

# **FEMA Can Enhance Readiness with Management of Its Disaster Incident Workforce**





# DHS OIG HIGHLIGHTS

## *FEMA Can Enhance Readiness with Management of Its Disaster Incident Workforce*

**September 2, 2016**

### **Why We Did This Audit**

In 2012, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) transitioned its on-call workforce from Disaster Assistance Employees to Reservists. Since then, FEMA officials have expressed their frustration regarding the performance of Reservists deployed to disasters under their new FEMA Qualification System positions.

We conducted this audit to gain a better understanding of the problem and identify ways FEMA can improve Reservist performance.

### **What We Recommend**

We made four recommendations that, if implemented, should improve the knowledge, skills, performance, and morale of FEMA's Reservist workforce.

#### **For Further Information:**

Contact our Office of Public Affairs at (202) 254-4100, or email us at [DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov](mailto:DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov)

### **What We Found**

Despite recent hiring initiatives, FEMA's disaster incident workforce remains significantly understaffed, and some Reservists continue to deploy to disasters without the knowledge, skills, and training they need to assist survivors effectively. Maintaining the skills of an intermittent on-call workforce will always be challenging; however, FEMA can take steps to improve the skills, knowledge, and morale of its Reservist workforce. These steps should include developing a more rigorous FEMA Qualification System-based performance evaluation system; increasing training opportunities for Reservists when not deployed; improving communication between Reservists and their managers; taking a greater role in assessing Reservists' performance; promoting their professional development; and engaging all FEMA components, including the FEMA Regions, to strengthen the Reservist workforce.

Reservists comprise the largest part of FEMA's disaster incident workforce, yet FEMA has hired less than half the Reservists it needs based on its target staffing goals. FEMA's success in responding to the next catastrophic disaster or to simultaneous, large disasters will depend in part on the performance of its Reservists. However improved, Reservist performance and morale will be of little consequence if FEMA does not have enough trained and experienced Reservists ready to respond to the next catastrophic disaster.

### **FEMA Response**

FEMA concurred with all four recommendations and is committed to building and maintaining a well-trained, adequately staffed workforce.



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Department of Homeland Security

Washington, DC 20528 / [www.oig.dhs.gov](http://www.oig.dhs.gov)

September 2, 2016

MEMORANDUM FOR: Elizabeth Zimmerman  
Associate Administrator  
Office of Response and Recovery  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
*Thomas M. Salmon*

FROM: Thomas M. Salmon  
Assistant Inspector General  
Office of Emergency Management Oversight

SUBJECT: *FEMA Can Enhance Readiness with Management of Its  
Disaster Incident Workforce*

For your action is our final report, *FEMA Can Enhance Readiness with Management of Its Disaster Incident Workforce*. We incorporated the formal comments your office provided.

The report contains four recommendations aimed at improving the knowledge, skills, performance, and morale of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) Reservist workforce. Your office concurred with all four recommendations. Based on information in your response to the draft report, we consider all recommendations open and resolved. Once your office has fully implemented the recommendations, please submit a formal closeout memorandum, along with evidence of completion of agreed-upon corrective actions, to us within 30 days so that we may close the recommendations. Please send your closure request to [OIGEMOFollowup@oig.dhs.gov](mailto:OIGEMOFollowup@oig.dhs.gov).

Consistent with our responsibility under the *Inspector General Act*, we will provide copies of our report to congressional committees with oversight and appropriation responsibility over the Department of Homeland Security. We will post the report on our website for public dissemination.

Please call me with any questions, or your staff may contact Tonda L. Hadley, Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Audit Services, at (214) 436-5200.





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### **Background**

Reservists make up FEMA's largest group of disaster response employees and are essential to FEMA's ability to respond quickly and effectively to major and catastrophic disasters. FEMA Reservists are on-call Federal employees who form the nucleus of FEMA's disaster incident workforce. Reservists deploy immediately to staff Joint Field Offices and Disaster Recovery Centers; interview disaster survivors; conduct and verify damage assessments; provide administrative, financial, and logistical support; and perform many other essential disaster-related tasks. Federal law does not govern the deployment of FEMA Reservists like the United States Coast Guard (Coast Guard) and other military reservist deployments. FEMA Reservists may decline deployment for any reason whereas the military may deploy reservists without their consent. While FEMA Reservists may decline deployment for any reason, FEMA policy limits the Reservists to three declinations before FEMA takes disciplinary action. In addition, FEMA Reservists do not receive employment protection like military reservists, which limits FEMA's recruitment pool of employees, as those individuals with other full-time employment cannot always meet availability requirements.

### **Hurricane Katrina Identified FEMA Staffing Problems**

Congress enacted the *Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006* partly in response to the staffing problems FEMA encountered after Hurricane Katrina. The law mandated several major changes and placed requirements on FEMA and other Federal agencies to "credential" all incident management personnel, emergency response providers, and other personnel likely needed to respond to disasters or acts of terrorism. FEMA responded by implementing an agency-wide credentialing system in June 2008, naming it the FEMA Qualification System (FQS) in 2010. FEMA assigned responsibility for FQS to its Incident Workforce Management Division in June 2011 and launched the system in October 2012, the same month Hurricane Sandy caused major damage to states along the eastern seaboard.

### **The Purpose of the FEMA Qualification System**

FQS provides a process of "qualifying" and credentialing members of FEMA's incident management workforce. Employee credentialing means assigning members of FEMA's workforce areas of expertise to assist state and local stakeholders during a disaster. The purpose of FQS is to—

- enhance the interoperability of FEMA's workforce by standardizing qualifications with a credentialing system that provides consistent training, skill identification, and deployable personnel across FEMA; and



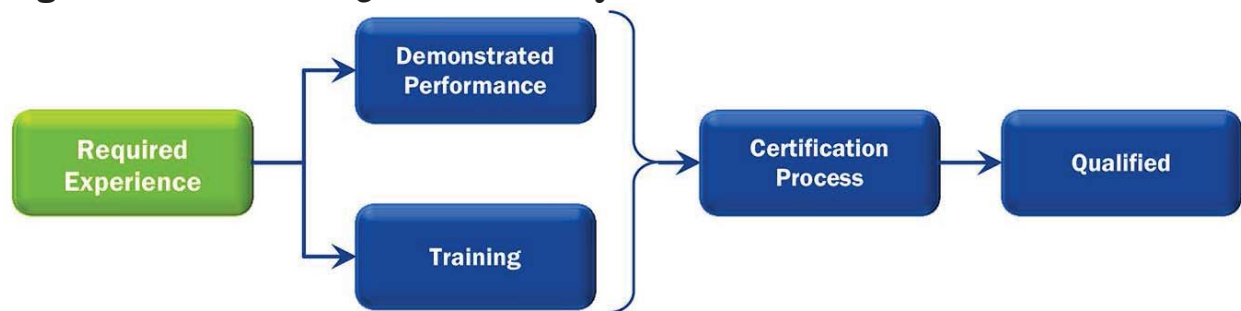
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- ensure that FEMA personnel are ready and able to fulfill their responsibilities immediately, competently, and professionally.

