

**Testimony**  
**Eric E. Holdeman, Director, King County Office of Emergency**  
**Management**  
**To**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Homeland Security Committee**  
**May 9, 2006**  
**Amending the Homeland Security Act of 2002**

- Mr. Chairman and other members, for the record I am Eric Holdeman, Director for the King County Office of Emergency Management. A position that I've held for the past ten years.
- I would like to express my overall support for this bill. While there are many provisions in the legislation there are four that are critically important to improving our nation's collective ability to respond.
  - Combining, once again, the function of emergency preparedness with that of disaster response and recovery.
  - Establishing Homeland Security Regional Offices
  - Supporting an "All-Hazards" approach to funding emergency management and disaster preparedness
  - Retaining the name of FEMA as defining the Federal emergency management agency for the nation.
- First of all there is the reuniting of emergency preparedness, with disaster response and recovery into the same organization.

- Disaster Preparedness is the foundation for disaster response. What you do to prepare for disasters by planning, training and exercising will set the tone for your capability to respond collectively when disasters do strike.
- We have seen what the impact was of taking disaster preparedness away from FEMA. While it was not made official until the Fall of 2005, in essence FEMA has not had the emergency preparedness function for the last five years. Having both functions placed under the control of the Under Secretary for Emergency Management will measurably strengthen our disaster response capabilities. This is one of those times where the placement of the agency on the organization chart does make a significant difference.
- Secondly, I have been saying for a long time that the one single step that the Federal government can do to quickly improve the nation's ability to respond to disasters is to establish Homeland Security Regional Offices. Without these offices there has been "No One, that is No One" to coordinate the multiple Federal agency regional efforts in disaster preparedness, and no one in the regions of this nation to work with State Emergency Management Offices, or like in my case major metropolitan areas. Without FEMA Regional Offices being empowered to perform this function (FEMA Region X is only 20 miles from my office) our ability to interact with a coordinated Federal agency effort has been eliminated. This legislation fixes that issue and provides for regional offices dedicated to the effort of coordinating and facilitating our Federal, State and Local efforts in preparing for disasters, and providing for a more effective response when disasters do strike.

- Thirdly, taking an “All-Hazards” approach to disaster preparedness has proven over time to be the best way to maximize scarce financial resources and minimize the risk to regions by being prepared for a broad spectrum of disasters. This legislation in many places uses language such as “Terrorism, natural disasters and other emergencies.” The Senate recently recommended taking an “All-Hazards Plus” approach to emergency management, which I tend to agree with. What I can tell you is that in section 521. Office of Grants and Planning, there is no reference to natural disasters or all-hazards! The bill’s language in paragraph c, Responsibilities, sub-paragraph (1) states that grants are to be used is only for funding counter terrorism functions. **This must be changed when you mark up this bill.** I know from personal experience that if you don’t change this language our ability to take a broad based approach to protecting our communities will be significantly diminished.
- And, retaining the name of FEMA. I recognize that there have been calls, most recently by the U.S. Senate, to do away with the FEMA name and establish a new organization to replace it. Well, there is no replacing the functions of FEMA, they must continue if we are to once again have an effective Federal disaster agency. If you recall years ago when the Chrysler Corporation had a problem and it was on the financial ropes. Lee Iacoca did not come in and say we are going to fix the problem at Chrysler by changing our name. No, he fixed the problem by rolling out improved products in the form of better automobiles. We need to fix the FEMA product, not the FEMA name.
- Lastly, I call on my peers in State and Local Emergency Management Offices across this great land to get behind this bill. As I stated before, it is not perfect, but we need something now. Don’t let an attempt at trying to come up

with a perfect piece of legislation become the enemy of doing something good. Implementing this legislation will not change things overnight. But, the sooner we reunite disaster preparedness and response, and establish Regional Homeland Security Offices, fund an “All-Hazards” approach to disaster preparedness, and decide to keep the FEMA name, the sooner we will be on a path to a more disaster resilient America.

