



DRCA Meeting with FEMA Recovery

FEMA-HQ 500 C Street SW, Washington, DC

1-2pm, Tuesday, March 8th, 2022

FEMA Attendees:

- Doctor Melissa Forbes, FEMA Assistant Administrator Recovery
- Colt Hagmaier, FEMA's Deputy Assistant Administrator Recovery
- Ana Montero, Director FEMA Public Assistance Division

DRCA Attendees:

- Casey Long, Managing Director, DRCA
- Lisa Miller, DRCA (via conference)
- Tom Schweitzer, Vice President Civilian Programs, Atkins Global
- James Joseph, Chief of Staff, Tidal Basin Group
- Carlos Castillo, Chief Development Officer, Tidal Basin Group
- Billy Sullivan, President, SLSCO
- John Sullivan, President, DRC
- David Venables, National Account Manager, Lowe's Companies Inc.
- Andy Robinson, Senior Advisor and Vice President, Resilience & Disaster Recovery Practice, Hill International
- Bob Caudle, Director Government Sales, United Rentals
- Jon Hoyle, President, Thompson Consulting
- Ed Jackson, Director Federal Solutions and Technology, Jacobs
- John Buri, Director, Post-Disaster Programs, Tetra Tech
- Tom Lewis, Climate Resilience & Sustainability National Business Line Executive, WSP

FEMA Meeting Agenda:

- 1:00-1:05pm General Introductions
- 1:05-1:10pm DRCA Overview, Casey Long
- 1:10-1:20pm Ask FEMA to provide an overview of their Recovery current priorities & initiatives
- 1:20-1:37pm Discussion of FEMA Policy Interpretation at HQ vs. Regions
 - FEMA HQ vs. Regional Inconsistencies, Carlos Castillo (*perspective having been the Recovery Director and now working in private sector*)
 - Impact on State and local governments & the private sector, John Buri & James Joseph (*former FEMA Regional Administrator*)
 - Examples of the impact inconsistent FEMA policy determinations make in the debris industry, Jon Hoyle & John Sullivan
- 1:45-2:12pm Equity in Emergency Management, David Venables, Billy Sullivan, Tom Lewis & Andy Robinson
 - Discussion of how DRCA can help FEMA achieve one of its primary goals laid out in the new Strategic Plan. To provide equity in emergency management and improve services in under-served communities (we can use the DRCA White Paper as framework for discussion), Andy Robinson & Tom Lewis
 - Using examples from the industry, discuss how a Federal Direct Housing Repair Program (new version of STEP) can help drive equity in EM, Billy Sullivan & David Venables
- 2:12-2:15pm Next Steps & Closing Comments

FEMA Meeting Agenda:

- DRCA Overview & General Introductions – Casey started the meeting with a DRCA introduction ...who we are and what we do. Stressed that we provide a broad view on Disaster Recovery and implementation and look forward to being a resource for FEMA.



- Ask FEMA to provide an overview of their Recovery current priorities & initiatives, Doctor Melissa Forbes & Colt Hagmaier...Casey asked them what they are focused on and to speak to their priorities heading into hurricane season.

Melissa Forbes: Equity, Climate Resiliency are important components of FEMA's new Strategic Plan. We are doing a lot of work on housing. How we might reimagine direct housing. Evaluating what is working and not in housing...looking at the national model.

Casey Long: Discussed the FDEM summit. Templates for the PA program and eliminate the appeals. Discussed Kevin Guthrie's discussion with FEMA about this project. He referenced our work on disaster housing with Texas GLO and Casey Tingle with LA GOHSEP.

- Discussion of FEMA Policy Interpretation at HQ vs. Regions
 - o FEMA HQ vs. Regional Inconsistencies, Carlos Castillo (*perspective having been the Recovery Director and now working in private sector*)
 - o Impact on State and local governments & the private sector, John Buri & James Joseph (*former FEMA Regional Administrator*)
 - o Examples of the impact inconsistent FEMA policy determinations make in the debris industry, Jon Hoyle & John Sullivan

Casey Long: We are not here to complain as this is a long-standing issue, we all struggle with. Carlos discussed his work with FEMA, and he vouches they have the toughest position at FEMA. In any organization, from HQ on down there are different interpretations... Carlos advises that FEMA's rules can't be black and white because they don't fit every situation. Is there a way we can help with these interpretations? We deal with it as best we can, and we are hoping to standardize as much as possible.

Melissa Forbes: Are you tracking the new PA National Model? Most of what FEMA does is recovery and the FCO's don't have the programmatic knowledge. Keith is heading that up. Keith Turi is at CISA doing other works and that would be a good conversation for DRCA to have with Keith Turi.

Keith Turi is now heading up field leadership. Tom McCool is heading things up while Keith is currently deployed to CISA. The goal is to elevate the FCO position and make them very recovery focused. The state and local level recovery is the least understood phase.

