

## Secretary Ridge Addresses Federation of State Medical Boards

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Remarks as Prepared

Thank you for that introduction. It is a pleasure to be here with you to discuss the important role the medical community plays in homeland security.

On September 11th, ordinary citizens became extraordinary heroes. On that fateful day, we saw firemen run into buildings; EMTs rush to the scene; and men and women in uniform run patrols on the ground and secure our skies from further attack.

It's what we have come to expect from brave men and women on police forces, in fire houses, and National Guard units who--on a daily basis--put our well-being ahead of their own.

But new heroes emerged on 9-11 as well. Businessmen charged up the stairs, volunteers donated blood in record amounts, and, as you all know so well, doctors and nurses cared for the burned, and broken, and bereft.

The medical community--like so many "first responders"--sprung into action that day, confronted by a situation many of us had never imagined.

Hospitals and Emergency Rooms prepared for a deluge of injuries, but saw mostly frantic family members in search of missing loved ones. Too many beds laid empty, awaiting survivors that never emerged from the rubble.

Many of the everyday heroes from this tragedy have received our thanks. Others have remained anonymous, and still others have paid the ultimate sacrifice for their fellow Americans--comforted by our enduring memories and endless appreciation.

The images of 9/11 chill the spine but heat the passion of our nation, and are the force that motivates us to work every single day to protect our homeland from those who wish us harm.

It is something that doctors can relate to--patients, diseases, and sickness do not take days off. Neither do the terrorists.

It has been said that the men and women of Homeland Security have to be right more than a billion times per year, the terrorists only once.

I know that kind of pressure is something the medical community can understand--and it is why you work so hard to ensure a level of preparedness for everyone in your profession.

Well, we are trying to do the same thing--make emergency preparedness one of the hallmarks of our homeland security effort. As you know, we must pursue emergency preparedness on two tracks--both of which you can play a role in, as individual doctors and collectively as an organization.

First, we must build and maintain an operational capacity in emergency preparedness, which includes both a national plan and coordination at the state, local, and neighborhood level.

Second, we must develop and nurture a culture of citizen preparedness so that mothers and fathers, school children and senior citizens, friends, neighbors, and even the family pets know what to do in the event of an attack or natural disaster.

Let me describe what I mean when I say 'operational capacity.' As so many of you probably experienced before 9-11, the emergency response capabilities in America's cities and towns were at their best, uncoordinated; and at their worst, incompatible.

While the bravery of firemen, police officers, and emergency medical personnel were uniform across our entire country, when they needed to work together across jurisdictional lines they were often frustrated by an inability to communicate--they used different "languages" and employed different technologies.

One of the great tragedies of our response at the World Trade Center was that even within New York City, the Police Department radios couldn't transmit to the Fire Department radios. And when engine companies rushed in from nearby neighborhoods, they were of little use because the couplings that fit 'hoses to hydrants' weren't compatible.

From these disappointments emerged a resolve not to let an incompatible radio frequency or a too-small/too-large piece of safety equipment impede the ability of brave men and women to save the lives of citizens as well as their own.

So this Department is determined to forge operational capacity when it comes to emergency preparedness, quite simply, the capacity for governors and mayors, police and fire chiefs, hospital staff and EMTs to prevent, prepare, and respond to disasters of any kind--whether wrought by man or Mother Nature.

I am pleased to say that we are already making great progress in this area. The Federal Government has improved communication--and coordination--with our partners at the state and local level.

For instance, amid the disasters wrought by Hurricane Isabel, the California wildfires, and last year's August blackout, the hard work of early preparation meant faster deployment of resources and manpower--so that assistance was available and ready to turnaround at a moment's notice.

In addition, thanks to secure communications, expanded security clearances for our partners, and the shared language of the Homeland Security Advisory system, we created a powerful and constant two-way flow of information between the federal government and our partners at the state and local level. This kind of coordination is crucial for emergency preparedness.

So is having a plan, which is why the Department developed the National Response Plan to integrate all of the current federal response capabilities under a single "all hazards" system for prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

The plan was developed with guidance from all stakeholders--federal government agencies, state, local, and tribal officials, as well as first responders. This working blueprint enhances current federal capabilities and unifies the team that will be charged with responding to potential attacks or disasters.