FQS is intended to provide uniform procedures for credentialing the FEMA workforce through experience, training, and demonstrated performance within FEMA's 23 incident management "cadres." FEMA cadres are logical groupings of operational and programmatic personnel by function. By establishing uniform qualification standards, FQS has as a goal to ensure that FEMA employees have the knowledge, training, skills, and experience to perform in their incident management positions (see figure 1).

**Figure 1: The FEMA Qualification System Process**



Source: FEMA Draft Qualification System Guide

In June 2012, FEMA transitioned its Disaster Assistance Employees to the Reservist Program. FEMA deploys Reservists on an as-needed basis to perform disaster response and recovery duties. This transition was challenging for both FEMA management and Reservists. Among other changes, including conditions of employment, Reservists had to adapt to FEMA centralizing Reservist management away from FEMA's Regions to FEMA's headquarters. Before the centralization, most Reservists reported to management within the 10 FEMA regional offices—FEMA regional management locally supervised 18 of the 23 cadres, while FEMA headquarters managed the remaining 5 cadres.

### FEMA's Deployment of Staff to Disasters

When the President declares a Federal disaster, the responsible FEMA Region deploys its available full-time employees. If the Region needs additional staff, it sends a deployment request to FEMA headquarters. FEMA headquarters typically deploys staff in the following order:

- Incident Management Cadre of On-Call Response and Recovery Employees (IM CORE) who are full-time, term employees whose primary job is disaster response;
- FEMA Corps teams from the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps who are devoted solely to disaster response and recovery activities;



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- Reservists who work intermittently to support disaster response operations;
- FEMA full-time employees, including Permanent Full Time, Temporary Full Time and CORE employees (other than IM CORE); and
- Department of Homeland Security Surge Capacity Force employees who volunteer to deploy to disasters to help FEMA with response and recovery efforts during disasters of extraordinary size.

Between November 2012 and October 2014, our office deployed Emergency Management Oversight Teams to several disasters to review disaster response and recovery activities (see appendix B). The objective of the Emergency Management Oversight Team is to evaluate FEMA's response to the disaster and to assess FEMA's actions, resources, and authorities according to Federal regulations and FEMA guidelines.

Following these deployments, we issued reports concluding that FEMA responded well to these disasters; however, several reports identified issues with inadequate Reservist performance. FEMA Joint Field Office officials attributed this problem, in part, to FQS not consistently providing the Joint Field Offices with Reservists who could adequately perform their FQS-credentialed responsibilities.

### Results of Audit

Our past Emergency Management Oversight Team deployments and our recent review of the 2015 Texas flooding disaster show that FEMA continues to experience challenges hiring enough disaster workforce employees and deploying Reservists in their FQS position with sufficient knowledge and skills to assist disaster survivors effectively. Strong Reservist performance is critical to the nation's ability to respond to major disasters because Reservists make up about half of FEMA's disaster incident workforce, a workforce that remains far below the number necessary to respond effectively to the next catastrophic disaster. Importantly, improving Reservist performance and morale will help FEMA achieve its strategic priorities including building its capacity to respond to catastrophic disasters and increasing its operational readiness rating to 80 percent. We conducted this audit to understand this problem better and identify ways FEMA can improve the knowledge, skills, and performance of its Reservist workforce.

Many factors likely contributed to performance problems; significantly, FEMA does not adequately assess Reservist performance following each deployment, and Reservist morale continues to remain low. Low morale among Reservists affects performance; however, determining whether it contributes to, or results from, poor performance is difficult.



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Further, FEMA does not consistently provide all Reservists with job-related training opportunities between deployments. FEMA cadre management can also strengthen performance and morale through more frequent and better communication with Reservists and by taking a greater management role in Reservist performance and professional development.

### FEMA's Reservist Staffing Shortfalls

FEMA's disaster incident workforce is far below the number necessary to respond effectively to the next catastrophic disaster. As of June 2016, FEMA's disaster incident workforce totaled 9,523, which is just over half of the 16,305 FEMA estimates that it needs. As table 1 illustrates, vacancies in Reservist positions make up most of the shortfalls.

**Table 1: FEMA's Current vs. Target Disaster Incident Workforce**

Employee Type	Current Workforce	Target Workforce	Vacancies	Vacancies/ Target WF
Reservists	5,282	10,949	5,667	52%
IM CORE	389	745	356	48%
Full Time*	3,852	4,611	759	16%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>9,523</b>	<b>16,305</b>	<b>6,782</b>	<b>42%</b>

Source: FEMA Deployment Tracking System, June 27, 2016

\*Represents full-time employees (permanent and CORE) available for deployment.

According to FEMA's 2013 after-action report on Hurricane Sandy:

Although FEMA completed one of the largest personnel deployments in its history, it nearly exhausted the number of available personnel. Moreover, staff who deployed for the first time — or without an assigned FQS title — reported confusion with deployment processes and expectations. By November 12, [2012] FEMA had only 355 Reservists (5 percent) available for potential deployment: 4,708 (67 percent) were already deployed to ongoing disasters, and 1,854 (26 percent) were unavailable.<sup>1</sup>

For FQS and management purposes, FEMA separates disaster response staff into "cadres." Cadres are groups of related disaster response positions. For example, all employees qualified under FQS to perform Public Assistance-related tasks are part of the Public Assistance Cadre. Each cadre includes many specific positions. Unlike the military reserve workforce model, FEMA

<sup>1</sup> Hurricane Sandy FEMA After-Action Report, July 1, 2013



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generally pays Reservists only when deployed. When not deployed, Reservists remain FEMA employees in non-pay status.

As shown in table 2, FEMA has hired less than half the Reservists needed based on its target staffing goals or “force structure.” FEMA’s force structure sets target disaster staffing levels based on historical data to ensure that FEMA has enough trained and experienced disaster personnel to accomplish its mission. This places doubt on FEMA’s ability to respond adequately to a catastrophic disaster or simultaneous large disasters.

