

## Remarks by Secretary Michael Chertoff at the International Association of Fire Chiefs

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**Secretary Chertoff:** Thank you very much. I want to thank Chief Westermann for that introduction. You know, whenever you hear people introduce you and go over your background, even when you've had as many jobs as I have had, it's a little bit like a walk down memory lane. And, of course, nothing is ever lost nowadays.

I was chagrined to see a picture dating back to 1985 in the news yesterday in connection with a story about Rudy Giuliani and the fact that the bosses of the Mafia Commission had been unhappy about the fact that we prosecuted them. And since I actually tried the Commission case, there was a picture of me 20 years ago, 21 years ago, and I have to tell you, it was kind of a rude shock.

(Laughter.)

**Secretary Chertoff:** I think you all know what that's like. So I appreciate that. I appreciate Fire Administrator Cade addressing you. I was on the phone with him when he was in California, we literally passed each other over the last couple of days as I went out and came back and he went out again. And, of course, you know, Chief Paulison has been out there since we flew out early in the week, and I think he'll be coming back quickly.

As we contemplate what is going on in California, it's an occasion for us to have renewed appreciation for the work that you do and the firefighters do under very demanding and difficult circumstances.

This organization has been involved in saving lives and improving public safety for more than 130 years. You also represent an exceptionally fine group of men and women who put their lives on the line and work themselves to exhaustion in dealing with some of the greatest challenges that we face in this country.

And, as is often said, but not too often said, firefighters rush in when everybody's running out. And that is certainly true with what we have seen in California, where there's an unprecedented response effort.

I thought what I would do is maybe begin, before I get into the regular prepared part of the speech, to talk a little bit about what I saw and what's going on out in Southern California. This has been truly a remarkable team effort of firefighters and responders at the local, state and federal level, really since this weekend when the Santa Ana winds picked up, and of course as you know, particularly on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, we had very high winds that made fighting the fire extremely challenging.

From the very beginning, the Interagency Fire Center, which is a joint federal, state coordinating entity that helps to make sure we can get firefighting assets, including air assets, onto the scene of major fires, they were on top of this over the weekend.

And I asked somebody to kind of pull some of the statistics, and it was fascinating, at least to me, that on Saturday, simply based upon the fact that people knew we were entering a dangerous period, the Fire Center had arranged to have eight large air tanker aircraft that were federal on site. There were then 16 CO415 scoopers, state and local, that were ready to go, and two medium air tanker aircraft. And then after Saturday, as the fires began to intensify, more and more aircraft got on scene. I think Governor Schwarzenegger said a couple of days ago that there were 90 total.

Of course, there were challenges. As you know, you have to fly the aircraft when we had very, very high winds, and I think CNN reported that the winds on Sunday sometimes topped 100 miles an hour. Obviously, you have difficulty flying both from a safety standpoint and from the standpoint of making sure that the fire retardant actually gets where it's supposed to go.

And I confess that when I see people observing, criticizing that the controllers, the fire controllers, because more planes weren't flying, I have to be honest with you and say I'm going to put my faith in the professional fire controllers who are sitting there in Riverside, responsible for managing the lives and the safety and the operations of the air crews and the ground crews that were fighting these fires. I think we have to support them, and I think we have to give them everything we can and trust their judgment about what the right thing

is.

(Applause.)

**Secretary Chertoff:** Now, of course, what we do as the federal government is not only provide the firefighting assets, the Hot Shot teams and the strike teams, and I think we're on the way to having maybe as many as 4,000 federal firefighters in California now, but we have to look at the whole incident, the whole disaster.

As you know, the President issued an emergency disaster declaration in the wee hours of the morning on Tuesday, shortly before Chief Paulison and I flew out. And when we got out there, we saw an unbelievable act of coordination on the part of all the responders and the public officials out in California. There were numerous fires. The wind was causing them to leap literally from location to location.

At various times, evacuation orders went out to literally hundreds of thousands of people, a lot of it through the reverse 911 system, which is a significant improvement that California has made since the 2003 Cedar fire. And with all that, it was possible for the authorities to stand up shelters that accommodated I think at one point over 20,000 people, including over 10,000 at Qualcomm Stadium.