- While I have additional recommendations for this legislation, you can read them in my attached written testimony.
- Thank you for this opportunity to testify, and I look forward to any questions that you might have.

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**Written Testimony**  
**[continued]**

The following are additional items of concern:

1. New funding needs to be provided to accomplish the organizational changes proposed by this legislation. One of the reasons for the poor showing by FEMA and DHS was that the new organization was enabled, but not financed. This led to robbing agencies like FEMA of resources (FEMA staff called it the DHS Tax) in order to fund the reorganization.
2. The new Regional Homeland Security Offices are given a year to be established. Since these are being based upon existing FEMA Regional Offices, there is no reason that improved preparedness cannot be “jump started” by requiring these Regional Offices to be established within six months of this legislation.
3. It is noted that Regional Councils are to be established in each region. I saw no mention of Department of Justice (DOJ) agencies, like the FBI being included in these Regional Councils. In order to bring about a better coordinated Federal response, DOJ needs to be a required/invited partner in these councils. Would you consider adding a position for “media” to the councils?
4. The Top Officials (TOPOFF) Exercises that are required by this legislation need additional legislative guidance. This must include that these exercises and the preparations for them will specifically address “unity of command” issues. In following NIMS, they should require the use of either “Unified Command,” “Area Command” and Multi-agency Coordination Center (MACC) concepts that go beyond the incident site and first responder organizations, to include the multi-jurisdictional and political players. This is needed so that they learn to work with one another in a coordinated fashion. Just recall how ugly the dialog was between the city, state and federal political leaders during and after Katrina.
5. These TOPOFF exercises should not be seen as “demonstrations” of how good we are, and not as “tests” to dissect the players and their performance, but as training events from which much good can come if we follow-up on what we’ve learned. Therefore the emphasis on these exercises should continue post exercise, with the Federal government (led by Regional HLS

Offices) being required to develop action plans to fix the issues discovered during the exercises, and follow through on these plans.

6. One of the recommendations that has never been acted upon concerning TOPOFF Exercises is incorporating the media into them as players. If we are to counter the terrorist's goals of influencing public opinion, and then public policy, we need to also plan, train and exercise with our local and regional media partners.
7. Sec. 524 Catastrophic Planning. Must include language that requires states and urban areas to establish direction and control methodologies that support Unified Command at the political level (see item 4 above). If you don't require this type of planning, it will not get done. People want to avoid conflict and are unwilling to take on the tough planning issues like, "who is in charge?"
8. Much has been said about promoting the use of best practices and requiring states and local jurisdictions to use them. If this is to remain, then there needs to be a central repository for Best Practices. I would suggest using the Lessons Learned Information Sharing ([www.llis.gov](http://www.llis.gov)). This is already a DHS sponsored effort and they have an extremely good methodology for documenting best practices.
9. Disaster public education is barely mentioned in the legislation. Yet, it is the corner stone of a jurisdiction's ability to be able to weather a disaster. If the general public are not prepared for disasters, then the corner stone becomes a mill stone hung around our necks as we are thrown into the flood waters. Again, recall Katrina and how unprepared people dragged the rest of the response down the drain. Dedicated funding is needed for this task, and it is normally poorly funded because there is no significant emphasis on it by DHS. Look at how the homeland security funding has been spent at the state and local levels. In King County I have fought for public education funding, but collectively we have spent \$20M on equipment and only \$1.5M on public education in all its forms—even in a proactive community!
10. The benefits of Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS) are generally confined to the city limits of the cities that receive the funding. If you want to expand the regional benefit of MMRS, the program should be expanded to function like Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grants. That is, there should be a joint management of funds and projects with a Core County and adjacent counties participating in the MMRS program. Such an approach has greatly aided the functioning of the urban area initiative.
11. Critical infrastructure has not been previously addressed in any significant and meaningful manner by DHS. In particular the interdependencies that we know exist between critical infrastructures needs more attention at the national level. Our experience with the Blue Cascade Exercise series has shown the value of working the critical infrastructure interdependencies issue.