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COMCARE Praises Senate's Katrina Report

Washington, DC – April 28, 2006 - The Senate report entitled, Hurricane Katrina: A Nation Still Unprepared, is the first national disaster report to identify the critical problems created by the lack of data communications and interoperability in emergency services. "COMCARE commends the Senate's Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee for describing how the lack of interagency data communications and interoperability created a major obstacle to efficient emergency response effort during and after the hurricane," said Richard Taylor, Chair of the 100 organization membership emergency response alliance.

The Committee report found that, "the response to Katrina was also hampered by the lack of data interoperability – that is responder inability to electronically share data – including patient medical records, information needed to track missing children and adults – coordinate search and rescue operations and verify eligibility for benefits."

Recommendations within the report directly address the need for interoperable emergency communications. The Committee specifically calls for an "all-hazards plus" strategy which would create interoperable communications networks not only for future natural disasters, but for use in all types of emergency incidents.

The Committee went on to state that, "DHS should develop a national strategy, including timeframes, for implementing a survivable, resilient, national interoperable communications network. DHS should establish a plan to migrate to the use of 1) interoperable platforms for communications networks; 2) equipment that permits sharing of resources in times of crisis; and 3) systems to promote high-precedence data communications and interoperability during disasters so that data (such as medical, victim registration, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data) can be electronically shared among responders, as needed, at all levels of government."

The Committee also noted that DHS needs to embrace common data software standards "for use by all Federal and state entities involved in incident management that will serve as the information architecture for shared situational and operational awareness."

Taylor said "Senators Collins and Lieberman should be very proud of this report. There has been a real lack of attention to the need for full informational interoperability, including both voice and data, and between agencies and organizations, not just individuals. One key piece of this is shared data standards. COMCARE applauds the Committee for recognizing how these important components of effective emergency communications will make the public safer."

Read the full report at <http://hsgac.senate.gov/index.cfm?Fuseaction=Links.Katrina>.

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