We worked with state and locals, with the military to make sure we had cots. Generous donations of food and water of all kinds literally filled the stadium. I remember I was struck there was kosher food for people who wanted kosher food. They were giving massages out. I'm sure totally legitimate.

(Laughter.)

**Secretary Chertoff:** On the third floor of the stadium. I think they were doing acupuncture. There were bands playing. Obviously, nothing can make up for the anxiety and stress that people feel when they're worried about whether their houses and their possessions are going to be there when they get back, and we understand that. But I think good planning and good coordination try to ease the stress as much as possible for people in the Qualcomm Center. And I'm delighted that we were able to do that.

Of course, we recognize that funding was important, so we had fire management assistance grants that were delivered during the course of the weekend. The President then declared a major disaster on Wednesday morning, which has now enabled us to open up 11 recovery centers, many of them co-located with state and local centers in the afflicted areas, so that we can help people register. And then once they go back and assess what the damage is, we can work with them to make sure that their uninsured or underinsured damages are being addressed.

Nothing is ever going to make a disaster pleasant. But I will say that some very good teamwork and a lot of preparation, planning, training and exercising well in advance have enabled us to try to make this disaster as manageable and as efficiently responded to as possible. And I want to particularly commend the fire officials and the other state and local officials in California for doing really an excellent job in handling a very, very challenging fire emergency, which of course is still going on.

The fire is not over yet. We're very much obviously concerned about the safety and well being of the firefighters and the first responders, and of course of the public. We pray for their safe return. I know we will all be holding our breath and keeping our fingers crossed through the weekend. I hope that the containment process will be completed this weekend, and we can then go on to rebuilding and reconstruction.

You know, this disaster is a very dramatic reminder of the risks that firefighters undertake whenever they put the uniform on. I remember being around on 9/11. I was head of the Criminal Division. We were of course focused, at least on the law enforcement side, in trying to understand who was responsible and then tracking down anybody else who might have been connected with the 19 hijackers.

But even in the midst of all the long nights that we put in on the law enforcement side, I was struck, really struck dumb by the unbelievable bravery of the firefighters who went into the buildings on 9/11. And, again, it is still a vivid image, I think in the minds of all Americans as a superb example of the heroism, which is a commonplace for firefighters around the country.

Earlier this year, I attended the memorial service in South Carolina for nine firefighters who lost their lives in a tragic warehouse blaze. And that was another reminder of the risks that firefighters face. I believe that this event in South Carolina was, at least as of that time, the worst loss of life in the firefighter community since 9/11. As the President said earlier this year at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial, the work here is a

calling, not a job.

So I want to take a moment to thank each and every one of you and those you represent and those who work with you for everything that you do on behalf of our nation and the American people. We've benefited tremendously in our work at the Department from your wisdom, experience and sound judgment, not only Chief Cade, but of course Chief Paulison, who I've had a lot of opportunity to spend time with over the last few years, and whose judgment, experience, coolness under fire and good sense of humor have made him a very trusted advisor and good friend as we confront a whole variety of natural disasters, and man-made disasters, and maybe some of these fires are man-made, I'm sad to say, as we confront a lot of disasters all across this country.

I'd like to spend a few minutes today talking about a couple of issues that we face going forward and how we're trying to continue to improve our capabilities to deal with all hazards, whether they're natural or man-made. And let me pause here to say, sometimes I see people who try to divide hazards into the two as if they're obviously different. But look at the fires we're fighting right now. Some of them are natural in origin. Some of them appear to be man-made in origin.

And you know the truth is, the fire burns just as hot and the deaths are just as real whether an individual started the fire or whether a downed power line or a lightning strike started the fire. And the response is pretty much the same.

So we have to look across the entire spectrum, and not be divided among ourselves, depending on whether something is a terrorist act or a criminal act or an act of God. We have to recognize it's the same approach that we have to be able to deploy, whatever the cause of the fire.

Now, obviously, a critical part of this is making sure we continue to give training and equipment to firefighters around the country. In 2006, we distributed \$485 million in fire grants to nearly 5,000 fire-related organizations nationwide. And since 2001, we've provided \$2.4 billion -- that's with a B -- in similar grants to fire departments and first responder organizations. They've been used for response equipment, personal protective equipment, vehicles and fire prevention activities.