**Table 2: FEMA Planned Reservist Force Structure vs. Actual**

Cadre	Number of Reservists Authorized (Force Structure)	Current Number of Reservists (Force Strength)	Equals Current Vacancies	Percent Vacant
Individual Assistance	2,498	1,208	1,290	52%
Public Assistance	1,426	1,062	364	26%
Logistics	1,365	732	633	46%
External Affairs	1,161	357	804	69%
Mitigation	1,155	408	747	65%
Disaster Survivor Assistance	650	438	212	33%
Information Technology	508	235	273	54%
Planning	358	146	212	59%
National Disaster Recovery Support	249	35	214	86%
Operations	191	64	127	66%
Disability Integration	190	39	151	79%
Equal Rights	175	36	139	79%
Financial Management	146	80	66	45%
Environmental Historic Preservation	141	80	61	43%
Disaster Emergency Communications	137	73	64	47%
Human Resources	135	69	66	49%
Safety	114	26	88	77%
Disaster Field Training Operations	99	32	67	68%
Field Leadership	86	42	44	51%
Security	79	65	14	18%
Acquisitions	42	19	23	55%
Alternative Dispute Resolution	39	34	5	13%
Office of Chief Counsel	5	2	3	60%
Total	10,949	5,282	5,667	52%

Source: FEMA Deployment Tracking System, June 27, 2016

According to the FEMA force structure model, FEMA should have 10,949 Reservists, representing 67 percent of FEMA’s targeted overall disaster incident workforce of 16,305. The number of Reservists has steadily declined since 2012 and, in November 2015, FEMA reported having only 4,812 Reservists. As of June 2016, the number of Reservists increased slightly





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to 5,282 — still less than half of FEMA’s target of 10,949. For example, the force structure of the Individual Assistance Cadre and the Public Assistance Cadre, FEMA’s 2 largest cadres, accounts for 3,924 Reservists; however, these cadres have only 2,270 Reservists as of June 2016. Therefore, FEMA’s 2 largest cadres have more than 1,600 vacancies. According to FEMA Senior Leadership, FEMA has led a massive hiring initiative and, as of June 27, 2016, the number of Reservists has increased by 470.

Hurricane Sandy made landfall in 2012 causing FEMA to deploy “all hands on deck” in response to the disaster. FEMA used virtually all available incident management employees and activated the DHS Surge Capacity Force personnel to staff disaster operations. The Texas flooding disaster in 2015 also stressed FEMA’s disaster incident workforce. Public Assistance had to hire contractors for work that FEMA was unable to staff because of the lack of FEMA personnel available. As recently as February 10, 2016, FEMA’s Federal Coordinating Officer for disaster DR-4250-MO reported that he anticipated “a significant shortfall in trained PA [Public Assistance] staff” and that this would affect program delivery.<sup>2</sup> FEMA officials said they have been aggressively hiring Reservists. FEMA’s efforts align with its 2014–2018 strategic plan, which includes appropriately staffing and managing its workforce. FEMA should also consider creating internal performance goals for FEMA management to reach and maintain workforce levels.

### **Problems with Reservist Performance**

Problems with Reservist performance, specifically job-specific skills and updated technology knowledge, during disaster deployments has been an ongoing challenge. However, it is difficult to maintain a large, well-trained, and reliable workforce of on-call employees. Budget limitations, the geographic distribution of Reservists, and the Reservists’ intermittent work schedule present significant obstacles to FEMA’s achievement of its goal of maintaining a workforce capable of deploying immediately anywhere in the United States and its territories.

During five of our seven disaster deployments that occurred after the October 2012 implementation of FQS, FEMA Joint Field Office officials told us they encountered problems obtaining capable Reservists with position titles under the new credentialing system. They also said that this impacted their ability to respond quickly and effectively to disasters, adding that Reservists sometimes lacked the experience and training to perform their duties adequately. This resulted in some FEMA disaster officials reassigning personnel outside their FQS-certified positions. FEMA disaster management

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<sup>2</sup> Missouri Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Straight-line Winds, and Flooding, DR-4250-MO, declared January 21, 2016



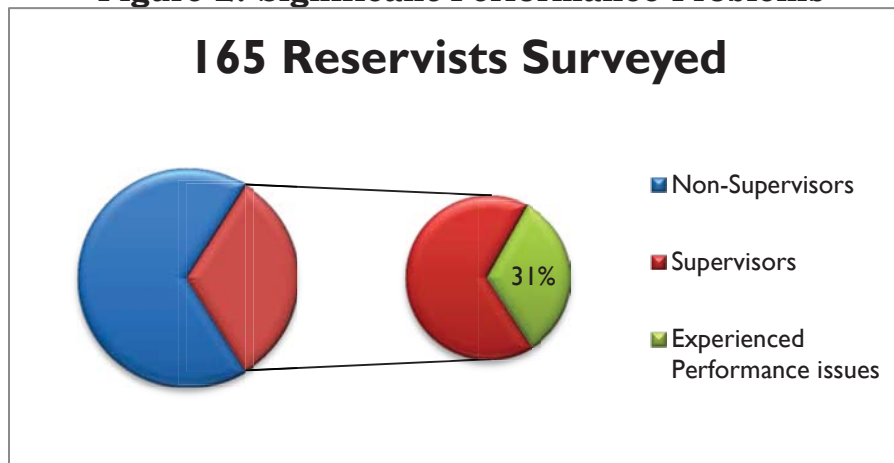
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officials also told us that FEMA misclassified some Reservists into FQS positions for which they did not have the required skills and qualifications.

To obtain more insight into Reservist performance issues, we interviewed a statistically valid, randomly selected sample of 165 of 740 Reservists deployed to the 2015 Texas Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Straight-line Winds and Flooding (see figure 2).<sup>3</sup> Our discussions indicated that Reservist performance remains a concern. Thirteen (31 percent) of the 42 Reservist supervisors in our sample said they experienced performance issues with other Reservists. For example, some supervisors said their Reservists had problems knowing how to use technology, registering disaster survivors, and understanding the Individual Assistance program.

