



AMERICAN PUBLIC WORKS ASSOCIATION

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# **Incident Command, Control and Communications During Catastrophic Events**

**Statement of**

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**On behalf of the American Public Works Association**

**To the**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Homeland Security**  
**Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Science and Technology**

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Good Afternoon. Chairman Reichert, Ranking Member Pascrell, distinguished members of the panel, my name is Bob Freudenthal and I am the Deputy General Manager of the Hendersonville Utility District in Hendersonville, Tennessee. I am also President of the American Public Works Association, or APWA. I am here today on behalf of the 27,000 public works officials and nearly 2000 public agencies that are members of APWA. We are an organization dedicated to providing public works infrastructure and life line services to millions of people in small and large, rural and urban communities.

I appreciate and thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the role of public works in the incident command system during catastrophes. I know I speak for all APWA public works officials when I say we are indeed grateful to be sharing our thoughts with you during this critical time for the ongoing development of our nation's emergency response plans. APWA has been and will continue to be an advocate for the development of policy which coordinates incident response across multi-disciplinary agencies in a way that saves lives and restores property and critical lifelines.

Let me take a moment to describe who public works officials are and what we do, and then I will go into more detail about the role APWA members play in the incident command system during catastrophes.

APWA's membership includes public works directors, city engineers, directors and senior managers of all areas of infrastructure, city managers, transit authorities, and

water and waste water treatment professionals among many others. Public works officials manage the very essence of our nation's cities: we plan the city's infrastructure; we manage, maintain and secure public buildings, vehicles and equipment, sewer systems, water and wastewater systems; we maintain public grounds, turnpikes, highways and port authorities; we ensure that traffic congestion is minimized and that all roads and bridges are maintained in safe and workable condition. Public works officials are first responders: we work alongside police, fire, and emergency services to ensure that water is flowing through fire hoses; traffic lights are operating and traffic is moving; barricades are up; debris is removed, and that the public is safe. Additionally, we are often the last ones to leave the scene as we manage the lengthy cleanup and restoration of any disaster site.

We run the gamut of city services with one overriding commonality: we are the nuts and bolts of local government. We are the pulse of local communities that our citizens call "home." Public works professionals manage the design, planning, and operation of our communities' critical infrastructures -- roads, bridges, and water systems—and are on the front lines in the face of natural disasters, terrorist attacks and other public emergencies. Public health and safety is our priority at all times.

Having explained what we do, allow me to take a moment to elucidate our history and role in disaster response. As first responders in any catastrophic event, public works professionals are comprehensively trained in the nature of incident command. A part of the National Incident Management System (NIMS), the Incident Command System

(ICS) is the organizational structure that facilitates and coordinates the **command**, **control**, and **communication** of a response. It is an "all hazard – all risk" approach to managing crisis response operations as well as planned special events, such as the Olympics in Salt Lake City or other large, routine public gatherings. We understand the need for command and control to be clear so that the response minimizes loss of life, quickly restores critical lifelines and minimizes property damage. Communication between all responders is critical to the efficiency and effectiveness of all response and recovery activities. Incidents with many ranges of significance require our participation in the incident command structure.

ICS is based on best practices developed from years of large-scale emergency response operations, such as multi-state wildfires, and addresses many of the incident management challenges faced by local, state, and federal officials in response to disasters. To highlight this need for enhanced coordination between agencies, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has created training curriculum that better reflects the "All Hazard – All Risk" model, which includes such risks as floods, earthquakes, oil spills, fires, hurricanes and terrorist attacks. We encourage our members and member agencies to be certified and trained through this, and other systems.

Oftentimes, public works crews are the first to arrive on the scene of a disaster. Emergency services need public works to clear the way in order to respond. In such cases, ICS provides for our personnel to immediately assess the situation, determine the

status of public safety, and in many cases lead a response effort. For example, at the scene of a water main break, public works crews work to locate, isolate and stop a leak as well as pump water out of impacted areas. And other times, the role of incident commander transfers to the public works director to complete the recovery.

Public works officials know what it takes to make infrastructure less susceptible to damage from disasters as well as rebuild infrastructure after a disaster. We know how to get the roads and water mains in working order, how to get the power back up, how to rebuild or reinforce public buildings damaged by natural or man-made disaster, how to identify equipment needs, and how to assist other first responders in dealing with immediate threats.