James Joseph: Things happen so fast and evolve and there are different rules ...from a county director, a FEMA Regional Administrator (RA), etc. As a county person, I relied on what FEMA told me. One of the greatest consistencies was when everyone had the COVID issues. As you have the trainings for the states, it would be good if DRCA could be included. Or, perhaps have a separate one for DRCA.

Jon Buri: 70% of the states have technical service assistance providers. When there is rule that is in place for several years, it would be helpful if the consistency of the rule maintains. FEMA has made PA improvements in the last 4 years, and it has been remarkable. The COVID clarification has been amazing. DRCA has process improvement nerds and we are interested in taking lessons learned from COVID. It would be great to look at how each region engages with the CRC. That will help us know how the locals experience the CRC process.

Andy Robinson: Agree and stated that we are asking for consistency...helps a lot.

Melissa Forbes: We concur. Everyone loves consistency. There are interesting dynamics in disasters and there is a balance between consistency and flexibility.



John Sullivan: We are the people doing the work. We are the ones financing the event. We did the vast majority of Ida cleanup and we have been maybe paid 10%. Something has gone awry in the past two years. Folks are overworked and because people are not meeting in person and our states are not feeling the sense of urgency to process these payments. FEMA is getting involved in the audits prior to payments being made. I am not sure where that directive came. That's why we need to be a part of the working groups. Our customers don't know the rules as well as we do, and we don't know them as well as FEMA does.

Jon Hoyle: One of the things we see when there is inconsistency is there can be an interpretation by an FCO, and it impacts all the monitors and haulers. There is not an off ramp so we can step back... These inconsistencies wind up in appeals that costs us \$500k and up in resources to work on these appeals. How do we break down the barrier and take out the contention? We want to say that the position is how it has been handled in the past. But often times it is how a single word is read in a sentence. Our customers ask why it has to go to appeal. We think we can help address these issues early on if we can continue our relationship with FEMA HQ. We have had some meetings with Keith Turi, and we want to find out how we get support to resolve these differences.

Melissa Forbes: Can you give any specific examples? That would be helpful.

Jon Hoyle: Leaners & hangers are a good example in AL. Digital photos help in the past and now the Alabaman FEMA officials are the only ones saying the y want this and that specificity. It appears the Alabama official involved isn't looking at how these debris hauler/monitors have been settled in the past. If you read the guidelines, it says the photos "and" versus "or"...We want to know so we can push out accurate information.

Casey Long: It's important to us to try to educate the private sector on FEMA policy. We want to make sure we're pushing out accurate, up to date policy information so the more FEMA can share with us, the better informed our membership and the private sector will be. Our members represent a significant amount of the recovery work that takes place so we can help.

John Sullivan: Mobile and surrounding counties....we follow our customers who bring issues to the state, and the state brings them to FEMA region. Once we (as a contractor) bring it to the county, we realize the counties aren't ready for the fight. Often the state will tell the county to bring the issue to the region and the state won't engage.

Louisiana had a pre-bid DOT meeting, and they said the debris contractor goes with the debris monitor so that the monitor can review all the pictures so they can review the pictures. That isn't workable for a truck driver with a chainsaw in their hands to do this. The hauler can't make sure the monitor is taking the right picture. There's just no way...more accidents will happen and will take a longer time to clear the debris. We need someone at the region or HQ so that we have someone reasonable to talk to.

Casey Long: DRCA co-hosted a Debris Summit with Tony Robinson in FEMA Region 6 a few years ago it was very effective and helpful in working through some challenging issues. We would welcome the opportunity to do summits or working groups with other FEMA Regions or with HQ.

Colt Hagmaier: Asked why debris removal pricing (per cubic yard) changed in recent disasters when pre-event contracts with agreed upon pricing were already in place.

John Sullivan: A lot of that is a myth. Dirt hauling equipment can't haul debris anymore. There was discussion with rates going out of control. The industry and the market learned was that the low bid was not the *right* contractor. We have worked to educate the clients that low bid doesn't mean best value. Some South Florida locals have changed their focus on price alone. Too often, smaller communities use the local landscaper and it's



not enough to get the job done. We have seen a price slide by a magnitude of three-fold. During Katrina, the pricing was at \$24-25 and now pricing is down to the \$7 range. The price of doing business is going up and prices are decreasing to the hauler.

John Sullivan: Urge the qualified bidder and not the low bid. Unqualified folks get these bids, and the ecosystem gets out of whack. I can tell you where it started and go from there.