**Figure 2: Significant Performance Problems**



Source: Office of Inspector General (OIG) analysis of Reservist survey of DR-4223-TX

Cascading Reservists into FQS positions before implementing FQS in 2012 caused some of the early performance issues. Before implementing FQS, but after completing the certification process, FEMA officials realized that too many Reservists held FQS positions at higher levels in the organization. To assign more Reservists to lower levels, FEMA limited the number of higher-level positions and “cascaded” those remaining to lower positions. While this better distributed employees throughout the organization, it also placed some Reservists into job categories for which they did not have the necessary skills or experience.

Fourteen of the Reservist supervisors we interviewed from the Texas flooding disaster said they addressed Reservist performance issues informally by providing Reservists on-the-job training or finding ways to work around the

<sup>3</sup> Texas Severe Storms, Tornadoes, Straight-line Winds and Flooding, DR-4223-TX, was declared May 29, 2015. To be included in our survey, Reservists must have deployed by September 1, 2015.



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performance problems. Although in past disasters we encountered Joint Field Office managers who dealt with performance problems by reassigning Reservists outside their FQS-certified positions, we did not identify many reassignments at the Texas flooding disaster.

These workarounds are understandable and demonstrate FEMA's flexibility during disasters. However, it is essential that Reservists remain in their FQS-certified positions so that supervisors can assess Reservist performance in their certified job positions. To do otherwise increases the risk that Reservists will deploy again with the same performance issues.

### **Reservists Need a Rigorous Performance Evaluation Program**

A rigorous performance evaluation program will improve actual Reservist performance by allowing cadre management to assess each Reservist's knowledge and skillset. Currently, FEMA neither adequately evaluates Reservists' performance following each deployment nor tracks those evaluations. For example, FEMA could provide us with copies of deployment evaluations for only 112 (68 percent) of the 165 Reservists in our survey.<sup>4</sup> Most of the Reservists we spoke to (133 of 165, or 81 percent) said they provided copies of their deployment evaluations to the Joint Field Office Human Resources staff during deployment check-out. According to the Human Resources Cadre Coordinator, the Joint Field Office Human Resource section is responsible for forwarding all deployment evaluations received to respective cadre management in FEMA headquarters. However, the Human Resource Cadre Coordinator also expressed concern regarding the check-out process and the lack of enforcement for Joint Field Office supervisors to provide evaluations.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) identified similar problems in 2012, saying that FEMA's performance appraisals need to be more rigorous and include specific criteria as a basis for performance ratings.<sup>5</sup> FEMA's current deployment evaluation process does not assess or track Reservist job performance in job-specific skills critical to success. Further, cadre management often does not receive these evaluations; and, even when they do receive them, cadre management does not use them for corrective action or career development.

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<sup>4</sup> The remaining 53 evaluations not provided by FEMA were either not received by cadre management by our cutoff date of September 1, 2015, or they did not receive the evaluation from the Joint Field Office.

<sup>5</sup> GAO-12-538, *Disaster Assistance Workforce: FEMA could Enhance Human Capital Management and Training*, May 2012, p. 2

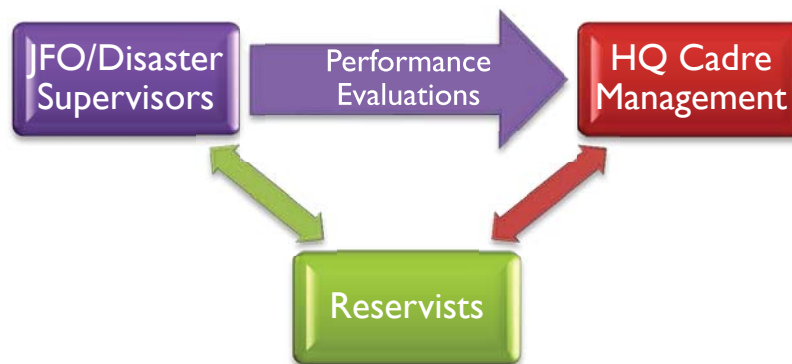


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To further complicate Reservist evaluations, Reservists have two supervisors; the deployment supervisor based at the disaster site and the Reservist's cadre supervisor located in FEMA headquarters (see figure 3).

**Figure 3: FEMA Reservist Management**



Source: FEMA Reservist Program Directive

Although 31 percent of the Reservist supervisors in our sample said they experienced problems with their Reservists' performance, less than half of these supervisors said they reported the problems to cadre management. However, because these evaluations are so generic, they provide only limited use in assessing Reservist performance even when provided to cadre management.

Further, supervisors may not always objectively complete performance evaluations. Ten supervisors (24 percent) we interviewed from the Texas flooding disaster, as well as supervisors from other Joint Field Offices we visited, said they were reluctant to criticize other Reservists for various reasons. One reason they provided was a concern that the Reservists they criticize could be their supervisors in future deployments. Regardless, as noted previously, even if performance evaluations were completed objectively and all forwarded to cadre management in headquarters, these evaluations do not provide FQS job-specific performance assessments (see sample evaluation form in appendix C).

FEMA's standard deployment evaluation form for all Reservists allows a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory rating on job performance in seven broad categories.<sup>6</sup> Although these categories address important *general* performance objectives, they are too general to assist Reservists effectively in improving performance. Reservists need assessments on their *specific* job responsibilities.

<sup>6</sup> Evaluation categories for non-supervisors are (1) Knowledge of Job, Rules, Regulations, and Policies; (2) Quality/Timeliness/Sense of Priorities; (3) Quality of Work; (4) Initiative; (5) Dependability; (6) Communication Skills; and (7) Cooperativeness.





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For example, FEMA could evaluate Public Assistance Project Specialists on their ability to prepare project worksheets and include specific competencies such as conducting site inspections, documenting eligible damage, and conducting project research. FEMA could also evaluate Project Specialists on their ability to educate customers on the Public Assistance program and provide timely responses to customer inquiries and requests.

The evaluation forms also include a small (1-inch by 7-inch) narrative section providing space to address shortcomings and suggestions for corrective actions. In seven instances, supervisors from the Texas floods used this section to highlight specific areas where Reservists could improve performance; however, cadre management officials we interviewed said they rarely used this section to identify specific performance problems or suggest actions to correct deficiencies. Of the 112 evaluations we received, only 7 included comments related to performance issues in the narrative section. In 17 other instances, supervisors commented on high performing individuals and suggested training for career development.

To provide effective evaluations and improve performance, FEMA should:

- supplement the existing evaluation form with FQS position-specific evaluation criteria,
- adopt procedures to ensure Joint Field Offices complete and forward all evaluations to cadre management,
- establish policies that require cadre management to account for and review these forms, and
- establish a system to track the performance evaluations.

