Arkansas Prepared

SEPTEMBER 2011

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Director Maxwell testifies before US Senate Subcommittee Hearing in nation's capital

ADEM Director David Maxwell, a former president of the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA), was one of a select group invited to testify before a Senate Subcommittee Hearing held in July in the nation's capital.

The hearing was chaired by Arkansas Senator David Pryor and was held to examine the federal response to floods and storms that devastated states in the Mississippi River basin earlier this year. Pryor had expressed frustration publically over FEMA's process to declare an emergency particularly when it involves smaller communities.

At the hearing, senators asked FEMA for an explanation as to the recent rise in presidentially declared disasters and the agency's strategy in combating its dwindling relief fund.

FEMA officials had earlier said that sometime soon the fund that provides a significant portion of federal assistance for presidentially declared disasters and emergencies will be down to its $1 billion threshold that triggers the agency's practice of ceasing spending on activities that are not considered essential. The declining balance, coupled with the record number of disaster declarations this year, brought up the question as to whether the agency is providing assistance for too many "routine" storms rather than only dipping into the pot of money for truly catastrophic events,

FEMA Deputy Administrator Richard Serino told the committee the rise in declarations is due to the record tornadoes and flooding the country has been hit with this year. And not because of any financial strain FEMA faced because of the unusually hard spring. The National Weather Service categorized six of the tornadoes that touched down in the South in April and May as F5 or equivalent, the most intense damage category. The country has not experienced so many tornadoes of that magnitude in one season in almost 40 years.

Meanwhile, Maxwell was praised for his testimony is accepting some responsibility for the initial failure to have Franklin and Johnson counties declared a disaster area after they were hit by deadly tornadoes in May. "In the zeal to get assistance to people quickly, we may have gotten out ahead too quickly," Maxwell told the panel. FEMA had initially rejected a request by the state for a disaster declaration for the two counties. Maxwell said the initial application by the state did not provide FEMA with a complete picture of the damage. The state appealed the rejection and went on to provide more comprehensive information about the storm damage. "While it took some to get the declaration, the money was out on the streets very quickly," said Maxwell. Pryor had earlier asked FEMA if the reluctance to declare an emergency in Franklin and Johnson counties had anything to do with the financial strain FEMA faced because of the unusually severe spring. He was reassured by FEMA that was not the case.

Representatives from the Joplin Chamber of Commerce and the Delta Regional Authority were also at the hearing. Witness were asked by the senators what worked well, what resources were essential to the response and recovery process and what else they needed to continue doing their job well. Mitigation was mentioned by nearly every witness and many lawmakers said they saw value in the work that is already being done.

2011 Arkansas Emergency Management Conference

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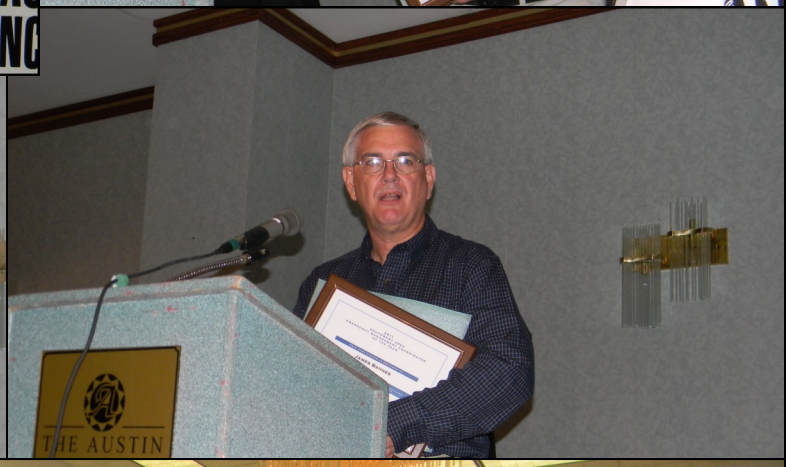

THE AUSTIN

AEMA
DARRELL REYNOLDS

EXIT
John Luther
STATE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
COORDINATOR OF THE YEAR

ADEM hosts visitors from Nepal

ADEM hosted a group from Nepal on September 8.The visitors were invited to the United States under the auspices of the Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program. Their focus during their three-week visit was Crisis and Disaster Management. (Four of those days were spent in Arkansas.)

Nepal, a South Asian nation, is ranked as one of the world's most vulnerable states to earthquakes and is also susceptible to a host of other natural disasters.

Floods and landslides are a recurring problem during each monsoon season. Wildfires in rural Terai remain a major problem during the summer season and incidents of forest fires are on the rise. Even the potential for glacial lake outburst flooding exists.

Eight representatives from the public, private and academic sectors who have strong backgrounds in GIS and information management services made up the group that visited ADEM.

Tommy Jackson, ADEM PIO, and Chad Stover, ADEM who also assists as a backup PIO, led the tour of the agency, spending most of their time in the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC). Among the topics discussed were the following:

Best practices in natural disaster and epidemic emergency preparedness, management, planning, and response in the private sector and at the federal, state and local levels of government; responsibility, delegation, coordination and integration of emergency response among government entities; community preparation and volunteer training on disaster management; and strategies for working with the media in disaster and crisis situations.

