

Extra-Sessional Meeting Minutes

Subcommittee on Disaster Reduction

7 February 2003 from 1:00pm-3:00pm, White House Conference Center, Lincoln Room

Names of absent members are indicated in italics. Names of members participating via teleconference are indicated with a (T).

Officers

Helen Wood (NOAA), Chair
John Filson (USGS), Vice-Chair for Science (T)
Margaret Lawless (FEMA), Vice-Chair for Policy

Working Group Chairs

Remote Sensing Applications Working Group
Rosalind Helz (USGS), Co-Chair
Steve Ambrose (NASA), Co-Chair

International Working Group

Larry Roeder, Jr./Fernando Echavarria (State), Co-Chair
Larry Weber (NSF), Co-Chair

Designated Representatives

CDC

Josephine Malilay

DOD

Earnest Paylor

EPA

Peter Jutro

FEMA

Margaret Lawless

FERC

Dan Mahoney

HUD

John Kennedy

NASA

Steve Ambrose

NIST

Shyam Sunder

Noel Raufaste (alternate)

NOAA

Helen Wood

NRO

Keith Fennell

NSF

Priscilla Nelson

Bob O'Connor (alternate, T)

OHS

Bill Jeffrey

OMB

Erin McCartney

Gary Reisner

Jason Freihage

OSTP

Gene Whitney

State

Fernando Echavarria

Larry Roeder, Jr.

USACE

Michael O'Connor

USCG

Ernesto Montijo

USFS

Sue Conard (T)

US Public Health Office

Eric Noji

USGS

Tim Cohn (T)

Other Attendees

NIMA

Heidi Smith

NOAA

Chris Lewis (NESDIS/IA)

Darci Glass-Royal (GRS)

Dori Akerman (GRS)

Peter Colohan (GRS, T)

USGS

Kathleen Gohn (T)

Agenda

3:00 Discussion of the Document to Supplement the President's FY2004 Budget

Handouts

Section IV: A Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction

Attachments to the Minutes

Section IV: A Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction
Noel Raufaste (NIST) comments
Tim Cohn (USGS) comments

Summary of Discussion - Document to Accompany the President's FY04 Budget

1. Discussion of the Document

Gene Whitney opened the meeting by reminding members of the Subcommittee's purpose, stressing the Subcommittee's role for interagency cooperation and the need to inform and affect planning with respect to interagency goals. These activities continue to be done with a focus on science and technology, as well as research and development. He also reiterated the objective of the National Science and Technology Council:

An important objective of the NSTC is the establishment of clear national goals for Federal science and technology investments in areas ranging from information technologies and health research, to improving transportation systems and strengthening fundamental research. The Council prepares research and development strategies that are coordinated across Federal agencies to form an investment package aimed at accomplishing multiple national goals. (http://www.ostp.gov/NSTC/html/NSTC_Home.html)

Dr. Whitney asked members to consider the original purpose of the document, as found in the SDR Annual Operating Plan:

An important objective of the NSTC and the SDR is the establishment of clear national priorities for natural and technological disaster reduction and recovery. The SDR will write and distribute a report that provides an overview of current natural and technological disaster programs, an assessment of the most pressing needs, and a summary of cross-cut Agency budget information, as feasible. This report will contribute to U.S. Government planning activities on a number of levels and is intended as a supplement to the President's FY 2004 budget. (Subcommittee on Disaster Reduction, Annual Operating Plan, page 3)

Chair Helen Wood summarized the Subcommittee's role "to provide our best advice in a judicious manner." One element of the "Way Forward" as defined in the paper, is to articulate points requiring attention, agreeing to work together as a group over the next year to get there. It is important to develop a framework and, if necessary, a record for consideration, including an assessment of important issues.

Noel Raufaste felt it was important to incorporate the long list of accomplishments of the SDR. He also recommended a look at other interagency groups to determine their best practices and felt that a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis of the SDR is in order. Chair Helen Wood agreed that this type of systematic, highly-visible approach is critical, and an element of the defined "Way Forward" as articulated in the paper. She also felt that it is important to engage the ultimate end-users, especially through conferences such as the National Emergency Managers Association (NEMA) Mid-Year Conference and the Hazards Research and Applications Workshop.

2. Plan for the Document

Given the opening conversation, the group agreed that this document is critical. Chair Helen Wood argued that the document this year lays the story. This document becomes an opportunity to declare the Subcommittee's purpose and to show the way forward.

To accomplish this, the current Section IV "A Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction" will become a broad category of the work to be done, allowing room for the Subcommittee to resolve the framework and plan from there. The group also agreed to retitle the document "Interim Report." Members also agreed to the elements of Section IV "A Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction," with the following modifications:

1. Item 3, “Development of a National Mitigation Plan” will be renamed to focus instead on the need to articulate the underlying science and technology requirements for the development of a National Mitigation Plan.
2. An Item 6, “Leveraging Natural Hazards Experience for Accidental and Terrorist Risks” will be added.

Members concluded that the Interim Report, with the items discussed, will be a very effective, purposeful document.

The meeting was adjourned at 3 pm.