Furthermore, to complete the evaluation cycle, cadre management should work with Reservists to develop corrective action plans, if necessary, and assist them in their career development.



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### Improving Reservist Morale

Improving Reservist staffing levels and performance will be difficult given that morale is low among Reservists. Improving morale should improve performance. In 2015, the GAO reported that low Reservist morale has been an ongoing challenge.<sup>7</sup> Our interviews with Reservists as well as FEMA full-time staff indicate the same problem. Clearly, the transition in 2012 from regional control to national control, as well as the problems encountered in the FQS transition itself, led to increased Reservist dissatisfaction and high attrition rates during the years following Hurricane Sandy.

During GAO's discussions with FEMA employee focus groups, participants expressed concerns about FEMA's implementation of FQS. They cited examples where FEMA officials ignored FQS positions when assigning Hurricane Sandy tasks and added that FEMA deployed some Reservists who lacked the skills and expertise needed to contribute effectively to the disaster response and recovery.

Morale also suffered when FEMA moved management and oversight responsibilities for its Reservist workforce from FEMA's 10 regional offices to FEMA's headquarters in 2012. According to GAO interviews of Reservists, this transition eliminated long-standing positive relationships between Reservists and regional staff. FEMA officials made this change because they believed the decentralized regional system was dysfunctional and lacked strategic oversight.<sup>8</sup>

Management in several cadres told us they do not have sufficient staff or resources to manage their Reservists. For example, the Disaster Survivor Assistance Cadre has only one supervisor managing 435 Reservists, and the Logistics Cadre has two supervisors managing 701 Reservists. FEMA senior leadership explained that a ratio of 1 supervisor managing 213 Reservists is the goal across all cadres; although an improvement, this ratio remains high. Managers have a significant impact on employee morale. It is difficult to predict what actions FEMA managers can take to increase Reservist job satisfaction. However, better communication and greater involvement by cadre management in the success and professional development of Reservists would likely help, especially for those Reservists assigned to the larger cadres. FEMA needs to hire additional cadre management to ensure proper management of Reservists.

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<sup>7</sup> GAO-15-437, *Federal Emergency Management Agency: Additional Planning and Data Collection Could Help Improve Workforce Management Efforts*, July 9, 2015

<sup>8</sup> GAO-15-437, *Federal Emergency Management Agency: Additional Planning and Data Collection Could Help Improve Workforce Management Efforts*, July 9, 2015, p. 18



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### Increasing Training Opportunities

Increasing opportunities for job-related training should improve performance and may improve morale. GAO also identified training challenges when it compared FEMA's Reservist training programs to similar disaster-related training programs at the Small Business Administration, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Coast Guard.<sup>9</sup> GAO found that, unlike the other agencies, FEMA Reservist training funds are dependent on Reservist deployments, which offers less flexibility for training. Conversely, Federal law mandates and provides funding for the Coast Guard to train its reservists.

Some supervisors in our sample said that a lack of training opportunities contributed to performance problems. GAO found that unlike FEMA, the Small Business Administration, U.S. Forest Service, and the Coast Guard all deploy their reservists for training before responding to a disaster. FEMA does not typically provide Reservists routine and job-specific training when not deployed. Forty-three (26 percent) of the 165 Reservists we interviewed believed they need training between deployments. Forty of the Reservists we interviewed (24 percent) in 2015 had not deployed to a disaster since Hurricane Sandy in 2012, further demonstrating the need to stay current on training when not deployed.

Many who deployed to the Texas floods said they or those they managed needed training because of changes in technology, FEMA programs, and new software including FEMA's new travel system.<sup>10</sup> Some supervisors said they lost time getting Reservists trained in these areas during their deployments. Other Reservists in our sample said they did not feel qualified in their FQS positions or they needed more training time to perform effectively in their FQS position.

Currently, FEMA's Workforce Management Division allows cadre management to compensate Reservists up to 40 hours per year for mandatory training.<sup>11</sup> However, none of these classes relate to job-specific training. Also, these training opportunities generally are online, web-based training that resides behind FEMA's internet firewall. Often, Reservists do not have laptops to

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<sup>9</sup> GAO-13-250R, *FEMA Reservists: Training Could Benefit from Examinations of Practices at Other Agencies*, March 22, 2013

<sup>10</sup> Reservists with an open Position Task Book may attend training needed to complete their qualification sheet; however, once Reservists become qualified in positions or complete required training in their Position Task Books, those trainings are no longer available. Completing a Position Task Book allows a Reservist to become "qualified" in a specific FQS position. Once a Reservist is qualified, he/she no longer has an open Position Task Book unless he/she requests to become a candidate for another position in his/her career.

<sup>11</sup> The Workforce Management Division oversees the management and readiness of the Reservist Program, including overseeing the implementation of FQS within the Reservist community.



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access this training when not deployed. Although the Workforce Management Division has allowed the 40 hours of training per year since June 2012, only half of the cadres we interviewed use these hours to train their Reservists. FEMA should explore regular, job-specific training opportunities for Reservists to stay current on FEMA policies and procedures and practice disaster recovery skills before their next deployment. FEMA senior leadership said the Workforce Management Division has developed a continuing education training program for Reservists who have not deployed in 180 days or more and plans to pilot the program in June 2016.

### Improving Communication

According to a 2014 FEMA report, 25 percent of former Reservists surveyed said they left FEMA because of cadre management issues, including poor communication, lack of support, and the perception that cadre managers were insensitive, impersonal, and uncaring.<sup>12</sup> Our interviews with Reservists confirmed that low Reservist morale resulted, at least in part, from inadequate communication, problems implementing FQS, and the centralization of the cadre management.<sup>13</sup>

Better and more frequent communications may improve both performance and morale. To support and retain a well-qualified workforce, cadre management should engage Reservists regularly. During our discussions with 165 Reservists deployed to the Texas floods, we asked Reservists whether their cadre management communicated with them on a regular basis when not deployed. Seventy-seven (47 percent) of the Reservists said they received very little communication from their cadre. They described the communication as sporadic and often not relevant to their specific cadres. Eleven of the Reservists we interviewed did not know who in their cadre to contact when they had questions. Also, five Reservists could not name their Reservist program managers, and one was unaware he had a manager. The GAO also identified communication challenges with Reservists when not deployed.<sup>14</sup>

Since 2012, the Workforce Management Division has also allowed cadres to compensate each Reservist up to 32 hours per year to participate in cadre conference calls. Ideally, the cadres should use these calls to keep Reservists informed of regulatory/statutory changes, procedural changes, planning items, etc. However, five of the cadres we interviewed did not use these hours to

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<sup>12</sup> FEMA based this on exit interviews with Reservists who left FEMA during the 18 months ended June 30, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> In response to the significant number of losses experienced in the FEMA Reservist workforce, the FEMA Reservist Ombudsman conducted a *Reservist Exit Interview Survey* in October 2014 to understand why individual Reservists had resigned.

