



NEWS RELEASE

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Leading Fire Service Groups Urge President-Elect Obama to Leave FEMA in Department of Homeland Security

Removing FEMA from DHS Would Endanger America's Emergency Response Capabilities

Fairfax, Va., January 7, 2009... Three prominent fire and emergency service organizations are urging President-Elect Barack Obama to leave the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) in the Department of Homeland Security, DHS. To move FEMA out of DHS could endanger America's emergency response capabilities, said the leaders of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) and the Congressional Fire Service Institute (CFSI) in a letter December 22 to President-Elect Obama.

Over the past month, press reports have cited opinions that FEMA should be removed from DHS, an idea that alarmed these fire service leaders. "America's fire service believes that emergency preparedness and response to all hazards is integral to our nation's homeland security, and we urge you to keep FEMA in its current role as an autonomous component within DHS," said IAFC President Larry J. Grorud, IAFF General President Harold A. Schaitberger and CFSI President Dr. William Jenaway.

They explained why moving FEMA out of DHS could endanger America's emergency response capabilities. "By separating FEMA from DHS, the new Administration would create a bureaucratic barrier between FEMA and the other DHS preparedness and response components, such as the Office of Intelligence and Analysis, the Office of Health Affairs, the Office of Infrastructure Protection, and the U.S. Coast Guard. In addition, if FEMA were removed from DHS, it would separate the agency's work with local first responders from the department's communications interoperability programs at the Offices of Emergency Communications and Interoperability and Compatibility. We also are concerned that the months of Congressional deliberation required to enact this change would create bureaucratic instability within DHS and FEMA, which would prevent FEMA's ability to perform its core preparedness and response mission," the three leaders stated.

They cited the improvements in FEMA since Hurricane Katrina. The national fire and emergency service organizations worked with Congress to restructure and strengthen FEMA and improve its emergency response capabilities. The result was the Post-Katrina Emergency Reform Act (P.L. 109-295). In addition to new requirements for FEMA, "this law protected FEMA's budget from arbitrary reprogramming and the agency from arbitrary reorganization by DHS. To strengthen FEMA, the law rolled most of DHS' preparedness activities into FEMA, including management of all of the major grant programs. ...Both these legislative changes and the experienced leadership of Chief R. David Paulison and his staff have created a strong, autonomous FEMA within DHS," said the leaders of IAFC, IAFF and CFSI.

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They also noted the assessment of FEMA's response to the Midwest floods by Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-MS), chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee. "FEMA's success demonstrated a continuing integration within DHS to implement the mandates of the Post-Katrina Emergency Reform Act (P.L. 109-295)," he said. "Simply put, this FEMA is better prepared, as a critical component of the Department of Homeland Security, to prepare for and respond to acts of terror, natural disasters, and other man-made emergencies."

The IAFC, IAFF and CFSI leaders' letter concluded: "The federal response to Hurricane Katrina demonstrated the problems that can occur when a federal agency is trapped in a period of continued transition. In 2006, Congress wisely acted to strengthen FEMA's autonomy; adequately fund its programs; and ensure experienced leadership for the agency. As a result of this legislation and Congressional appropriations, the new FEMA is better managed, staffed, and prepared to respond proactively to all hazards. Considering FEMA's recent accomplishments, we urge you to keep the agency within DHS, and make whatever managerial decisions are necessary to ensure that FEMA is adequately staffed and funded to meet its statutory preparedness and response mission. If FEMA were removed from DHS, we have serious concerns that the agency's core missions would be critically compromised, which would have a deleterious effect on the safety of the American public."

For a copy of the letter to President-Elect Obama, go to the www.iafc.org: Government Relations > Issues: [Homeland Security](#).

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About the IAFC: The International Association of Fire Chiefs (www.iafc.org) is the voice of fire and emergency service leaders around the world. Established in 1873, the IAFC is a powerful network of more than 12,000 chief fire and emergency service officers who are the world's leading experts in firefighting, emergency medical services, terrorism response, hazardous materials, natural disasters, search and rescue, and fire prevention and education.

About the IAFF: The International Association of Fire Fighters (www.iaff.org) is the nation's largest fire service organization, representing more than 292,000 full-time professional fire fighters and paramedics who protect 85 percent of the nation's population.

About the CFSI: Established in 1989, the Congressional Fire Services Institute (www.cfsi.org) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy institute designed to educate Congress about the needs and challenges facing the entire fire and emergency services. The strength of CFSI is its National Advisory Committee comprised of 42 national fire and emergency services organizations (including the IAFC and IAFF) which provides direction and guidance in forming positions on federal legislative and policy initiatives the Institute shares with Congress and the Administration.