



# PASCO COUNTY, FLORIDA

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*"Bringing Opportunities Home"*

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First Responder Technologies: Ensuring a prioritized approach for Homeland Security Research and Development joint hearing

Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the invitation to testify today in your joint hearing on first responder technologies. Your focus on ensuring a prioritized approach for Homeland Security Research and Development resonates with me and I hope that my testimony assists you towards that end.

I realize that this committee has probably seen some very tangible work accomplished by the universities and private sector institutes funded through the Science and Technology Directorate. Through conversations with my new-hires, guys who worked CBRNE in the Air Force and Army up until a few months ago, I understand that the Department of Defense saw an increase in the quality and quantity of Personal Protective Equipment and response equipment over the last 10 years. They also experienced strengthened relationships with Research & Development entities and labs that support testing and analysis. I also know that the placement of the very competent and well equipped WMD-CSTs (civilian support teams) in local communities was a positive forward movement in support of local response. The experiences of federal representatives working with and within the S&T directorate, members of the military, and the faculty at funded universities and staff of national labs is not the experience of local responders. My perspective is limited to the outcomes of Homeland Security initiatives at the local level.

In the realm of *Emergency Preparedness* gains have been made within the area of training through the National Domestic Preparedness Consortium facilities like the Center for Domestic Preparedness at Ft. McClellan in Anniston, AL, the Energetic Materials Research and Testing Center at New Mexico Tech, the National Center for Biomedical Research and Training at Louisiana State University, and the Texas Engineering Extension Service. This training has become a cornerstone of common knowledge building for the local response community. I've seen the consortium grow and I've watched as more and more local folk become aware of the training opportunities offered through it. I've personally put SHSGP funds to good use to support training of local responders through the consortium and I've seen other local governments do the same. I find that resident training at these facilities is more effective than attempts to provide the same training through mobile delivery within local communities. Support for local responders to attend training at Consortium facilities should be the emphasis for future capability building. A significant effort to promoting participation and educate local communities about the value of this training would further the agenda that asks us to standardize

our approach towards emergency response. Careful oversight that focuses on the quality of instruction and gauging the depth of knowledge built through consortium training will help justify the need to have local responders leave their own communities for this training. A few weeks ago, Sheriff Chris Nocco, Pasco County, Florida provided testimony before this or a similar body. Sheriff Nocco spoke about a number of things but I would like to speak to one of these as well. The Sheriff conveyed his understanding of state and federal designation of regional specialty response teams and his concerns about the use of these teams in a community which must then rely on the skills and equipment of those teams. Designation of a regional team really means that single jurisdictions “own” a team that will be eligible for federal Homeland Security planning, training, exercise and equipment funds. There is considerable logic for concentrating funding in high risk communities and expecting that those communities build a capability for managing those risks. However, for those of us living in and serving communities on the fringe of those high risk communities this funding methodology has produced some sense of detachment to the Homeland Security mission. If you aren’t empowered to make decisions about the application of Homeland Security funds, then how do you contribute to the mission? Further, the expectation that those specialty teams will serve outlying communities through mutual aid is reasonable, but this approach to building capability fails to recognize that mutual aid works in two directions. There should be a more networked approach to capability building; one that disregards jurisdiction, supports multi-agency response, and acknowledges that it is through mutual aid that all disasters are best served.

At the state and local level I’ve seen a significant amount of confusion about where local State Homeland Security Grant Program funds set aside for planning, training and exercise should and could be spent. I’ve understood the struggles and arguments that local, regional, state & federal players have when trying to determine how equipment fits into the context of capability building and risk reduction. We’ve all felt the consternation over the debate about sustainment funding for equipment upkeep. I, and my community, have been fortunate in that from 2005 until 2011 I filled a Homeland Security Coordinator position created by my local jurisdiction and initially funded through the State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP). This obligation of funds towards a dedicated full-time emergency manager focused on local implementation of Homeland Security initiatives is what enabled my understanding of the things I’m speaking to you about today. But in nearly all of the communities that surround me, I look and don’t see a counterpart. Instead, I see emergency managers, fire fighters and law enforcement officers struggling with an other-duty, as-assigned. For the local first response community, this is a deficit. Without dedicated homeland security personnel at the local level, much of the work being done on a national scale is hidden from view and, therefore, largely disregarded.