<sup>14</sup> GAO-12-538, *Disaster Assistance Workforce: FEMA could Enhance Human Capital Management and Training*, May 2012





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communicate with their Reservists. Two of the cadres said that when hundreds of individuals are on one conference call, the calls become unproductive.

During our discussions with Reservists from the Texas floods and other Joint Field Offices we visited, we repeatedly heard that managers communicated better with Reservists before FEMA centralized cadre management. Some Reservists also expressed dissatisfaction with cadre management because they felt managers did not respect Reservists as full members of FEMA's workforce.

### Improving Cadre Management

Better cadre management should also help improve performance and morale. As discussed previously, FEMA's shift to centralized cadre management resulted in an extreme shortage of managers in the larger cadres contributing to lower morale. The GAO reported in 2015 that Reservists they interviewed felt the management centralization eliminated long-standing positive relationships between the Reservists and the staff of FEMA's 10 regional offices.<sup>15</sup> Also, FEMA's *Reservist Exit Interview Survey* conducted in 2014 indicated that 25 percent of the Reservists interviewed noted cadre management problems such as inadequate communication, insensitivity, and lack of support as a reason for leaving FEMA. The survey also found that 9 percent said they might not have resigned if cadre management remained with the regional offices.

According to FEMA senior leadership, they have authorized the cadre management teams to hire additional staff to help with the day-to-day management of the Reservists. However, as noted previously, some of the cadres are still experiencing a shortage of managers.

FEMA's regional management has a strong interest in the training, professional development and high performance of Reservists because Reservists not only represent FEMA nationally, but also represent the individual FEMA Regions where the disasters occur. FEMA centralized management of Reservists in part to achieve standardization among the 10 Regions; however, FEMA should consider engaging the FEMA regional offices and other FEMA components to assist the cadres in improving the readiness and training of the Reservists.

### Conclusion

FEMA continues to experience challenges hiring enough disaster incident workforce employees and deploying Reservists with sufficient knowledge and skills to assist disaster survivors in the hard work of disaster recovery. Low morale also remains a problem. FEMA's transition to a credentialed workforce

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<sup>15</sup> GAO-15-437, *Federal Emergency Management Agency: Additional Planning and Data Collection Could Help Improve Workforce Management Efforts*, July 9, 2015



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under FQS, and the centralization of Reservist management has been a difficult process. Undoubtedly, the transition resulted in the loss of some Reservists and harmed morale. The transition also broke long-established relationships between Reservists and their regional managers. To improve Reservist performance and morale, FEMA should develop a comprehensive and job-specific performance evaluation program, expand training opportunities, improve communications, and increase involvement by cadre management.

In addition, FEMA does not have enough Reservist program managers in headquarters to manage the larger cadres effectively. Therefore, for the larger cadres, FEMA should consider sharing some responsibilities with other FEMA components, including the individual FEMA Regions, especially in the areas of training and employee development.

### Recommendations

We recommend that FEMA's Associate Administrator, Office of Response and Recovery:

**Recommendation 1:** Strengthen FEMA's capacity to respond to catastrophic disasters by bringing the Reservist workforce up to target workforce levels and creating internal performance goals that encourage FEMA management to reach and maintain those target workforce levels.

**Recommendation 2:** Develop, implement, and enforce a rigorous FEMA Qualification System-based performance system and tracking mechanism for all Reservists.

**Recommendation 3:** Increase job-specific training opportunities for Reservists when not deployed to disasters, improve cadre management communications with Reservists, and require cadre management to take an active role in monitoring performance and promoting the professional development of all Reservists.

**Recommendation 4:** Develop and implement a workforce readiness strategy to engage all FEMA components, including the FEMA Regions, on cadre management efforts to include training and promoting professional development.



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### Management Comments and OIG Analysis

FEMA concurs with all of the recommendations. We obtained written comments on the draft report from FEMA's Acting Associate Administrator for the Office of Policy and Program Analysis. We have included FEMA's comments, in their entirety, in appendix A. FEMA also provided technical comments and suggested revisions to our draft report in a separate document. We reviewed the technical comments and made changes in the report where appropriate. A summary of FEMA's response and our analysis follows.

**Management Comments to Recommendation 1:** FEMA concurs with and requests closure of recommendation 1. FEMA officials said they established a target of increasing Reservist staffing levels to 80 percent of force structure by the end of fiscal year 2018 and incorporated this goal into the 2014–2018 FEMA Strategic Plan. FEMA officials also said they established dashboards and reporting tools to track progress toward meeting this target.

**OIG Analysis:** We consider the actions FEMA has completed and proposed responsive to the intent of the recommendation, which we consider resolved and open. We will close this recommendation when we receive documentation demonstrating that FEMA has met 80 percent of its target workforce goal.

**Management Comments to Recommendation 2:** FEMA concurs with recommendation 2. FEMA officials said the Office of the Chief Component Human Capital Officer is working to develop a deployed employee performance guide and supporting form for all members of the incident workforce. FEMA estimates it will complete these documents by March 31, 2017.

**OIG Analysis:** We consider the actions FEMA has proposed responsive to the intent of the recommendation, which we consider resolved and open. We will close this recommendation when we receive documentation that FEMA has developed, implemented, and enforced procedures related to the performance guide and supporting forms for Reservists. This guide and supporting form should ensure (1) evaluations of Reservist performance relevant to FEMA Qualification System positions and (2) management's ability to track the evaluations.

**Management Comments to Recommendation 3:** FEMA concurs with and requests closure of recommendation 3. FEMA officials said they piloted a Mission Rehearsal training targeted at Reservists who have not deployed for over 180 days to ensure they remain engaged and aware of pertinent FEMA and program policies regardless of disaster activity. FEMA intends to begin offering this training monthly in FY 2017. FEMA officials also increased the number of dedicated cadre management personnel and staffing in support components.



