highway Patrol, Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Conservation Corps, Department of Social Services, Department of Health Services and the Department of Transportation are the agencies most often asked to respond and assist in emergency response activities.

OES may also call on its own response resources to assist local government. For example, four communications vans are available to send to disaster sites. Portable satellite units are available to provide voice and data transmission from remote locations. OES also maintains caches of specialized equipment,

principally for use by local law enforcement agencies. One hundred and twenty OES fire engines (“pumpers”) are stationed with fire districts at strategic locations throughout the state and can be dispatched when needed. OES staff members are on call 24 hours a day to respond to any state or local emergency needs.

The OES Warning Center is staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. From this center, warning controllers speak with county OESs and the National Warning Center in Berryville, Virginia on a daily basis. OES also maintains a 24-hour toll-free toxic release hotline, and relays spill reports to a number of other state and federal response and regulatory agencies, as well as local governments.

OES coordinates the statewide Fire, Law Enforcement, Emergency Management and Telecommunications Mutual Aid Systems based on the “neighbor helping neighbor” concept. OES also coordinates the state’s Urban Search and Rescue and Safety Assessment Volunteer programs.

During emergencies, OES activates the State Operations Center (SOC) in Sacramento and the Regional Emergency Operations Centers (REOCs) in impacted areas to receive and process local requests for assistance. OES and other state agency public information officers staff the OES Emergency News Center to provide emergency information to the public through the news media.

In addition to the need for significant numbers of personnel, local and state emergency managers throughout California learned long ago the development and use of sound and flexible systems were critical to an effective response to the many emergency that occur in California.

Realizing more than 55 years ago that no one agency could ever have enough resources to deal with every situation, all 58 counties in the state agreed to share resources through California’s mutual aid system. As a result we have access to thousands of fire engines, ambulances and other equipment resources, combined with over 150 thousand first responder who -- when deployed to an event hundreds of miles away -- can work in concert with one another. An example of the effectiveness of this system is the Day Fire that is currently burning in Ventura County. While this fire is being managed by the United States Forest Service, 1,874 personnel from over 48 different fire departments are

supporting this response. The overwhelming majority of these personnel were deployed under California's fire mutual aid system.

The system serves as an effective, bottom-to-top mechanism for helping ensure that cities and counties affected by an emergency get the right resources as soon as possible.

It's important that members of the Commission, elected officials at the local, state and federal levels, as well as the public and the media understand that all disasters are essentially local events and that, because city and county police, fire, medical and public works personnel are closest to the scene, effective response always begins at the city and county levels.

In California, our state agencies automatically respond to emergencies when they have a specific statutory authority.

Let me give you two examples:

The maintenance of the state highway system in California is the responsibility of Caltrans. If an earthquake or other emergency occurs, Caltrans staff automatically checks the integrity of state highways, bridges and overpasses.

Similarly, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection is responsible for fire suppression and fire protection in State Responsibility Areas.

If, for example, k-rails owned by Caltrans were needed to help divert flowing water or mud from private property or a local jurisdiction needs assistance with sandbagging, Caltrans and CDF could not provide assistance immediate because the task fall outside their normal function.

The resources of the CNG, Caltrans, CDF and other state agencies are available, however, to assist cities and counties under mission tasking authority delegated to OES by the Governor when lives, property and the environment are at risk and the resources within an affected region may be insufficient. It is our desire to maintain this control over state resources.

Resources from cities and counties that are not affected by the event are also available to assist through California's aforementioned mutual aid system, which is coordinated by OES and involves all the cooperation and participation of all 58 counties in the state.

In tasking state agencies and coordinating the deployment of mutual aid, our major objective is to find the closest resource – local, state or federal – that can accomplish the mission.

If flooding were to jeopardize the safety of residents of a community and local agencies lacked the capability of meeting their transportation needs, for example, we could task the National Guard to provide assistance. In doing so, we would describe the mission -- 20 people stranded on Gilligan's Island needing transporting – and leave it up to the National Guard to determine whether the mission is best accomplished by Huey, Blackhawk or other resource.

Integrating resources from around the state and, if necessary, the nation into a cohesive response effort is a challenging task.

Fortunately, California's Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) has provided incident commanders and emergency operations center managers at all levels a system to help ensure the effective coordination of information flow and resources based on shared priorities.

The SEMS system itself is an organizational system that was developed in coordination with state and local emergency response and emergency management agencies, many of whom are here today. SEMS, through its standard organization structure practiced by responders at all levels of government, addresses command and control, communications, common terminology and mutual aid, which I have already described.

