

**Statement**  
**Of**  
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**U. S. Department of Homeland Security**  
**Before The**  
**Select Committee on Homeland Security**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**

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**Washington, D.C.**

Chairman Cox, Congressman Turner, and Members of the Committee, my name is Sue Mencer, and I serve as Director of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office for State and Local Government Coordination and Preparedness (SLGCP). On behalf of Secretary Ridge, it is my pleasure to appear before you today to discuss our homeland security exercise programs.

I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and all the members of the Committee, for your ongoing support for the Department and for SLGCP. Congress has long been a champion of rigorous exercise programs as an important contributor to our nation's preparedness, and made early and critical investments in what have become today's highly successful programs. You and your colleagues have entrusted us with a great responsibility in administering these efforts for the nation, and we are meeting that charge with the utmost diligence.

Mr. Chairman, since its creation in 1998, the Office for Domestic Preparedness (ODP), now consolidated with the Office of State and Local Government Coordination as the Office of State and Local Government Coordination and Preparedness (SLGCP), has provided assistance through its preparedness programs to all 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the U.S. territories. By the end of Fiscal Year 2004, SLGCP will have provided States and localities with more than \$8.1 billion in assistance and direct support, trained 550,000 emergency responders from more than 5,000 jurisdictions and directly supported nearly 400 exercises.

We conduct these exercises in the firm belief that they are a cornerstone of preparedness. Our experience and data show that exercises are a practical, efficient, and cost-effective way to prepare for crises. They test our resilience, identify procedural difficulties, and provide a plan for corrective actions to improve capabilities without the penalties that might be incurred in a real crisis. They are a tangible measure of accountability in the repetitive cycle of planning, training, exercising, and assessing our homeland security capabilities. Short of an actual incident, they provide the "final test" for our preparedness.

Congress has played a critical role in laying the foundation for our current programs. In 1996, Congress authorized the Nunn-Lugar-Domenici Domestic Preparedness Program, an unprecedented undertaking which provided training, equipment, technical assistance and exercises focused on the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction to 120 of the nation's largest urban areas. This effort was initially administered by the Department of Defense and subsequently transferred to our Office. Each city received direct support in the design, development, conduct and evaluation of a series of three exercises, including a full-scale (or field) exercise. This Program was the forerunner for many of our current initiatives.

Today, SLGCP has organized exercise support for States and communities into Eastern, Central, and Western Regions through its Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program. States are required to adopt the Program for exercises conducted with Federal grant funds. State Exercise Managers and support teams are assigned to each Region. Exercise Managers conduct Exercise Planning Workshops with States, Territories, and designated urban areas to aid in

program establishment and development of a multi-year exercise schedule. On average, states have planned twenty annual exercises.

Congress has also led the establishment of exercise programs for our nation's leaders. In 1999 Congress directed that a Top Officials ("TOPOFF") National Exercise be conducted with the participation "of all key personnel who would participate in an actual terrorist event." The first TOPOFF, a full-scale exercise in May 2000 was, at the time, the largest combating terrorism exercise ever conducted in the United States. Over 6,000 participants from federal, state and local departments and agencies, including Cabinet officials participated. The States of New Hampshire and Colorado served as our pioneer venues for the first TOPOFF exercise.

Again thanks to Congress, the second TOPOFF was a tremendous advancement. We were provided with additional funding so we could design and conduct a full two-year cycle of exercise activities of increasing complexity. Sixteen major exercise activities were conducted for 103 Federal, State, local and international departments and agencies and 20,000 domestic and international participants, including senior officials of the USG and Government of Canada. The States of Washington and Illinois were our full partners and provided our exercise venues. Through the use of distance learning methodologies, we were able to broadcast elements of the exercise series to audiences across the nation. Secretary Ridge personally led his team and the nation through the week-long TOPOFF 2 full-scale exercise just two months after the Department of Homeland Security was established. This proved to be an invaluable opportunity for the

Department and its partners across government to train key personnel in their new homeland security roles and responsibilities.

Following TOPOFF 2, Secretary Ridge directed my Office to develop a comprehensive national homeland security exercise program. Congress provided the resources necessary to build a Program that will ensure the homeland security community is trained, practiced and able to perform its assigned homeland security missions. We worked with our partners across government to develop a Program with four principal objectives: 1) To provide senior officials and their organizations with the opportunity to periodically train and exercise together, identify key policy issues, and refine key incident management processes/procedures against the range of probable threats; 2) To develop common doctrine and provide annual program planning guidance; 3) To establish collaborative management processes, supporting systems, and multi-year scheduling; and 4) To formalize a system for collecting, reporting, analyzing, interpreting, and disseminating qualitative as well as quantitative exercise lessons and exemplary practices.