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**OIG Analysis:** We consider the actions FEMA has completed and proposed responsive to the intent of the recommendation, which we consider resolved and open. We will close this recommendation when we receive documentation that FEMA developed and implemented a plan to require cadre management to take an active role in monitoring performance and promoting professional development of all Reservists as well as documentation that FEMA implemented the Mission Rehearsal training.

**Management Response to Recommendation 4:** FEMA concurs with recommendation 4. FEMA officials said FEMA's Field Operations Directorate officials recently traveled to each of the FEMA Regions to discuss readiness initiatives and discuss how the Regions could partner on critical initiatives. Additionally, FEMA is working through its various executive boards to advance staffing initiatives and readiness policies. FEMA expects to consolidate these initiatives into a coordinated incident workforce readiness strategy by February 28, 2017.

**OIG Analysis:** FEMA's corrective action is responsive to the recommendation, which we consider resolved and open. We will close this recommendation when we receive documentation of FEMA's coordinated incident workforce readiness strategy.

### Objective, Scope, and Methodology

The objective of this audit was to determine whether FQS adequately supports FEMA's goal of developing a Reservist workforce with the critical skills and competencies required for responding effectively to major disasters. To accomplish our objective and to gain an understanding of FQS, we interviewed the following FEMA personnel:

- FEMA executive level officials (FEMA Headquarters)
- FEMA Incident Workforce Management Division officials (FEMA Headquarters)
- FQS officials (FEMA Headquarters)
- Cadre Management officials (FEMA Headquarters)
- Joint Field Office senior managers and supervisors from several disaster locations (DR-4207-VT, DR-4208-ME, DR-4216-KY, DR-4217-KY, and DR-4223-TX)
- FEMA Regional Incident Workforce Management Division officials
- FEMA Regional Officials

We also interviewed a random sample of 165 of the 740 Reservists deployed to the Texas flooding disaster as of September 1, 2015, to discuss numerous





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topics such as cadre management, deployment evaluations, significant performance issues, and the FQS.<sup>16</sup> In addition, we reviewed workforce management and deployment policies and reports, reviewed GAO and OIG reports relevant to FQS, and performed other procedures we considered necessary to accomplish our objective. We extended the audit period to February 2016, to include Federal Coordinating Officer comments from Disaster DR-4250-MO, declared January 21, 2016. We did not assess the adequacy of FEMA's internal controls applicable to the FEMA Qualification System because it was not necessary to accomplish our audit objective.

We conducted this performance audit between March 2015 and April 2016 pursuant to the *Inspector General Act of 1978*, as amended, and according to generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based upon our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based upon our audit objectives.

The Office of Emergency Management Oversight major contributors to this report are Christopher Dodd, Director; Trudi Powell, Audit Manager; DeAnna Fox, Lead Auditor; and Heather Hubbard, Auditor.

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<sup>16</sup> We designed this statistically valid sample to be accurate to within +/- 5 percent with 90 percent confidence.



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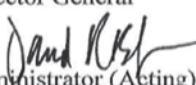
### Appendix A FEMA Comments to the Draft Report



# FEMA

**JUL 27 2016**

MEMORANDUM FOR: Thomas Salmon  
Assistant Inspector General (Acting)  
Office of Inspector General

FROM: David Bibo   
Associate Administrator (Acting)  
Office of Policy & Program Analysis

SUBJECT: Management's Response to OIG Draft Report "FEMA Can  
Enhance Readiness with Management of its Disaster Incident  
Workforce"  
(Project No. 15-076-EMO-FEMA)

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this Draft Report. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) appreciates the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) work in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

The Draft Report contains four recommendations with which FEMA concurs. Detailed responses to each recommendation are included in the attachment. Actions taken over the last few months address many of the report's findings, and illustrate the significant effort required to advance the management of FEMA's incident workforce.

FEMA is committed to building and maintaining a well-trained, adequately-staffed incident workforce that is able to carry out the Agency's disaster response, recovery, and mitigation missions. Over the last two years, FEMA has taken a number of steps to improve the management of its incident workforce programs. These steps include: restructuring of cadre management; implementation of a revised Reservist availability and benefits policy; establishment of the Reservist Advisory Board; development of an updated information technology solution for the deployment and accountability of the deployed workforce; and establishment of standard training requirements through the FEMA Qualification System (FQS) with support from the FEMA Incident Workforce Academy (FIWA).

At the end of 2015, FEMA assessed its progress toward achieving readiness objectives and implemented a number of aggressive steps to address staffing, training, and retention issues. Specifically FEMA:



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### Appendix A (continued) FEMA Comments to the Draft Report

- 1) Conducted a Reservist hiring pilot in June 2015 to improve the force strength of five critical cadres – Individual Assistance (IA), Public Assistance (PA), Hazard Mitigation, Information Technology, and Logistics. Within two months of implementation, 647 individuals accepted offers in the Reservist program;
- 2) Conducted a mass hiring event in Pasadena, California in December 2015 for the PA cadre, which resulted in 245 offers of employment to Reservists;
- 3) Assigned 400 existing Full Time Equivalent employees to the IA and Disaster Survivor Assistance cadres;
- 4) Assigned Federal Coordinating Officer Type III Position Task Books to all Senior Executive Service members in November 2015;
- 5) Launched the Qualifications Management Portal that automates and increases transparency of the FQS process in October 2015; and,
- 6) Revised new employee orientation and onboarding to include the FIWA Tier 4 Emergency Management Specialist Course. This ensures that all FEMA employees receive the foundational course for all FQS job titles, and facilitates a faster qualification process.

The five initiatives above have contributed to enhanced operational readiness and align with the recommendations identified in the Draft Report. Since November 2015, the Agency has added over 1,000 individuals to its incident workforce, over half of whom are Reservists. As the size of the workforce grows, FEMA is working to ensure all employees have an opportunity to attend training, deploy to the field, participate in an exercise environment, and continue to advance their careers.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this Draft Report. Technical comments were previously provided under separate cover. Please feel free to contact Gary McKeon, FEMA's GAO/OIG Audit Liaison Office Director at 202-646-1308 if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you again in the future.



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**Appendix A (continued)**  
**FEMA Comments to the Draft Report**

**Attachment: FEMA's Management Response to Recommendations Contained in  
OIG-15-076-EMO-FEMA**

**Recommendation 1:** Strengthen FEMA's capacity to respond to catastrophic disasters by bringing the Reservist workforce up to target workforce levels and creating internal performance goals that encourage FEMA management to reach and maintain those target workforce levels.

