



# The United States Conference of Mayors

1620 Eye Street, N.W. • Washington, D.C. 20006  
Phone (202) 293-7330 • Fax (202) 293-2352  
E-mail: [info@usmayors.org](mailto:info@usmayors.org) URL: [usmayors.org](http://usmayors.org)

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Contact: Rhonda Spears Bell (202) 861-6766  
[rspears@usmayors.org](mailto:rspears@usmayors.org)  
Elena Temple (202) 861-6719  
[etemple@usmayors.org](mailto:etemple@usmayors.org)

## **The U.S. Conference of Mayors Hold Special Meeting on Emergency Response and Homeland Security, Update “National Action Plan for Safety and Security in America’s Cities”**

### ***Mayors Have First Meeting with Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff***

**Washington, D.C.** – A special working group of The United States Conference of Mayors, led by its President and Long Beach, California Mayor Beverly O’Neill, held an **emergency meeting today in Washington, DC on emergency response and homeland security**. This special working group was comprised of top officers, past presidents, relevant committee and task force chairs, key mayors from the Gulf Coast region, and local public safety officials. **Mayors also met with Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff for the first time since taking over the department.**

One month after the attacks of September 11, 2001, The U.S. Conference of Mayors brought together mayors, police chiefs, fire chiefs, and emergency services/health care leaders for a Safety and Security Summit in Washington, DC. That Summit resulted in the release of a *National Action Plan for Safety and Security in America’s Cities* which focused on transportation security, emergency preparedness and federal-local law enforcement. This document has guided the Conference of Mayors’ advocacy efforts for the last four years.

When Mayor O’Neill assumed the Presidency of the Conference of Mayors in June 2005, she charged the Conference with reviewing and refining the *National Action Plan* based on new priorities. This effort became even more urgent following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita that devastated cities in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas.

“After seeing first hand the devastating impact of Hurricane Katrina on Louisiana and the Gulf Coast area, and talking to mayors from this region, we recognize, more than ever, that much more work is needed in the federal-local partnership on disaster preparedness and emergency response,” said Conference President O’Neill. “We have experienced a natural disaster that this country simply was not prepared for. We have learned that when it comes to disasters, whether man-made or natural, mayors must have a voice and a seat at the table because we are on the front lines of defense and emergency response. We are the first responders.”

The Conference of Mayors has argued since 9-11 that major changes are needed in federal response and partnership with cities on homeland security and disaster prevention and preparedness. Now since the devastating hurricanes, the Administration and Congress are discussing structural changes to the federal, state, and local emergency response system, and the Conference of Mayors wants to make sure that mayoral and first-responder priorities are reflected in this process.

Today, the Conference of Mayors is making recommendations to the *National Action Plan on Safety and Security* in five (5) key areas:

- 1) **Fixing the FEMA Disaster Response System**
- 2) **Military Involvement in Disaster Response and Recovery**
- 3) **Communications Interoperability**
- 4) **Enhanced Transportation Security**
- 5) **First Responder Funding – A Better Distribution System is Needed**

These recommendations were given to Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff today, and will also be carried to Congress and the Administration. The recommendations will be further discussed and refined during the 74<sup>th</sup> Winter Meeting of The U.S. Conference of Mayors to be held in Washington, DC, January 25-27, 2006.

**The Conference of Mayors' 2005 National Action Plan on Safety and Security in America's Cities include the following recommendations:**

### **1) Fixing the FEMA Disaster Response System:**

Mayors and local police, fire and emergency medical services personnel are America's true first responders to any disaster, whether natural or man-made.

Mayors have expressed serious concerns about state control on homeland security and disaster preparedness and response. These same concerns also relate to what mayors experienced during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Mayors recognize the important role of FEMA, the states, and the National Guard in responding to disasters. But as the Conference of Mayors learned from its mission to the Gulf Coast area following Hurricane Katrina, the fact remains that aid did not come in time.

While we are pleased that Congress recently approved \$750 million in loans for hurricane hit cities, we are also outraged that Congress adopted language that would - for the first time - prohibit these loans from being forgivable by FEMA, even if local conditions necessitate.

**Therefore:**

- **Congress and the Administration should implement a more focused process to work directly with mayors and first responders to review and make changes to the national disaster preparedness and recovery process.**
- **Congress must reverse its decision to make loans to cities hard hit by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, under the Disaster Assistance Loan Program, non-forgivable.**
- **Congress and the Administration must work with mayors to better define federal reimbursement and other policies related to housing, transportation, and health and human services for evacuees from disasters – and how these policies are coordinated across federal agencies.**

### **2) Military Involvement in Disaster Response and Recovery:**

The current legal paradigm is that the military is viewed as the "resource of last resort" deployed to restore order. However, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have given us reason to re-evaluate this paradigm. Because of the sheer magnitude of the hurricane events recently experienced, and because acts of terrorism may spring up during or in the wake of such natural disasters, it is advantageous to consider an increased role for the military in disaster response.