The importance of a nationally integrated program was reinforced when the President issued Homeland Security Presidential Directive/HSPD-8, "National Preparedness," in December of last year. HSPD-8 confirmed the requirement to establish a national program. Our National Exercise Program, including the TopOff exercise series, will support implementation of the National Response Plan and National Incident Management System, and the provisions of HSPD-5, issued in February 2003.

Program implementation is well underway, including design and development of the third in the series of TOPOFF exercises. New Jersey and Connecticut will be our host venues, and Washington and Illinois, our partners in TOPOFF 2, will serve as their mentors. We will shortly announce the venues for TOPOFF 4, and those States will be invited to monitor the design, development, conduct and evaluation of TOPOFF 3. This mentoring program is designed to transfer knowledge and experience among multiple States and communities by leveraging national-level exercise participation. In addition, the Governments of the United Kingdom and Canada have committed to participation in what promises to be the largest, and surely the most productive exercise series ever conducted by the United States Government and its allies

To unify homeland security exercise efforts, we have worked diligently with our federal, state and local partners to develop exercise policy and doctrine. We have produced a series of manuals that are employed by our State and local clients, and have been adopted for use by several Federal departments and agencies. These manuals and hundreds of exercise references are available through a secure but unclassified web portal we established for the homeland security community. This portal helps us realize our goal of maximizing the reuse of exercise investments and products, and in reducing the man-hours required to design and develop exercises. The portal is utilized by thousands of federal, state and local exercise planners, and provides them with the tools and references that accelerate exercise design and development and dramatically enhance our ability to share information, including lessons and best practices. Our success with the portal has led us to use it as a collaborative workspace for many other preparedness initiatives.

To meet the needs of the millions of first responders that must periodically train and exercise together on key action procedures, we have been hard at work examining and evaluating models, simulations, and games to identify products that meet federal, state, and local training and exercise needs when large-scale exercises are impractical, and to augment and extend existing programs. The potential benefits include increased training and exercise frequency, delivery, realism, and lower costs. Two reports commissioned by my Office reviewed nearly 100 models, simulations and games, and these reports are available to federal, state and local users of our Secure Portal.

The real value of exercises – and a difficult challenge -- is in the identification and correction of weaknesses in our performance. We have established a national network of Lessons Learned and Best Practices for emergency response providers and homeland security officials. This “Lessons Learned Information Sharing” system was developed by our partners at the Oklahoma Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism, is hosted on our secure but unclassified web portal, and is designed to share information necessary to prevent and respond to acts of terrorism across all disciplines and communities throughout the United States. All users are verified emergency response providers and homeland security officials at the local, state, and federal levels. We employ strong encryption and active site monitoring to protect all information housed on the system. Most importantly, the content is validated by homeland security professionals for their peers. The site also houses an extensive catalog of after-action reports from exercises and actual incidents as well as an updated list of homeland security exercises, events, and conferences.

Today's multimedia presentation will complete the portrait of the homeland security community's exercise efforts at every level of government – efforts that improve with every exercise. Your committee's support of these programs contributes to our readiness every day across this great nation.

In closing, I'd like to offer a premier illustration of the value of exercises to our nation's preparedness. In 1997, New York City began a rigorous series of exercises focused on the terrorist threat. Our office, along with other federal partners, was privileged to assist in these efforts. On the morning of September 11th, 2001, one of our exercise teams was in New York City preparing to assist Mayor Guiliani and his team in conduct of a full-scale bioterrorism exercise scheduled for September 12<sup>th</sup>. This exercise would have involved upwards of 700 police officers and firefighters. The exercise venue, Pier 92, became the alternate City emergency operations center when Tower 7 of the Trade Center was made untenable by the attack. Mayor Guiliani later described what a robust exercise program meant to the City: "We did not anticipate that airliners would be commandeered and turned into guided missiles; but the fact that we practiced for other kinds of disasters made us far more prepared to handle a catastrophe that nobody envisioned."

Let me re-state Secretary Ridge's and my commitment to exercises as a cornerstone of America's homeland security preparedness. There are no stronger proponents than the President and the Secretary for the utility and versatility of exercises in improving domestic incident management. This concludes my statement. I will be happy to respond to any questions that you and the members of the Committee may have following our multimedia presentation. Thank you.