

The Region III Report

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region III Information Source

Philadelphia, PA, April 2003

Bush visits Philadelphia Port

Traveling throughout the eastern region, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) employees gathered on March 31 in large numbers to hear President Bush give the latest developments on Operation Liberty Shield.

Held outdoors at the Port of Philadelphia, FEMA Region III employees were among the first to arrive. The crowd of Coast Guard, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection employees cheered as President Bush and Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge approached the stage.

The president's twenty-minute speech had two major themes: One, to commend the Coast Guard for its efforts in guarding America's waters and two, to discuss the current initiatives in place to protect the nation from the dangers of terrorism.

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Niki Edwards

Region III welcomes new Public Information Officer

In the same month as the historic launch of the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Region III prepared for another new beginning—the arrival of its new Public Information Officer, Niki Edwards.

Arriving at the regional office on March 24, Edwards is no stranger to DHS. Prior to joining FEMA, she served as the Public Information Officer for the Philadelphia District of the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Citizenship and Immigration Services and Customs and Border Protection—all in the Border and Transportation Security (BTS) Directorate.

“I’m grateful for the opportunity to be a part of an organization that helps people and communities recover from devastation,” said Edwards.

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Melissa Ann Janssen/FEMA

President Bush addressing the U.S. Coast Guard and agencies of the Department of Homeland Security at the Port of Philadelphia on March 31.

In Brief...

► **Disaster Aid Approved for Virginia:** Federal disaster aid has been approved for Virginia to help people and communities recover from the severe winter storm and record snowfall that struck the state last month.

The declaration covers damage to private property from the storm, heavy rain, flooding and mudslides that occurred February 15-28. The following jurisdictions are eligible: the counties of Buchanan, Dickenson, Montgomery, Russell, Tazewell and Wise and the cities of Norton, Roanoke and Salem.

Funding will be available to pay part of the cost for emergency protective measures undertaken as a result of record and near-record snowfall in the counties of Arlington, Clarke, Fairfax, Fauquier, Frederick, Highland, Loudoun, Orange and Rappahannock and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church and Winchester. FEMA will reimburse state and local government agencies in these jurisdictions for 75 percent of the total eligible costs of equipment, contracts and personnel overtime related to emergency services in dealing with the snow over a 48-hour period.

► **Additional Counties Eligible for Aid:** With the addition of six counties on April 4, West Virginia now has a total of 24 counties that are eligible for individual assistance: Braxton, Harrison, Lewis, Logan, Monroe and Putnam. Five more counties are eligible for public assistance, including Boone, Kanawha, Summers, Tyler and Wetzel—the total has risen to 29. As of April 10, 20 counties are eligible for snow emergency assistance. The original disaster declaration for the state was announced on March 14.

► **FY03 EMPG Allocation:** An unprecedented increase in funding for the Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG) was announced on March 20, providing additional support for all-hazards, comprehensive emergency management at the state and local levels. Overall, FEMA Region III states and the District of Columbia will receive a marked increase over the FY 02 allocation that ranges from 39 percent to 85 percent. FEMA has also taken the opportunity to improve distribution of these funds. A new allocation methodology has been adopted for FY03 which takes into account not only current population estimates, but also the risk and vulnerability inherent in heavily populated areas.

► **States Awarded Grants for ‘Secure Rooms’:** The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has approved more than \$400,000 in grants to construct secure communications rooms at Emergency Operations Centers in each of the five Region III states and the District of Columbia.

The District of Columbia will receive \$150,000 as the federal share of a \$200,000 project; Delaware, \$100,000 for a \$133,334 project; Maryland, \$58,613 for a \$78,150 project; Pennsylvania, \$35,000 for a \$46,667 project; Virginia, \$41,925 for a \$55,900 project; and West Virginia, \$47,137 for a \$62,850 project.

The federal share is 75 percent with the state picking up the remaining 25 percent. Total cost of the projects is \$576,900, while the federal share totals \$432,674. Each state already received a \$50,000 grant to assess the capabilities of their Emergency Operations Centers.

If you would like additional information on the news briefs, please call the External Affairs Office at 215-931-5614/5716.

Fast Facts

A news tip from our State Partner, the Maryland Emergency Management Agency

The first-ever comprehensive federal privacy regulation, which was implemented on April 14, gives patients sweeping protections over the privacy of their medical records. A strong medical privacy regulation under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), the new privacy rule creates national standards to protect an individual's personal health information. Primarily, under the rule, the release of medical information is prohibited without prior consent from patients. Also, patients now have greater access to their records and can request corrections to errors.

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"The men and women of our Coast Guard are showing once again that you are always ready," said President Bush. "You're always ready to serve with courage and excellence. You are always ready to place your country's safety above your own..."

In between applause, the president discussed the Coast Guard's critical role in Operation Iraqi Freedom, saying that the 213-year-old organization will take on a new and vital role in DHS. In addition to the enforcement of maritime law, the service will also work to defend the country against terrorist attacks.



President Bush greets audience members.

Bush said another measure for the defense against terrorism is the establishment of Operation Liberty Shield. He outlined the nationwide effort into five specific areas: Increased security at borders; stronger transportation protections; increased surveillance of suspected terrorists; protections for critical infrastructures and key assets; and strengthening public health preparedness.

"The actions we're taking in Operation Liberty Shield are making this nation more secure...In every case, by acting today, we are saving countless lives in the future," said Bush.



President Bush and Secretary Ridge shake hands.

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"From a public affairs perspective, this responsiveness has earned FEMA a good reputation, and I plan to help maintain it."

Edwards will head the External Affairs component, managing the internal/external communication programs as well as three cadres of Disaster Assistance Employees (DAEs) and coordinating congressional affairs activities.

Although she has spent the majority of her career in Philadelphia, she has completed several assignments and leadership programs outside the local area. After graduating from Temple University in 1991 with a

degree in broadcast journalism, Edwards began working for the Department of Navy in Northeast Philadelphia, holding a variety of positions from television production manager to public affairs officer. While there, she developed the first broadcast employee news program, which was transmitted to over 4,000 employees. In 2001, seeking new challenges, she left to work for the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

In her spare time, she works as a mentor for the Big Brothers Big Sisters Organization. She enjoys reading, interior decorating and traveling. A staunch believer in progress, she is often in search of ways to become a better person.

The Region III Report is a vehicle for FEMA to share information with its federal, state and local partners and full-time staff and reservists. Please send any additional email addresses or changes to melissa.janssen@fema.gov. Send suggestions and story ideas to Niki Edwards at r3report@fema.gov.