**Response:** Concur. FEMA has established hiring targets for its Reservist program to improve cadre staffing levels to 80% of force structure by the end of FY 2018. These targets have been incorporated in annual spend plans, and are reflected in the 2014-2018 FEMA Strategic Plan. And, FEMA has established dashboards and reporting tools to track progress towards meeting these hiring goals. FEMA considers this recommendation closed.

**Recommendation 2:** Develop, implement, and enforce a rigorous FEMA Qualification System-based performance system and tracking mechanism for all Reservists.

**Response:** Concur. FEMA's Office of the Chief Component Human Capital Officer (OCCHCO) is working to develop a deployed employee performance evaluation guide, as well as a supporting form that will apply to all members of the incident workforce regardless of employee type. This document will provide more specific guidance for field supervisors responsible for providing performance reviews for personnel deployed to disasters. Estimate completion date (ECD): March 31, 2017.

**Recommendation 3:** Increase job specific training opportunities for Reservists when not deployed to disasters, improve cadre management communications with Reservists, and require cadre management to take an active role in monitoring performance and promoting the professional development of all Reservists.

**Response:** Concur. In June of 2016, FEMA piloted its first Mission Rehearsal training targeted at Reservists who have not deployed for over 180 days. This training program is designed to verify the intermittent workforce is engaged and aware of pertinent Agency and program policies regardless of disaster activity. FEMA intends to offer this program monthly beginning in FY 2017. Furthermore, to improve cadre management communications, FEMA has greatly increased the number of dedicated cadre management personnel, as well as staffing in supporting components such as OCCHCO and FOD. FEMA considers this recommendation closed.





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**Appendix A (continued)**  
**FEMA Comments to the Draft Report**

**Recommendation 4:** Develop and implement a workforce readiness strategy to engage all FEMA components, including the FEMA Regions, on cadre management efforts to include training and promoting professional development.

**Response:** Concur. Since its inception in November 2015, FOD has made regional engagement a priority. Between May and July of 2016, the FOD travelled to each of the FEMA Regions in order to discuss readiness initiatives and how the Regions could partner on critical initiatives. In addition to this effort, FEMA is working through its various executive boards, to include the Human Capital Governance Board and Incident Workforce Executive Steering Committee, to advance staffing initiatives and readiness policies across the Agency. FEMA will work to consolidate these initiatives into a coordinated incident workforce readiness strategy. ECD: February 28, 2017.



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### **Appendix B**

### **DHS OIG Reports Issued in FYs 2013–15 on FEMA’s Response to Disasters**

During FYs 2013–2015, DHS OIG issued seven reports on FEMA’s response to disasters. These disasters occurred after FEMA implemented FQS in October 2012, but before we deployed to the Texas flooding, DR-4223-TX, in June 2015.

- Hurricane Sandy-New Jersey; DR-4086-NJ; Report OIG-13-117
- Hurricane Sandy-New York; DR-4085-NY; Report OIG-13-124
- Oklahoma Severe Storms and Tornadoes; DR-4117-OK; Report OIG-14-50-D
- Colorado Severe Storms, Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides; DR-4145-CO; Report OIG-14-111-D
- Washington Mudslide; DR-4168-WA; Report OIG-15-102-D
- Napa, California Earthquake; DR-4193-CA; Report OIG-15-92-D
- Michigan Severe Storms and Flooding; DR-4195-MI; Report OIG-15-105-D



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**Appendix C**  
**FEMA Reservist Performance Appraisal Form**

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL FOR THE DISASTER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM		
NAME	POSITION TITLE	GRADE (PFT/TEMP) OR LEVEL (DAE)
REGION AND PROGRAM AREA	POSITION TITLE FROM TO	DR OR EM NUMBER
NOTE TO EVALUATOR: Part I must be completed for all employees. Part II must be completed on all employees in a supervisory capacity. A separate evaluation form should be completed for each discrete job performed by the employee. You are required to discuss this evaluation with the employee prior to its being signed by either party. This evaluation must be completed <u>prior to</u> the employee's departure from the Disaster Field Office.		
The following definitions are to be used: S SATISFACTORY - Consistently meets normal requirements U UNSATISFACTORY - Fails to meet normal requirements N/A UNABLE TO EVALUATE - No opportunity to observe performance		
PART I - ALL EMPLOYEES		PART II - ALL SUPERVISORS
ELEMENTS	RATING	ELEMENTS RATING
1. <b>Knowledge of Job, Rules, Regulations and Policies</b> - Understands duties and responsibilities and applies skills in conformance with applicable guidance.	_____	1. <b>Planning and Organizing</b> - Effectively utilizes staff time and skills and develops priority-driven work schedule. _____
2. <b>Quality/Timeliness/Sense of Priorities</b> - Produces useful volume of work, meets deadlines, organizes/prioritizes work.	_____	2. <b>Leadership</b> - Inspires teamwork and productivity; delegates responsibility. _____
3. <b>Quality of Work</b> - Finished product is accurate, complete, and in compliance with procedures.	_____	3. <b>Develops, Motivates, and Counsels Staff</b> - Identifies employee potential; encourages and assists in employee development. _____
4. <b>Initiative</b> - Assumes responsibility; completes assignments with minimal supervision.	_____	4. <b>Personnel Management</b> - Achieves program goals within the limitations of staff and personnel budget; controls overtime usage. _____
5. <b>Dependability</b> - Gets the job done efficiently, adhering to procedures; is supportive and reliable.	_____	5. <b>Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action</b> - Complies with regulations; displays fairness in selections; encourages/recognizes employees' achievement. _____
6. <b>Communication Skills</b> - Gets ideas across clearly, concisely, and effectively both orally and in writing.	_____	6. <b>Technical Ability</b> - Provides sound, timely advice and inspires action. _____
7. <b>Cooperativeness</b> - Works well with others to achieve a common goal.	_____	7. <b>Resources Management</b> - Efficient management of funds, equipment, and supplies. _____
NARRATIVE (Required)		
SIGNATURE OF RATING OFFICIAL		DATE
SIGNATURE OF EMPLOYEE (Signifies only that rating has been discussed with Rating official, does not necessarily indicate concurrence)		DATE
EMPLOYEE'S COMMENTS (Optional. Use the reverse side of form or additional sheets, if necessary)		
DISTRIBUTION: Forward Original Copy to: OPEO for Official Personnel File Forward one of each of the remaining copies to: Employee/Employee's Home Office/Official DFO file		

FEMA Form 90-106, JAN 01

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