Our unique role in Incident Command sets us apart from other disciplines. The role public works plays in debris management (often the first step taken on the road to recovery), reconstruction of the community, restoring lifeline services such as power and telephone service, and using public works engineers in designing and implementing search and rescue operations, are quite varied in nature. Yet, all are *essential* when it comes to incident management during a catastrophic event.

Therefore, our role in incident command is not just assessing the damage and then letting everyone else know how we plan to fix it -- it is also our mission to work with an eye on making sure that lives are protected in the future. It's a big responsibility, but with the help of Committees such as yours, and Federal tools like the National Incident

Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS), among others, we have had many successes. We are proud to say we have saved people's lives, their homes, their livelihoods, their property, their heartache, and their tax dollars.

However, while the plans we have in place can do much to mitigate the effects of a catastrophic event, they in and of themselves are not enough. The importance of continued planning for disaster cannot be underestimated – and is colorfully illuminated in the following quote by President Eisenhower, “I have always found that plans are useless, but that planning is indispensable.” Plans require constant maintenance to meet changing conditions, new threats and indeed, to overcome past failures.

During the recent catastrophe resulting from Hurricane Katrina, public works officials were called in to assess the damage in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Our people were and continue to be on the streets clearing debris, working to reestablish electricity for millions of customers, working to provide clean water and inspecting public buildings to determine the safety to their occupants. However, there continues to be a critical need for interoperable communications among responder groups to allow people to communicate effectively with other relief units, and determine where resources are needed most.

Because many of our members across the country wanted to help in the wake of Katrina, the American Public Works Association immediately posted information for its members encouraging them to work within established Department of Homeland

Security and FEMA procedures and the congressionally-ratified Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) which provides form and structure to interstate mutual aid.

The American Public Works Association has an Emergency Management Technical Committee within our organization that has consistently supported, provided comments for and helped to implement HSPD-8, the National Response Plan (NRP) and the National Incident Management System (NIMS). We are hosting a web broadcast this December to ensure that the public works community is fully informed of the importance of NIMS implementation. We continue to support an emphasis on cross-discipline communication and training for our members, public officials and all first responder groups. APWA is also working with Lessons Learned Information Sharing (*LLIS.gov*) to capture lessons learned from the public works community to share with the emergency response and homeland security communities. These lessons learned will help Incident Command, regardless of incident size, have a better understanding of the capabilities that public works organizations bring to preparedness, response, and recovery.

In addition to ICS, public works personnel have been available to interoperable communications groups over the past four years. As we have in the past, we are again serving on the President's HSPD-8 working group, with a goal to "establish policies to strengthen the preparedness of the United States to prevent and respond to threatened or actual domestic terrorist attacks, major disasters, and other emergencies."

Our Emergency Management Committee continues to advocate the credentialing of key public works officials who play a critical role in the ICS. APWA is well represented on the DHS/FEMA Public Works Working Group that is focused on credentialing. Unlike our partners in law enforcement, fire, and emergency services, public works officials are not continuously posed for emergency response but are responsible for the continuation of daily service delivery to our communities. During a disaster, public works is not only involved in the response and recovery but also the continuation of those critical service delivery areas – water, sewer, solid waste, transportation and safety. Our credentials for emergency response are in addition to our credentials of our every day jobs.

The American Public Works Association has many members with intimate knowledge and direct experience of what it takes to recover from major catastrophes. Paul Brum, Public Works Director of Oklahoma City, played a crucial role in the recovery after the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. Our Emergency Management Committee Chairman, MaryAnn Marrocolo, is the Director of Plan Management in the Office of Emergency Management for the City of New York, and gained first hand experience of the crucial role public works played on September 11, 2001, as well as in the countless other emergencies the city has faced. Diane Linderman, former Public Works Director of Richmond, Virginia, led that city’s department when Richmond was devastated by the winds of Hurricane Isabel and the consequential flooding from Hurricane Gaston. Brian Usher, Director of Public Works and Engineering for the City

of Zion, Illinois, dedicates substantial time as a course instructor and trainer at the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) in Emmitsburg, Maryland. The list goes on.

To summarize, the American Public Works Association recognizes the importance of tools like ICS that emphasize cross-discipline communication and training for our members, public officials and all first responder groups. We will also continue to support increased funding for interdisciplinary training so that we can be better prepared for the challenges we will all face in the future. We realize that there are gaps in current preparedness strategies, but with cooperation and an eye to lessons learned, we believe that our future will be one in which we can enjoy greater security through increased awareness, communication and planning.

We again would like to thank the Chairman and this Committee for allowing us a seat at the table as we look forward into the future.