

**Natural Hazards Workshop  
Boulder Colorado  
July 10-12, 2006**

I was able to attend the 2006 Natural Hazards Workshop that is held annually in Boulder, Colorado. This was the largest and most attended workshop held to date with 440 attendees. There was a diverse geographical audience with some international representatives. There is a heavy presence of researchers and academics in attendance with a sprinkling of emergency management practitioners. Since the hotel I was staying in was some distance from the conference site I did not have my laptop available for taking notes during the sessions. My notes from this year are consequently a bit truncated.

**Plenary:** One of the interesting things about this workshop is that they spend the first hour of the event with folks each standing up and introducing themselves. Name, organization and if you had a job to offer or were looking for a job is allowed to be stated. It does allow attendees to understand who all is in attendance and to put a name with a face. This session allowed me to connect with several representatives later in the event.

**Keynote: Margareta Walstrom, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.** Political will is there to respond to the issue of disasters, but leadership is lacking. Clearly media attention to disasters garners the support needed to respond. Over 500 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) responded to the Tsunami event in a totally uncoordinated manner. It is afterwards that the recovery drags and people become disinterested. She noted that 75% of the world's population lives in areas that can be impacted by disasters. There is now a global consensus on Global Warming. The facts are there, so how do we now respond as a global community.

**Plenary #1: Paul Farmer, American Planning Association.** Disasters don't seem to make us any smarter. Money and political will flow for a period of time. Values don't change after a disaster. If you thought Charter Schools were the answer before the hurricane, then after the hurricane you think Charter Schools are the answer. It is easier for government to fail than it is for it to succeed in a post disaster environment. Entire state economies were destroyed. Neither state had a state-wide building code. There is further curtailment due to the eminent domain movement happening in the nation. The FEMA we all knew did not show up. Too many political cronies had been appointed. New Orleans had a dysfunctional government before the disaster. Still—in May of this year the Mayor had not had an appointment with his Planning Director. In New Orleans, of the 22,000 businesses impacted by the disaster only 2% are back in operation. Investor confidence needs to be restored. Leaders need to be honest with their constituents. New Orleans will be a smaller city. Before the disaster the city had

a planning department of 24 people. Today is has a department of eight, with half of those being professional staff. A department of 65 is needed for the task ahead of them.

**Shirley Laska, University of New Orleans:** With good sciences you do have good predictive capacity. During the recovery you need to select companies that are part of the regional community and not external. She gave an example of “Blue Tarp” installation rates. Sorry I missed the big number but it was very high-\$50-80. In the end the company actually subcontracted to nail the tarp to the roof was getting \$2.00 a square foot. She expects the new population of New Orleans to be around 230,000. During the recovery you need to pay attention to the cultural rituals. For New Orleans it was music that helped bond the people to their community.

**Victoria Salinas, FEMA/Gulf coast Recovery Office:** She is a Special Assistant to ESF-14. Their duties include support of local and state efforts and to coordinate federal efforts. For long term community recovery see [www.louisianaspeaks.org](http://www.louisianaspeaks.org) There was a tension between the Joint Field Office (JFO) and the recovery effort. Working between the states is an issue. They are working to rebuild a partnership with the City of New Orleans.

**Gavin Smith, Mississippi Governor’s Office of Recovery and Renewal:** A direct alignment with the chief elected official is key. There are 7,300 300-400 square foot travel trailers deployed with people living in them. They believe they need temporary kit-modular housing vs. trailers. In planning he said, “Make no small plans!”

### **Concurrent Session—Leadership in Disasters:**

**William Carwile, Naval Postgraduate School:** You can’t lump all the states in Katrina together. Mississippi did not have the same problems as Louisiana. Alabama and Mississippi had a wind and surge event. Leadership is a challenge in our federalist form of government. There is a requirement for delegation of authority based on well understood systems (NIMS). He noted that in many areas of the country the National Incident Management System (NIMS) is not being implemented or followed. Unified Command is key. You need to set common objectives and retain jurisdictional control. He believes in credentialing and typing leaders. You need access to the chief elected official if you are going to be successful.

**Frances Edwards, San Jose State University:** All disasters are local [I would add and regional]. There are 82,000 local governments in the USA. Homeland Security (HLS) is a subset of emergency management. The mitigation focus of today has a prevention/terrorism focus, which is not the same. She believes that students today should get degrees in political science with a minor or emphasis

in emergency management since there are not enough jobs out there for someone who had just specialized in emergency management.

**Richard Rotanz, Nassau County Office of Emergency Management:** The New York City Office of Emergency Management (OEM) has a staff of 50 and he believes they need an additional 50. Few counties in New York State have full time emergency managers. We have a bureaucratic system here in the USA. There are the complexities of the federal system to deal with. Access to the person in charge is important for the emergency manager. The education system is building, but not there yet.

**Steven Sellers, California Governor's Office of Emergency Services:** The emergency manager of today needs multiple levels of experience. Interpersonal skills and the ability to influence others due to only having indirect authority is critical. Professional organizations need to exert influence with their legislatures. You need to recruit people into emergency management who are interested in making a difference.

**Patrick Leahy, Acting Director, U.S. Geological Survey, Keynote address, July 11<sup>th</sup>:**

There is a need for natural science. The USA is second only to Japan in economic impact from disasters. The number of Category 3 hurricanes has doubled in recent years. He noted that even the USGS was out rescuing victims of Katrina in New Orleans. The role of science is changing. The stakeholder is involved earlier and often during research, not just at the end. For Southern California they have an annualized economic loss of \$3B. He believes in more risk reduction efforts via use of scenarios. Don't confuse scenarios with exercises/drills. He believes that they can not predict aftershocks that follow after earthquakes. He sees the USGS not as just a scientific endeavor, but rather a s critical to public safety and business continuity.