Attachment 1 Section IV: A Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction

(DRAFT SDR Supplemental Report to the President's Budget for FY2004 – DRAFT 3, p. 4)

IV. A Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction

In light of the current mix of risk, issues, opportunities, and existing programs for hazard risk reduction, the agencies of the SDR have identified five areas of emphasis to narrow the gaps in the nation's knowledge and capacity to reduce hazard risk vulnerability.

1. National Coordinated Framework for Hazard Research

Coordinating and prioritizing the research agenda for fundamental research and applications development for hazard identification, prediction, risk assessment, mitigation, and risk communication.

2. Integrated Environmental Observing Systems for Hazard Support

Provide national and international leadership for a global initiative to integrate and improve remote-sensing and land/sea/air in-situ observing systems for early hazard detection and delivery of timely, high-quality critical observation data to hazard managers.

3. Development of a National Mitigation Plan

As the Federal Response Plan is revised under the Department of Homeland Security, build on ideas introduced with DMA 2000 to develop a nationwide strategy for developing improved engineering and design techniques for mitigation and promoting their widespread use. In addition, in order to fully support US interest in the international arena, this strategy should be extended to the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

4. Implementation of a National Risk Communication Plan

Work with recently introduced legislation and the recommendations of the Partnership for Public Warning to develop a national risk communication plan to expand the effectiveness of public warning and pre-disaster public education in techniques for preparedness and mitigation.

5. Disaster Costs Compilation for Improved Risk Assessment

Establish a coordinated and centralized system for quantifying annual national disaster costs in terms of direct damage estimates, relief expenditures, and economic disruption, with a view to developing improved risk assessment models.

Throughout 2003-2004, the SDR will provide more detailed recommendations for each of these areas of emphasis through white papers and fora, and will provide an update on each in its supplemental report to the President's budget for FY 2005.

Attachment 2 Comments: Noel Raufaste (NIST)

(Provided via email, February 11, 2003)

My remarks centered on developing comprehensive and forward-looking future narratives about SDR's reason for being and articulating our capabilities, in some detail, to serving our customer - the Federal Government. For the latter, I suggested we need to demonstrate that we understand the federal government's disaster reduction technology needs and we should present our uniqueness, as the interagency body that represents disaster reduction issues. I felt, to do the job right, this effort will probably demand 12-18 months of our time through to receiving OSTP's publication approval.

I proposed we first identify our accomplishments -- for the SDR Subcommittee members to better and uniformly understand, who we are, what we do, and what we have done. That profile will help us identify gaps e.g., what we would liked to have done but didn't (help us to look forward).

Next I asked that we look at ourselves as a corporate body and list our strengths and uniqueness as a way to see beyond our own particular agency's mission.

Follow this exercise (probably done concurrently with the above) with an honest assessment of our (SDR's) weaknesses so they may be addressed. As a start some weaknesses could include:

- -not known outside the committee membership,
- -not a representative cross-sectional sample of the federal government's disaster R&D agencies,
- -limited resources (human, financial, time) to assure comprehensive work performance and deployment/announcement of capabilities to customers,
- -not well linked to related NSTC Committees to effect synergy e.g., Homeland Security, Construction and Building Subcommittee,
- -not well linked to the private sector to perform joint work as was and is being done by the Subcommittee on Construction and Building,
- -others to be defined by the members.

There is great probability the above tasks will help us identify opportunities for cross collaborations.

Graphically this could be illustrated as: **Before** (SDR reports/activities not well aligned with or comprehensively focused on its agency's missions and findings/services; **Current** (becoming tightly focuses); **Envisioned** (advisory network to the president that addresses disaster national needs). I think our bottom line is to articulate SDR's capabilities as an organizer, facilitator, integrator, and collaborator with appropriate global public and private sectors and academia.

Hopefully such a process will help us better: develop next year's Budget Supplement; regularly update SDR's Web Site; create on-demand specialty white papers and presentations to Congress; seamlessly operate as an interagency entity, perhaps we may even turn our attention to soliciting partial funding from our participating SDR Agencies that will financially allow us to effect collaborations with the private sector and to fund appropriate studies.

Attachment 3 Comments: Tim Cohn (USGS)

(Provided via email, February 7, 2003)

Strategy for the Future: A Disaster Resistant America

The Subcommittee on Disaster Reduction (SDR) is charged with facilitating and promoting natural and technological disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. A critical component of SDR's mission is to provide scientific and technical guidance to the federal government so that, working with other components of our society, we can reduce disaster losses.

The problem is not going away: the United States today is at greater risk of natural and technological disaster than at any time in our history. Dramatic population growth along coastlines, fault lines, and other hazardous areas has resulted in increasing numbers of Americans living and working in harm's way. The imperative to prepare for and protect against those threats touches every American community.

For the foreseeable future, the federal government has a critical role to play in helping reduce the Nation's disaster losses. It will continue to work with partners in state and local government, the private sector, and academia, to advance research on earth processes, to monitor the planet, to develop improved satellite sensors, to recognize where the social sciences can contribute to saving lives and property, to support research on how to design and build stronger and cheaper structures, and to provide critical response assistance when local resources are overwhelmed by events. Because of the geographic, economic, and temporal scale of these activities, the private sector and local governments look to the federal government for the consistent leadership and long-term support needed to make America's future both safe and prosperous.