- Equity in Emergency Management, **David Venables, Billy Sullivan, Tom Lewis & Andy Robinson**
 - o Discussion of how DRCA can help FEMA achieve one of its primary goals laid out in the new Strategic Plan. To provide equity in emergency management and improve services in under-served communities (we can use the DRCA White Paper as framework for discussion), **Andy Robinson & Tom Lewis**
 - o Using examples from the industry, discuss how a Federal Direct Housing Repair Program (new version of STEP) can help drive equity in EM, **Billy Sullivan & David Venables**

Casey Long: Discussed how DRCA can support FEMA in helping them to meeting one of their primary objectives laid out in their new 2022 – 2026 Strategic Plan. The mission is to provide Equity in disaster recovery particularly to underserved communities.

Andy Robinson: We visited with HUD, FEMA and Army Corps and there was a common theme. I have experience with tribal. There was \$20 million targeted to tribes for BRIC . If you look at the 574 tribes and that is a 6% response rate. We do work with the tribes. They don't understand the relationship to what they are building to resiliency. We need to help them to understand these areas to access these areas.

Tom Lewis: Very broad complex topic. He discussed BRIC: Justice40 is a big thing. Pilot program and we can discuss with others you recommend. We have collective experience...neighborhood to neighborhood and there is confusion. We met with HUD, and we need to understand how we can be better. Often times, when their area gets devastated, nice new condos are built and those affected have no idea on how to bring their voice. Love to have future conversation on how to help them with their voice.

Billy Sullivan: our company has done a variety of FEMA housing , working for FEMA or the states. Every storm is different, and every housing recovery model is different. We worked in Hurricane Sandy as a rapid repair program. Then we went to Maria – USVI and PR. My recommendation there needs to be a tool in the toolkit – there's MHUs and whole the STEP program had issues, but at its core it was a great idea. It may have been too broad. It may not be reconstituted but if there was direct housing mission beyond step, we need to look at. We call it HELP – Housing Equity Living Program. The idea is that the states could lead it and FEMA could back it. People with means they can recover quickly. If there was a problem put in place, there would be faster and cheaper recovery. In the end result, it would save the government money in the future. In LA, 21 days after the flood the first house was started. Fairly defined scope and they stopped the scope. When left the homeowner they had a safe place to sleep, get their kids ready for school and get ready for their jobs. May not have had cabinets.

David Venables: One of the largest inequities in recovery is in housing. If you don't have access to resources, it could be years to recover. We are working in a typical community that may be the hardest hit and the hardest to recover.

Andy Robinson: Short-term temporary and long-term permanent

Melissa Forbes: Have you talked to HUD?

Casey Long: Yes, we're working with Janet Golrick at HUD on disaster housing issues.



Carlos Castillo: I think the only way to accomplish this is to put FEMA and HUD together. There is something needing to be done but the concept that STEP brought. Is there a disaster housing program?

Melissa Forbes: Looking at it slightly different. Definitely part of the conversation. Can we do direct repair? We currently can't do that. **We want direct housing reimagined.** From a resilience perspective should we be offering more survivor choice. As part of reimagining direct housing and look at the resilience. We need to rebuild stronger.

Andy Robinson: The Corps has a handle on these issues, and they have come up with "Defend, Adapt or Retreat." Before going back to rebuild like before.

James Joseph: There always will be local political pressure. We're concerned that is a STEP type program is done hastily in response to political pressure, there will be problems an audit 2-3 years after the program. We want to be a resource and be a voice of support in developing a new and improved version of STEP.

Tom Lewis: The tip of the spear is the federal funding and the focus on equity with HUD and other agencies.

Carlos Castillo: After Katrina, residents were offered to move anywhere in the country. And most didn't take the offer. Just the fact at COVID times, the local emergency VOAD or emergency managers are dealing with the unmet needs.

Melissa Forbes: I understand why they didn't. I told Janet these folks have vouchers...they will wait for a 408 solution and won't use their voucher. This not a one size fits all. We are actively talking to Janet. HUD has a lot less capacity in terms of horsepower.

Billy Sullivan: 0 to 2 years for FEMA and CDBG is 2 years forward. That is not right. The way we make that happen is to bring FEMA and HUD together re: housing. It's difficult to install a trailer to replace their home and the resident says thank you and they say, "what's next" and we tell them to just wait and not a good feeling. So much better to look at housing programs on a macro basis. We should find a way to make the Stafford Act meet HUD in the middle!

- **Next Steps & Closing Comments**

Casey Long: We're pretty good at identifying obstacles and challenges and then making specific recommendations to improve recovery efforts. We look forward to developing a strong working relationship with you. Casey referenced the Disaster Recovery Reform Act and the fact that the bill would require HUD to develop a permanent office to coordinate disaster housing efforts across the Federal Government (FEMA included).

We left hard copies of the following doc. at the end of the meeting:

- 1 pg. DRCA Overview
- DRCA Equity Doc.
- DRCA Housing White Paper & Exec. Summary
- Press Release on Disaster Recovery Reform Act