

Major General Stanhope S. Spears  
Opening Remarks  
to the  
United States Senate  
Subcommittee on Disaster Detection and Prevention  
May 24, 2006

Good afternoon.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of this subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon on this matter of extreme importance.

Though my remarks will have a South Carolina slant to them, I think you'll find they are relevant to all of the States. The National Guard across the country has been extremely busy preparing for this year's hurricane season. States directly impacted by hurricanes understand their responsibility to help their neighbors in need. Moreover, we all understand that the preparations we make for hurricanes also affects how we would deal with other emergency situations -- whether man-made, natural or the act of terrorism.

Although the National Guard in the states directly impacted by Katrina, with considerable support from other states, responded decisively and effectively, the scale of that disaster highlighted significant shortcomings in the Nation's emergency response including the use of the National Guard and the active military.

One of the key lessons learned involves command-and-control issues. Military support to civil authorities is just that-- state and local authorities are in charge. The military is there to support, not take charge. The challenge is to ensure unity of effort among federal, state, and local agencies along with nongovernmental and private voluntary organizations, such as the Red Cross and Salvation Army.

Unity of effort requires the ability to communicate in a timely, effective manner horizontally and vertically and develop a common operating picture among all agencies. In my opinion, the National Guard can be a key enabler to ensuring that unity of effort. We can bring communications equipment to multiple incident sites that enables first responders to communicate with each other and the military over disparate radio systems, example, 800 Mega Hertz, UHF, VHF, HAM Radios. This equipment allows all systems to intercommunicate. National Guard Bureau has purchased a limited number of systems that provide this unique capability. The latest version is called the Joint Incident Site Communications Capability and was first fielded by the South Carolina National Guard in 2005. We will be demonstrating this system in Charleston next month and I invite you to attend.

In addition to communication support, the Guard can bring very significant capabilities to support civil authorities. These include security forces, engineers, transportation, logistical support, and rural search and rescue.

Is the National Guard ready? I can only speak for the South Carolina National Guard and the answer to that is yes. Certainly, overseas deployments have stressed our force, but even when we peaked with over 4000 South Carolina Army National Guard Soldiers mobilized in 2004, we had sufficient strength and equipment available in South Carolina to meet all our State's emergency contingency plans.

Are our Soldiers and Airmen ready? You bet! One of the major reasons young people join the National Guard is to be there in times of emergencies that affect their neighbors, friends and families.

While we have not had any "war stoppers" when it comes to equipment for natural disasters in South Carolina, the question that we can't answer is "how much is enough?" How many electrical generators will we be asked to supply? How many helicopters will be needed for search and rescue? How many off-road trucks will be required to deliver potable water, food, clothing, medical supplies and other commodities to hard to reach areas? Moreover, many other National Guard States have critical shortages of authorized equipment. Those questions unfortunately cannot be answered prior to the impact of the event. The bottom-line is "The Guard is Prepared"

I again thank you for this opportunity, and look forward to addressing your questions.