

## **The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) – An Overview**

### *Background and History*

Prior to FEMA's creation the responsibility for disaster response and reconstruction was shared between a number of different agencies, including the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, the Bureau of Public Roads, and the US Army Corps of Engineers. The Department of Housing and Urban Development coordinated disaster relief and recovery from 1973 until its incorporation into FEMA in 1979.

FEMA was initially created by Presidential Reorganisation Plan No.3 in 1978, and was established as an independent agency in 1979, absorbing a number of existing agencies such as the National Fire Prevention and Control Administration.

In 2003 FEMA was incorporated into the Department of Homeland Security, which was created by the Homeland Security Act of 2002 in response to the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001.

Today FEMA exists as a major agency of the Department of Homeland Security and the Administrator, currently W. Craig Fugate, reports directly to the Secretary of Homeland Security.

### *Organisational Structure*

FEMA is headed by W. Craig Fugate, the current administrator, who works alongside Deputy Administrator Richard Serino and Chief of Staff Jason McNamara.

W. Craig Fugate has been Agency Administrator since May 2009, having been nominated for the role by President Barack Obama. Fugate began his career as a volunteer fire-fighter and paramedic before working his way up the administrative levels to reach the position Director of Florida Division of Emergency Management in 2001, a position he held until his departure in 2009. Fugate differs from previous FEMA leaders due to his background being in emergency management and relief rather than politics.

FEMA's organisation includes the following departments:

- Office of Policy and Program Analysis (Associate Administrator, David J. Kaufman)
- Office of National Capital Region Coordination (Director, Steward D. Beckham)
- Industry Liaisons
- National Advisory Council (Director, Kathy Fields)
- Office of External Affairs (Director, Jessica Smith)
- Mission Support Bureau (Deputy Associate Administrator, Carla Gammon)
- Office of Regional Operations (Director, Elizabeth Edge)
- Protection and National Preparedness (Deputy Administrator, Timothy W. Manning)
- Office of Response and Recovery (Associate Administrator, William L. Carwile, III)
- Office of Equal Rights

### *Budget and Funding*

FEMA is a part of the Department of Homeland Security and as a government agency is publicly funded by taxpayers.

FEMA's requested budget for 2013 is \$13.5 billion.

President Obama has proposed cuts to the Federal Emergency Management Agency for 2013 that would reduce overall funding by about 3 percent, with \$1 billion trimmed from the Disaster Relief Fund but more money given to state and local programs.

### *Regulation*

The Federal Emergency Management Agency regulations are set forth in *44 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) – Emergency Management and Assistance*

This document details the regulations that bind FEMA in areas such as rulemaking, environmental responsibility, non-discrimination, the use of funds, etc.

FEMA is responsible to the Department of Homeland Security and, ultimately, the President of the United States of America.

### *Domestic Partnerships*

FEMA's Partnership structures include cooperating with state government specialists, universities and academic research centres, regional committees, commissions and councils, non-governmental partners in the media and organisations such as the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the Humane Society. These partnerships are publicised on FEMA's website and contact links to partners are provided.

FEMA has initiated the Cooperating Technical Partners (CTP) Program within National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) communities to facilitate cooperation between FEMA and communities, regional agencies, State agencies, tribes, and universities that have the interest and capabilities to become involved.

### *International Partnerships*

Building and developing relationships with partners in the international community is important at FEMA. FEMA sees it as important to cooperate with, aid, and learn from international partners given the often international nature of disasters in the global society.

FEMA offers training programs for international partners.

Cooperative agreements are in place with agencies from APEC, Australia, Canada, Chile, the European Union, Germany, Israel, Mexico, NATO, New Zealand, Russia, and the United Kingdom. These vary from mutual assistance agreements to best practice to joint emergency management goals.

### *Communication*

FEMA's Disaster Emergency Communications Division (DEC) has six geographically dispersed Mobile Emergency Response Supports (MERS) and a number of Mobile Communications Office Vehicles (MCOV). These are used to establish, maintain and coordinate the effective disaster emergency communications services and information systems that are critical to FEMA's coordination of responses. The DEC's headquarters is tasked with the strategic policy issues impacting the communication needs of emergency responders, and State and local governments.

FEMA runs training courses for its staff, citing the importance of being able to communicate effectively for every emergency manager, planner and responder. These courses focus on things like how to communicate in an emergency, how to identify community-specific communication issues, and how to use technology as a communication tool.

The Personal Localised Alerting Network (PLAN) uses mobile phones as personal alert systems. These alerts are geographically targeted, able to get through to phones no matter how jammed the cell towers are, and free of charge requiring no sign up.

### *Internet and Social Media*

FEMA has Facebook and Twitter pages dedicated to providing news, updates and advice. This page was used before, during and after Hurricane Sandy to communicate with members of the public.

'Rumor Control' section of FEMA's website aims to provide people with up to date and accurate information to prevent the spreading of rumours.

FEMA's YouTube channel has videos on preparedness, hazard mitigation, how to get assistance, getting involved and comments from the FEMA leadership.

### *Landmark Activities*

FEMA has been involved in the following emergencies and disasters:

- Hurricane Andrew (1992)
- South Florida hurricanes (2004)
- Hurricane Katrina (2005)
- California wildfires (2007)
- Hurricane Sandy (2012)
- Multiple other emergencies such as flooding, snowstorms, wildfires, etc.

### *Hurricane Katrina*

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, FEMA was criticised for staffing, training and organisational failures that meant that its inadequate performance in the face of a disaster the size of Katrina was all but inevitable. FEMA was seen as being disconnected from the problems on the ground, slow in its response, poorly prepared, and lacking target focus.

### *Hurricane Sandy*

FEMA's response to Hurricane Sandy differed markedly from its response to Hurricane Katrina. Responding to the criticism of its handling of Katrina, with increased support from the Obama government and with a greater leadership focus under W. Craig Fugate, FEMA endeavoured to improve its organisational structure and partnerships with other organisations and communities. FEMA's actions in relation to Hurricane Sandy have seen the benefit of this progress as it has been praised for its preparedness, effective response and cooperation with communities on the ground.

### *Future*

With President Obama having just been elected for another four year term the future of FEMA looks secure for the foreseeable future. FEMA will continue working to improve its preparedness and partnerships within the community so as to enable it to continue to respond well to future emergencies.

**Will CHIVERS, London**