The consolidation, by the Science and Technology Directorate, of the multiple standards that apply to homeland security is a successful and useful effort. NFPA 1600: Standard on Disaster/Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs should be well understood and implemented by local government. Beyond the standard, however, there should be stronger mechanisms for ensuring that disasters are well managed, business can continue, and local civil servants know their role. Other standards, such as NFPA 1981, Standard on Open-Circuit Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) for Emergency Services which requires all SCBA gear to adhere to certifications that provide respiratory protection against chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear attacks and NFPA 1994, which specifies the minimum requirements for

protective ensembles for fire and emergency services personnel operating at domestic terrorism incidents (chemical/biological) are key and critical components of a nationwide Homeland Security program. Their focus on the protection of first responders is of an importance that is well understood by all of us here today. Continued focus on modernizing these standards, promoting the use of emerging technologies in support of the response community, and leveraging the knowledge found in research and development labs in the private sector and universities is our first line of defense for our local responders.

When I first came on board to work homeland security in Pasco County, Florida, this was a DHS element that I was quite excited about. Over the course of more than 6 years, I taught approximately 4,000 local first-responders homeland security related concepts of operation. I would always tell a story that started something like this: “Do you all remember the fellow who died from Anthrax exposure in Palm Beach County in October 2001 – he worked at the National Enquirer building...? Well, imagine that you are the hazmat responder from local government who is asked to go into that building, find (detect) the anthrax, collect and package it, and transport it out of the building. As you don your low-bid SCBA and your low-bid protective suit, and you strap the low-bid detection device around you, how do you feel about being the guy going in?”

I would go on to talk about how the DHS Science and Technology Directorate was intended, in part, to bring cutting edge technology being developed in R&D labs in the private sector and in the great universities across our nation to those agencies inside of government that have responsibility for responding to WMD/CBRNE events. I shared my opinion that the future held for us the idea that the choice of low-bid only would be countered by the science behind the why-we-need-THIS device/equipment/supplies justification. I would go on to state that I held out hope that our local hazardous materials responder would don PPE and use devices that would be of a proven quality – proven TO government THROUGH government instead of by a corporate salesman who we can't point to and swear that he has our best interests in mind.

Today, I hesitate to share that message because my observation of how science and technology has trickled down to local communities shows me some disparities between what I had hoped for and what is. In example, I offer a limited local perspective on the work of the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO). This program seems to have worked diligently to ensure that communities are protected from a radiological/nuclear incident. As a result, local law enforcement officers have been the recipients of personal radiation detector devices and hospital entryways are outfitted with in situ detection devices. But, not enough law enforcement officers have these devices. Certainly, the first-in officer doesn't have one. Not enough hospitals have these devices and for those that do, not enough integrated planning with local health departments and first responders has been accomplished. At the local level, there is little to no understanding of how to access technical reachback capabilities. And so there will be losses if we find ourselves responding to a radiological or nuclear incident. I could offer other examples of how a good program hasn't gone far enough to reach local communities.

Outside of the purview of domestic security, other hazards exist. Recently, the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) articulated its position on the National Hurricane Program to the Federal Emergency Management Agency. I'm familiar with their

recommendations and wanted to take this opportunity to communicate my support of a few of their key concepts as it relates to *Emergency Preparedness*. NEMA suggests that the FEMA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers conduct an analysis of government user's needs to ensure that the software application HURREVAC remains the best tool for use by emergency managers in their evacuation decision making. This recommendation asks that these agencies consider current and emerging technologies and the resource requirements for maintaining and modernizing HURREVAC. This is a reasonable request and reflects the customer-service oriented approach that should be the underpinnings of any emergency preparedness work. NEMA also shared their recommendations related to a continued focus on private sector outreach and the need to focus efforts on sharing FEMA products with the private sector. This is a balanced and reasonable recommendation and is conducive to efforts being made within local and state governments. Finally, NEMA's recommendation related to leveraging academic institutions applies not only to hurricane preparedness but to the entire realm of emergency preparedness. Federal support for building collaboration between local communities can promote the application of education and experience to disaster management in all phases.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to share the local perspective on first responder technologies. Your focus on a prioritized approach to Homeland Security Research and Development is strongly appreciated by the citizens and civil servants of our great nation. I personally appreciate the effort you are making here today on behalf of Pasco County's first responders and all of the dedicated first responders who serve in times of disaster.