The group from Nepal included the following: Mr. Pitambar ARYAL, Director, Disaster Management Department, Nepal Red Cross Society; Mr. Sher Bahadur GURUNG, Principal Instructor, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Central Department of Geography,Tribhuvan University; Mr. Saurav Raj ONTA, Inspector, Computer Section, Armed Police Force; Mr. Sudeep PANTA, Chief, GIS Unit, Nepalese Army; Mr. Sudip PRADHAN, Developer, GIS and Decision Support Systems (DSS), International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD); Mr. Punya Prasad SAPKOTA, Technical Specialist, Information Management Unit, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator's Office (RCHCO), United Nations, Nepal; Ms. Puspa SHARMA, Lecturer, Central Department of Geography, Tribhuvan University; and Mr. Suresh Man SHRESTHA, Project Chief, National Geographic Information Infrastructure Program (NGIIP), Survey Department, Ministry of Housing and Physical Planning.

The group presented Jackson and Stover with commemorative post cards and lapel pins from Nepal at the end of their visit.

Preparedness Month is observed in September

The severe storms and flooding that struck Arkansas this year have once again been a painful reminder that emergencies can occur anytime and anywhere without notice. September is National Preparedness Month and a good time to urge residents of the Natural State to plan ahead.

"Severe weather this spring not only caused millions of dollars in damage to our state, it took the lives of too many of our citizens," said David Maxwell, director of the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management and state coordinating officer for the two disaster recovery missions. "We can't eliminate the weather hazards, but we certainly can prepare for them."

Households, businesses and organizations should be prepared in the event any kind of emergency requires them to be self-reliant for three days, said Maxwell. This means preparing to be without utilities, electricity or water, having no access to a supermarket or local services — and maybe even going without response from police, fire or rescue — during a three-day period. Maxwell is asking Arkansans to take three important steps during National Preparedness Month:

- Get an emergency supply kit.
- Make a plan for what to do in an emergency.
- Be informed about emergencies that could happen, and identify sources of information in their community that will be helpful before, during and after an emergency.

"Doing these three things now will help Arkansans stay safe, and protect their loved ones and their property in the event of any emergency."

More information and helpful tips on preparing for emergencies are available at the ADEM website, www.adem.arkansas.gov .

State battling back from two federal disasters

The 11th and 12th federally declared disasters in Arkansas since 2008 resulted in deaths and destruction in the state.

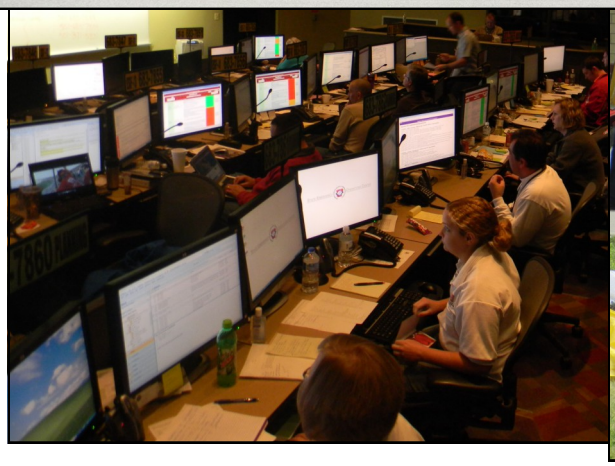
The first major disaster was declared May 2 this year and covered the period of severe storms, tornadoes and associated flooding that took place from April 14 thru June 3. That resulted in declarations of Individual Assistance to the following counties: Arkansas, Benton, Boone, Carroll, Chicot, Clark, Clay, Crawford, Crittenden, Cross, Dallas, Desha, Faulkner, Garland, Greene, Hot Spring, Independence, Jackson Jefferson, Lawrence, Lee, Lincoln, Lonoke, Madison, Mississippi, Monroe, Montgomery, Phillips, Pointsett, Prairie, Pulaski, Randolph, Sanit Francis, Saline, Washington, White, and Woodruff. Individual Assistance is assistance to Individuals and households,

Those counties being approved for Public Assistance (Assistance to state and local governments and certain private nonprofit organizations for emergency work and the repair or replacement of disaster-damaged facilities) are as follows: Arkansas, Baxter, Benton, Boone, Bradley, Calhoun, Carroll, Chicot, Clark, Clay, Cleburne, Cleveland, Conway, Craighead, Crawford, Crittenden, Dallas, Faulkner, Franklin, Fulton,Garland, Greene, Hot Spring, Howard, Independence, Izard, Jackson, Johnson, Lawrence, Lee, Lincoln, Lonoke, Madison, Marion, Mississippi, Monroe, Montgomery, Nevada, Newton, Perry, Phillips, Pike, Poinsett, Polk, Prairie, Pulaski, Randolph, Saint Francis, Saline, Searcy, Sharp, Stone, Van Buren, Washington, White, Woodruff and Yell.

For the IA portion of that disaster, a total of 4,276 applications for assistance was approved totalling $23, 268,387.80. That breaks down as follows: Total housing assistance, $19,744,572.52 and total other needs assistance, $3, 523,815.28.

The second presidential disaster covered the period of May 24-May 26 and was for severe storms, tornadoes, and flooding in Franklin and Johnson counties. Each of those counties was named for both Individual and Public Assistance while Crawford County was also declared for Public Assistance for weather covering the same time frame. The declaration came down on July 2. A total of 177 applications had been approved by early September with $1,595,866.25 approved for payment.

Pictures of NLE 11



Legislative members visit ADEM

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