**Therefore:**

- **The federal government should allow for greater military involvement in the immediate response to such overwhelming disasters, at the very least during the first days and weeks of response and when requested by local or state governments.**
- **Cities need a mechanism to request direct assistance in form of military assets during a major natural disaster or terrorist attack. It is too cumbersome for cities to have to go through the state apparatus.**

### **3) Communications Interoperability:**

Major incidents such as the 9/11 attacks, the Oklahoma City bombing, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, or tornados or floods, repeatedly show the critical nature of first responder communications.

#### **Interoperable Communications:**

A major concern related to communications interoperability is the limited access to spectrum for public safety. The limited availability of spectrum continues to force first responders to operate on several different and incompatible and congested voice channels. This continues to be identified by mayors and their first responders as an obstacle to achieving full interoperability - as identified in the Conference's 2004 Interoperable Communications Survey of 192 cities.

#### **3-1-1 Communications:**

The U. S. Conference of Mayors recognized in December 2001 in "A National Action Plan for Safety and Security in America's Cities" that in the event of a terrorist attack using weapons of mass destruction a city's 9-1-1 system could be quickly overwhelmed and, therefore, 3-1-1 systems should be put in place to handle the large volumes of incoming calls from citizens.

**Therefore:**

- **Congress should provide urgent funding to assist cities and their first responders achieve full interoperability.**
- **Congress and the Administration must clarify that 3-1-1 systems are an allowable cost under its homeland security grant programs and to make an explicit reference to 3-1-1 systems in the Authorized Equipment List.**

### **4) Enhanced Transportation Security:**

#### **Public Transportation: Bus and Rail:**

With more than 9.6 billion trips logged on the nation's public transportation systems in 2004, securing this critical infrastructure and protecting riders from potential terrorist attacks rank as a high priority.

**Therefore:**

- **Congress and the Administration should fund deployment of security and communications technologies such as security cameras on-board public transportation vehicles and in bus and rail stations.**
- **Congress and the Administration should fund security infrastructure expansion, modernization and rehabilitation such as permanent chemical, biological and explosive detection systems.**

#### **Port Security:**

Not enough is being done about security at our nation's ports. Ports remain exposed to large-scale acts of terrorism, including weapons of mass destruction or other dangerous materials. For example, according to the Government Accountability Office in a May 2005 report, only 17.5% of containers deemed "high risks" were being inspected.

**Therefore:**

- **Congress and the Administration should provide full and flexible funding for port security needs such as Video Surveillance and Threat Detection Cameras.**

**Freight Rail:**

The U.S. Conference of Mayors supports advance notification for hazardous freight rail. Mayors recognize that there are sensitive issues that need to be addressed, however, we want to work with Congress and the Administration to address these issues so that a system of advance notification can be implemented.

**Therefore:**

- **Congress and the Administration should direct the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of Transportation to establish a coordinated system for notifying appropriate local first responders of the transportation of rail hazardous materials through local jurisdictions, including a rail carrier's comprehensive list of all hazardous materials scheduled to be transported.**

**Airport Security:**

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) was mandated to screen all checked baggage using two types of screening equipment: explosive detection systems and Explosives trace detection systems at airports as of December 31, 2003.

**Therefore:**

- **The United States Conference of Mayors reaffirms our policy calling for a fully federalized workforce at points of passenger, baggage and cargo inspections.**

**5) First Responder Funding – A Better Distribution System is Needed:**

Since the early days after September 11, 2001, there was serious concern that an over-reliance by the federal government on a multi-layered, state-based distribution system for first responder resources and training, which then often is further channeled through counties, would be slow and result in delays in funding reaching high-threat, high-risk population cities.

Unfortunately, the many Homeland Security surveys the Conference of Mayors conducted proved this to be the case. Time and time again, these surveys have showed that money was not reaching cities quickly, and when it did reach cities, it often came with federal restrictions and rules that made it very difficult to spend on what was needed most, such as limitations on the use of overtime.

**Therefore:**

- **Congress should increase, not decrease, funding for key first responder grant programs.**
- **Congress should restore funding for key law enforcement/homeland security programs like COPS and the Justice Assistance Grant program, and allow Department of Homeland Security first responder funding to be used for hiring and overtime for police, fire, and EMS personnel.**
- **Congress should amend the current state-based system for distribution of federal first responder assistance to provide a significant portion of the funding directly to cities and local areas.**

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