But we're doing more than just giving money out. We're trying to integrate fire operations into the very fabric of DHS. Our National Operation Center now has a fire desk. We now have a Fire Service representative sitting at the table with our interagency colleagues from the FBI, state and local law enforcement and the intelligence community whenever we deal with an operational challenge. We recognize that you have special insight. We want your input into the whole range of our operations, and your expertise whenever we're dealing with a hazard.

Moreover, Charlie Allen, our Chief Intelligence Officer, is working to add firefighter personnel to state and local fusion centers. Now some people might say, well, wait a second. Why do you want to put firefighters in an intelligence fusion center, which has intelligence officials and police officials? I'll tell you why. In many cases, the first person on the scene for an event where there's an explosion or where there's a fire is going to be a firefighter or responder. And what they see may very well lead us to recognize that the source of the fire is not an accident but is an act of terror or an act of criminality. And that's why fusing firefighters and responders into the normal law enforcement and Counterterrorism Intelligence Fusion Center is critical to get a whole picture of what's going on.

Earlier this year -- I'm sorry, earlier this month -- I was in Oregon when we did TOPOFF 4, which was a simulated exercise -- I guess all exercises are simulated -- involving simulated IED attacks, Improvised Explosive Devices attacks -- with radiological material, so-called "dirty bombs," that were to have taken place in Portland, Oregon, in Phoenix, Arizona and in Guam.

And in doing a live exercise in Portland, there was fire -- fire's first responders who had the radioactive badges that went in first and were able to determine it was not just an explosion but a radioactive explosion. And the reason they have those badges, which they really have in real life, is because we have gotten that equipment to the firefighters up in Portland, and because their standard operating procedure when there's an explosion is to put those badges on so they can be protected and so they can warn others that there's radioactive material in the explosion. That is exactly the kind of step forward that we need to be making to unify our activities.

Another big step forward is in the area of communications. Earlier this year we made available approximately \$1 billion in public safety interoperability communications grants to help states and cities and regions improve communications interoperability. Again, you know this is a very important initiative. It's not all about equipment.

Some of it's about governance and reaching agreements about protocols and who speaks to whom and what language you use, whether it's 10 code or plain English, but the equipment is certainly a critical part of it.

And, again, if I can go back to the fire, fires that are raging now in Southern California, I had the opportunity to speak to police and fire officials when I was on the ground, and they told me that they have much improved interoperability, and a lot of the different departments were able to communicate with each other and coordinate with each other. And, in particular, they were grateful for reverse 911, which allowed them to get people, I think over a quarter of a million people, to get evacuation orders in a timely fashion.

There's more work to be done. We have a score card that we have done for communities to assess where they are with interoperability. I can tell you that the technology is now there so that we can bridge information even among people who operate on different frequencies. What we need to do is continue to drive the training and the protocols and the governance so that we can coordinate the incident as effectively as possible.

Let me finally turn to the issue of emergency response and incident response in the broadest sense of the term. We look at the whole range of possible incidents when we consider what we have to do at the Department of Homeland Security. Obviously, many of the most common incidents are emergencies, fire emergencies. But they can also be explosions. They can be law enforcement emergencies with a lot of criminality or gang activity. They can be terrorist emergencies. They can be cyber attacks. They can be public health emergencies, like a pandemic flu.

We have to have the ability to adjust, adapt, prepare, plan, train, exercise for any one of a whole host of incidents. Many of these will involve firefighters. Some of them probably actually will not involve firefighters. But as we try to reduce to doctrine what we are doing and the full range of challenges we face, we are trying to once again take all the lessons we've learned and assemble them in a National Response Framework, which will be the next generation of our response strategy and planning at the national level.

The Fire Service has been critical in helping us develop the National Response Framework, and we have in fact had I think numerous groups at every stage of the process of putting this together who have contributed to it. We've circulated a framework draft and received further comments recently.