As part of this plan, we also introduced the National Incident Management System--or NIMS--so that everyone understands what their role will be--and will have the tools they need to be effective.

NIMS is the Nation's first-ever standardized approach to incident management and response--and it unifies federal, state, and local lines of government into one coordinated effort.

NIMS makes America safer--across our entire Nation and throughout every neighborhood--by establishing a uniform set of processes, protocols, and procedures that all emergency responders, at every level of government, will use to conduct response actions.

For the first time, all of the Nation's emergency teams and authorities will use a common language, and a common set of procedures when working individually--and together--to keep America safe.

I like to think of NIMS as the playbook for the NFL Pro-Bowl Game. When you bring together the best players from 26 different teams, a "Blue 42, Slant Right, Release" might mean one thing to the Quarterback, another thing to the Wide Receiver, and yet another to the linemen. At the call of "hike," chaos might break out on the field. At the very least, the play won't be successful.

NIMS ensures that everyone shows up on game day with the same playbook. They will have the same preparation, the same goals and expectations, and--most importantly--they will be speaking the same language. When the quarterback calls a play, everyone will know what they are supposed to do. And in this battle, "safety" is far better than 2 points--in fact, it is the only result worth anything at all.

Of course, having a plan is only the beginning. Emergency personnel also have to have the right equipment, the right training, and the right amount of support to continue to do their jobs well.

This Department has provided unwavering support to these brave first responders--those who arrive on the scene minutes after a tragedy and, they will tell you, are often the last to leave.

Since March 1st, 2003, we have allocated or awarded more than \$8 billion to help our Nation's first responders and state and local governments to prevent, respond, and recover from potential acts of terrorism and other disasters.

This money has already been used to purchase everything from the simplest radio to the most up-to-date technology for detecting bombs and weapons of mass destruction. It has been used to purchase and upgrade the critical equipment that first responders use to keep all of us safe--which is central to our mission of increasing America's preparedness.

When it comes to purchasing equipment with these new funds, we must ensure that the money is used effectively. We want to ensure that when federal money is spent, it fosters the kind of coordination I just mentioned.

That is why the Department recently announced the first comprehensive Statement of Requirements for communications throughout the first responder community.

This document outlines the future technology requirements for public safety wireless communications and interoperability. This is going to serve as another chapter in our playbook--one that will bring governments, public safety officials, the communications industry, and future research and development efforts together under a common mission.

Because only together can we provide first responders with the tools they need to do their jobs well--in a way that replaces outdated, outmoded relics with an interoperable, innovative and integrated system of communications.

We have also adopted the first set of standards regarding personal protective equipment developed to protect first responders against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents.

These standards, which will assist state and local procurement officials and manufacturers, are intended to provide emergency personnel with the best available protective gear--allowing them to protect themselves, as they work to protect others.

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As we fight a new battle against the terrorists, against the evil perpetrators of tragedies like 9-11, dedicated men and women throughout the medical community have taken on new titles. In addition to being "first preventers" in their traditional duties as care providers, they are also now a part of the first responder community.

We have seen the face of mass terrorist destruction, and the faces of its many victims. And we know that the potential exists for further attacks of this magnitude. Doctors, nurses, EMTs, and medical emergency professionals of all varieties may one day be called upon to again respond at the scene of such a tragedy--and we must be prepared.

As I said earlier, on September 11th many doctors, nurses, and hospital staff prepared triage areas and emergency rooms for the expected deluge of injuries trickling out of the World Trade Center. But few emerged, and we learned the lesson that in the future we need to be prepared to deploy additional medical resources at the scene of an attack or disaster.

So Homeland Security has taken over operation of the National Disaster Medical System--which consists of specially trained teams of medical professionals that are ready to activate during an incident.

These teams cover a variety of fields, including doctors and nurses capable of specializing in burns, pediatrics, crush injuries, mental health, as well as those who can properly deal with the medical consequences of chemical, biological, or nuclear materials.

This system has also readied mortuary units with the training and experience necessary to help recover, identify, and process deceased victims.

Perhaps just as important, the NDMS has incorporated these teams of medical professionals into the training exercises and planning for potential future disasters.