**Plenary #2, Grand Challenges for Disaster Reduction:**

In this summary I'll mix the remarks of all the participants together [I didn't keep good enough notes].

We need to provide hazard and disaster information where and when it is needed. There is a need for real time information before and during disasters. Technology in a vacuum saves no one. Shake maps are now available as on overlay on Google Earth. For hurricanes the tracking system is much better. Figuring out and predicting intensity is much harder. Note the smaller the eye of the hurricane, the more intensity and impact there will be. We need more resilient structures for natural disasters. There will be \$1B and \$500M available for post disaster mitigation in Louisiana and Mississippi respectively. We need to better quantify the benefits of mitigation. There was a \$6-10B business loss due to the August 2003 blackout. Since then reliability standards were established. Check out [www.americanlifelinesalliance.org](http://www.americanlifelinesalliance.org) for a conference in October. Creating risk

assessments to compare disaster statistics is needed. We need to monitor what is going right and what needs improvement. Then we need to communicate findings and make knowledgeable changes.

**Dennis Mileti, Natural Hazards Center:** We are choosing not to pursue natural hazards as a nation. What we are doing, we are doing in a splintered way. Leadership is needed. We need to educate the public about hazards and risks. We should match our efforts to the risks. Economic incentives are needed. We need to be comprehensive and more innovated in our approaches.

### **Concurrent Session—Disaster Journalism Roles, Ratings and Responsibilities:**

Journalism is a public trust. There is a warning role. Needs to be coordinated with the National Weather Service. Need to use language that is not scientific. During disasters the normal check and balances in the newsroom can go by the wayside because of staff shortages or logistics. The media and government have the same responsibilities: save lives and protect property.

**Amanda Ripley, Time Magazine:** She is writing a book. She asked, “Why are reporters such morons?” Don’t assume that reporters know anything more than the average citizen. How can we educate them? Go educate them at their offices! Consider “Embedding Reporters [note: FEMA has OK’d embedding reporters with the Urban Search and Rescue Teams]. She made the point of saying that you should not let the public relations people run the show. Her experience with such folks in Katrina was poor. Remember with the internet there are hourly deadlines today.

**Pandemic Flu Session:** Just my commentary here. I was surprised at the lack of knowledge and action by the people in attendance at this session. I also noted that the panelists illustrated the need for better coordination of the message between the levels of government. In several instances I noted information that was contradictory to what I’ve been able to learn from studying the subject.

**Plenary #3:** The state of Federal Emergency Management: I served on a panel with Michael Brown, former FEMA Director and Craig Fugate, Director, Florida Division of Emergency Management. A copy of my comments for this session are below.

**Remarks**  
**Natural Hazards Conference, Boulder**  
**Future of the Federal Emergency Management System**  
**August 12, 2006**

- Prefer the canoe approach over the row boat approach to looking at the future.
- Future of EM at the Federal level difficult to predict due to the political aspects surrounding this issue
- Three courses of action-Near term
  - House is either:
    - Return FEMA to its former self
    - Keep FEMA in DHS, return Preparedness to FEMA
  - Senate: Make a whole new organization. Do away with the FEMA name (United States Emergency Management Authority (US-EMA, USE-ME)
    - Senate just passed amendment to HLS Appropriations Bill, keeping FEMA in DHS.
- Believe that FEMA needs to stay in DHS. Cannot turn back the clock. Too much water has gone over the dam to go back in time. We have moved on, and DHS is going to remain. I do believe in an all-hazards system and separating FEMA from DHS would further strangle natural hazards efforts. Quote: Senate Bill.
- Keep the four phases of emergency management. Prevention almost replaced mitigation in the lexicon of what you do before a disaster.
  - Do not expect a return to a mitigation emphasis, until:
    - There are repeated examples of systems failure like we saw in Katrina. Lesson's Observed vs learned.
    - Or, there is new leadership (regime change)
- Conflict and tension. We are seeing the clash between political philosophy and facts—which is the realm of science and I think that is what is causing most of your personal frustration. As we have seen, political philosophies do not have to be based on science or economics.
- Leadership is the next topic.
  - Great session here on Monday on this topic
  - Who makes the best emergency managers
    - PhD in EM

- Mix of knowledge and skills
      - Inter-personal skills
      - Ability to lead with no direct authority
      - Cannot be a large city emergency manager
    - Experience (wisdom) from making mistakes
      - When to activate the EOC
      - Mistakes in doing warnings
      - Knowing the first report is almost wrong
      - When the boss doesn't ask any questions, it means the lights are on, but no one is home.
    - Hire someone with a record of success, but not a guarantee of future success
    - James Lee Witt's success—not necessarily predictable
  - The military should not be in charge
    - Posse Comitatus (spelling?)-needs to stay
    - Editorialize: U.S. Army is wore out, both equipment and personnel.
    - Short 3,000 captains-the building block of leadership
    - Army is half of the size of what it was 15 years ago in 1991
    - Many soldiers have seen more combat than most in WWII.
- Reuniting preparedness with FEMA is a given
  - Taking away preparedness in the Stage II Review is what caused me to write the Washington Post Op-ed Destroying FEMA
- I believe in regional offices for FEMA.
  - Worked extensively with both FEMA Regions V and X
  - It is this regional perspective that is currently being ignored that is the single action that could immediately improve our national disaster preparedness system.
  - Response and Recovery flow out of preparedness and joint preparations.
  - We are currently wasting a great asset in the ten FEMA Regional offices.
  - My fear is that the institutional knowledge in regions is dwindling as people retire and take other positions in government.
  - It takes much longer to build or rebuild an organization than it takes to destroy it.