Some people have been critical about this framework. And let me explain as clearly as I can what it is and what it's designed to do. First of all, the framework is a framework. It is not a detailed set of plans. It is supported by more detailed sets of plans that look at 15 different kinds of emergencies and 15 different kinds of incidents, which are very different from one another. Some of them are natural disasters with which you are familiar, hurricanes and earthquakes. Others may involve terrorist types of things, multiple improvised explosive devices across the country, maybe devices that don't cause a lot of damage, but that create a ripple psychological effect.

Another element of the plans that we have deals with the pandemic flu, not a fire incident, not an explosion, but a huge, very challenging public health emergency. Cyber attacks, again, would have no real necessarily explosive effect, although there could be some collateral explosions, but would be a huge impact on our infrastructure and our way of life.

So we have to develop a framework that embraces all of these, gives us the flexibility to adapt, depending on what the particular incident is, and then builds a set a specific plans down to the local and community level where the really specific process of identifying steps to be taken has to be put together.

Let me begin by also drawing a distinction between emergency management and incident management, because they are quite different. Emergency management refers to the actions taken to prepare for and in the immediate aftermath of an incident to respond to an emergency, regardless of cause. The purpose of emergency management is to save lives, meet basic human needs and reduce the loss of property. It's focused on the impacted jurisdiction, and the jurisdictions that provide assistance.

But as Secretary of Homeland Security, although emergency management is within the domain of the Department under FEMA, I have a broader set of responsibilities. They include prevention and protection. They involve terrorism. They involve coordination of counterterrorism investigations. They involve infrastructure protection. They involve dealing with the collateral consequences of a pandemic flu, and working with other agencies to deal with a cyber attack.

As described in the National Response Framework, FEMA will continue to lead the federal response efforts for emergency management and for Stafford Act disasters. We are committed to supporting FEMA as it's

significantly increased in size and capabilities over the last two years, and that will continue. I think we all agree that's appropriate.

Other incidents, of course, may not be FEMA incidents. A cyber attack will probably have a response led by other elements of DHS and other agencies. A public health emergency is likely to be led with HHS as the lead agency with the incident being coordinated by our department so as to make sure collateral consequences are being addressed.

What we are doing in the National Response Framework, and I encourage you to read it, is to give public leaders across the country in plain English the broadest concept of what incident management is, to allow them to understand that there are times they need to be dealing with emergency management, there are times they need to be dealing with computer issues, times they need to be able to deal with law enforcement issues. But whatever the challenge, they need to deal with them using a unified command system and an incident management system, which I might say, was pioneered by the Fire Service, particularly the Fire Service in California.

In conclusion, I would like to say you know better than anyone that individual preparedness at the local level, community, private sector, family and person. Without that kind of preparedness, putting supplies together, having a plan, your job becomes much more difficult.

I believe it is a civic responsibility to get people to be prepared. Sometimes people are overwhelmed, and they say I can't be prepared. It's too scary. It's too difficult. It's too complicated. Part of the solution is of course to put information out. We have ready.gov on the web. We have a lot of written material we put out about how to prepare yourself. It's not the hard thing that many people fear it is.

But I also know that the Fire Service has incredibly good experience in how to teach people about getting prepared, that it's not too difficult to get prepared, and that it's important to get prepared. Fire Prevention Week earlier this month is a great example of a way of getting a message out. And when I was a kid, there was great information out there. We learned about what you do, you know, stop, drop and roll, having a fire extinguisher, don't leave candles burning, don't smoke cigarettes in bed. Of course, kids aren't supposed to smoke cigarettes anywhere, but.

(Laughter.)

**Secretary Chertoff:** But the point is, you all understood how to get that message out. We need to build on your experience and get a broader message out. Because, unfortunately, in the world we live in, it's not just fire we have to be prepared for, it's public health emergencies, it's the possibility of a terrorist attack, it's the possibility of other kinds of incidents.

So we have a lot we have to do together. I want to continue to work with you as partners. I want to continue to borrow from your ranks to populate the senior leadership of our Department. I want to continue to support you and to listen to you.

And most of all, when we have events like 9/11 or what we're seeing in California or what we saw in Charleston earlier this year, I want to stand shoulder to shoulder with you, making sure you have all the support the federal government can give in equipment and in personnel so you can do the very important and heroic jobs that you do.

I'm going to take a few questions, but let me thank you and say God bless you.

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