Now, we are able to pre-position these teams during an incident and ensure faster response times and closer cooperation between these specialized teams--and others like police and firemen--providing direct aid to disaster victims.

For instance, before Hurricane Isabel made landfall last September the Federal Emergency Management Agency opened several staging areas and mobilization centers in anticipation of the services that would be necessary once the powerful storm hit the coast.

NDMS was part of this advance deployment--along with other resources--that included Emergency Response Teams in every state along the hurricane's projected path.

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Hurricane Isabel is also a good example of the second aspect of emergency preparedness --citizen education and awareness. The "Ready" Campaign is the flagship of our citizen engagement efforts --I am sure that most of you have visited the Ready.gov website.

Ready is a national public service advertising campaign designed to educate and empower American citizens to prepare for and respond to potential terrorist attacks and other emergencies. I am proud to say that it is working.

Our strategic partner, The Ad Council, declared that "Ready" was one of the most successful campaign launches in the storied 62-year history of their organization --more than 113 million people saw or read about the Ready campaign during its launch. Another 18.7 million people have visited the website accounting for more than 1.7 billion hits!

If you ask people in south Florida, or the Outer Banks of North Carolina about being "ready," they already know about having supplies, keeping extra batteries handy, and even having a hurricane evacuation route planned.

...aying supplies, keeping extra batteries handy, and even having a nationwide evacuation route planned.

If you ask people in Northern California about being "ready," they already know exactly where to go if an earthquake begins or a fire threatens their home. If you ask people in Oklahoma or Kansas about being "ready," they already know to stay away from windows or head for the basement or other low area.

Being ready is a part of the daily lives of so many Americans. Now we must apply these principles to the threat of terrorism. Like natural disasters, terrorists can strike without warning, without declaring their methods ahead of time, and certainly without regard for innocent lives.

The Department of Homeland Security is an all-hazards agency. And, as such, we will continue to educate the public about the importance of being prepared for all emergencies, whether wrought by disaster or design. We are committed to accelerating the basic level of citizen preparedness across the nation.

Current research suggests that between 20 to 30 percent of Americans have an emergency supply kit and that 15 percent have a communications plan.

Our desire is that nearly half of all Americans, in some form or combination, will be better prepared by the end of 2004--whether that's by preparing family Ready kits and emergency plans; volunteering to aid in disaster planning; or engaging in CPR and training exercises to help someone in a life-threatening situation.

To help push this agenda forward, we will add to the strength of our existing Ready campaign by launching two new citizen preparedness endeavors--Ready for Business and Ready for Kids. We will also continue to work with third party organizations, such as The American Red Cross and America Prepared -- and, of course, Citizen Corps.

President Bush created the Citizen Corps so that Americans could volunteer to participate directly in homeland security efforts in their own communities. The Citizen Corps mission is to encourage everyone to participate in making America safer; and the Citizen Corps Councils, which have nearly tripled in number since 9-11, have helped us deliver the Ready message at the grassroots level--the level where it's needed most.

These Councils are comprised of local leaders from law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services, businesses, community-based institutions, schools, places of worship, health care facilities, public works and other key community sectors.

In addition, Citizen Corps coordinates the Medical Reserve Corps, which enables retired healthcare professionals to effectively augment local health officials' capacity to respond to an emergency.

In order to be fully prepared as a Nation, everyone must play a role. Whether by preparing your family ready kit or volunteering to serve on your neighborhood Citizen Corps Council, the opportunities abound for individual citizens to take the reins of our homeland's security.

Whether as part of the National Disaster Medical System or as a volunteer in the Medical Reserve Corps, the medical community has responsibilities as first preventers and first responders --critical elements of our Nation's preparedness.

And, of course, the members of the Department of Homeland Security will be implementing our plans for a nationwide, unified response capability.

These are all examples of something I have said many times that homeland security is truly about the integration of a nation --everyone pledged to the cause, everyone a protector of freedom.

Together --unified in one purpose --we are working hard every day to help make America safe and secure. We will always do so. So that our families, our friends, our fellow citizens, and generations to come, will always enjoy the opportunities so plentiful in this great country, this great republic we call the United States of America.

Thank you.