The Incident Command System (ICS) was established under California's FIRESCOPE program and is a model for managing field incidents or events. ICS establishes a command and support structure that any incident commander can utilize to effectively manage any situation they may face. It also provides for the establishment of a Unified Command for multi-jurisdiction or multi-agency response. ICS concepts such as operational periods, action planning and management by objective help provide for effective response to events of all sizes.

While recognizing that all disasters at least start locally and that California has a significant number of resources and an effective emergency management system to support local government, we recognize that we may be severely tested in a catastrophic event.

Such an event would require the deployment of personnel and equipment from a number of federal agencies, either through the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency or through other mechanisms.

One key to our ability to respond effectively to a catastrophic event will be the use of military personnel in support of civilian authority and the specialized resources they bring to the table.

OES already has a strong working relationship with the California National Guard, which has provided support in a variety of missions ranging from the support of CST personnel at large-scale, preplanned events (Busch/NASCAR at California Motor Speedway in Fontana earlier this month) to aerial support in search and rescue efforts to aerial transport and aerial firefighting support. No improvements are needed in our ability to utilize National Guard Assets in California.

Clearly, Department of Defense resources—active and reserve--could provide us with additional capability in our effort to meet the needs of Californians when the next emergency occurs.

The first question that we must ask in this regard is: How best to do this?

We believe that the use of existing systems and processes, perhaps with some refinements, is the best way to accomplish the integration of DOD resources into our response to emergencies. Despite some of proposals that have been fostered in reaction to what transpired in Hurricane Katrina, a lot of reinvention is not needed. Rather what we need to ensure is that the role of the Defense Coordinating Officer is clearly established and that the existing Liaison Officer program is further refined and institutionalized.

A DCO is now in place in our FEMA Region IX as well as at other FEMA Region offices around the country. Coupled with a revitalized FEMA as is now apparently going to be the result of federal legislation, we will have a structure

and process for accessing DOD resources as needed. We need to ensure that within the military and the Department of Homeland Security the roles and responsibilities of the DCOs are clearly established and communicated. We also need to incorporate them into ongoing preparedness and response efforts to ensure that we all know what to expect in our next large-scale disaster. This was validated in a recent exercise conducted with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and a reserve communication unit at the Joint Forces Training Base, Los Alamitos. As a result of the exercise, we are refining how we would incorporate the use of such resources in a coordinated mutual aid response.

In my own experience I have also learned how important the liaison officers maintained by the various branches of the military are to ensuring a better coordinated and effective emergency response. These Emergency Program Liaison Officers are our customary military contacts. They reinforce the common principal that we do not want to find out who each other is after the disaster, but before. It is about relationships. The DOD is encouraged to ensure that this aspect of support to the states and their cities is fully entrenched and fostered. These individuals need to have the DOD's full support and be given the mission to establish direct and frequent collaboration with us. The proactive work of some of those we have collaborated with who call us on virtually every moderate sized event needs to be part of their job descriptions and periodic reviews.

This being said, what are some of the more particular items we need to know?

As with any resource we may need, OES and local jurisdictions must know:

- What military capabilities are available to us at any point in time?
- Where are the resources located?
- How do we access them?
- What response times can we expect?
- Are they clear on their roles, responsibilities and limitations especially as related to law enforcement?

This critical information and systems that are common to all responding agencies and must be incorporated into our emergency management systems before the next disaster occurs. Otherwise we may have a collection of independent relationships that will lead to an uncoordinated and ineffective response when we move to regional and statewide coordination and priority setting.

Is there anything else we need?

We need to brief our military counterparts on our emergency management systems so they know what to expect.

We need to incorporate the DOD into our exercises.

Conclusion

California is proud of the development of the Incident Command System and our Standardized Emergency Management System. Coupled with an effective mutual aid program, we have regularly demonstrated our ability to manage moderate and large-scale disasters in our state. We think that the Department of Homeland Security's adoption of the National Incident Management System brought our concept of emergency management to the federal level. While it was clearly demonstrated in the response to Hurricane Katrina that we must continue to improve how we work together, the building blocks are in place.

At all levels of government, the goal is the same: to maintain and improve an emergency management system that protects our citizen's lives, protects property and preserves the environment. DOD assets are indeed needed to help us meet that goal. We encourage the military to continue to work with us and make the improvements necessary to increase our capability to provide a coordinated and efficient response to disasters. A cooperative effort today will ensure a more effective response tomorrow.