

Meeting Minutes of the Subcommittee on Disaster Reduction

6 December 2007, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., Department of the Interior Room 6641

Italics indicate absent members. "T" indicate members participating via teleconference.

Officers

David Applegate (USGS), Chair
Margaret Davidson (NOAA), Vice-Chair

NSTC Liaison

Gene Whitney (OSTP)

Working Group Chairs

International Working Group
Ralph Braibanti (State), Chair

Infrastructure Task Group

Joy Pauschke (NSF), Chair

Earth Observations Working Group

Steve Ambrose (NASA), Co-Chair
Tim Battista (NOAA), Co-Chair
Bruce Quirk (USGS), Co-Chair

Resource Impacts Task Group

Susan Conard (USFS), Chair

Designated Representatives

BLM Ronald Huntsinger
CDC Mark Keim
DHS Bruce Davis
DHS/FEMA David Maurstad
DHS/USCG Suzanne Strohl
DOD Al Johnson
DOE Patricia Hoffman
DOT Sheila Duwadi
EOP / OSTP Gene Whitney

EPA Peter Jutro
HUD David Engel
NASA Steve Ambrose
NGB Daniel Bochicchio
NIH Allen Dearry (T)
NIST William Grosshandler
NOAA Margaret Davidson
NSF Joy Pauschke

OPHS Sven Rodenbeck (T)
State Jordan Muller
Ralph Braibanti
Fernando Echavarria
USACE Barbara J. Sotirin
USAID Peter Morris
USDA / USFS Susan Conard
USGS Paula Gori

Other Attendees

DOE Jim McGlone
NSF Robert O'Connor
Dennis Wenger

NIST Jack Hayes
NOAA Nell Codner
Nathalie Valette-Silver (T)

USGS Matt Hayes

Agenda

10:00 Introductions
10:05 Approval of November Meeting Minutes
10:10 Report from the Chair
10:15 Report from the Vice-Chair
10:20 Report from the NSTC Liaison
10:30 Discussion of Wildfire Lessons Learned White Paper
11:10 Discussion of 2008 Subcommittee Activities
11:55 Close and Next Actions

Handouts

- Agenda
- November Meeting Minutes
- Agency support request letter

I. Call to Order and Approval of Minutes

Subcommittee on Disaster Reduction (SDR) Chair David Applegate (USGS) called the meeting to order at 10:08 a.m. Following introductions around the table and on the phone, the minutes for the previous meeting (November 1, 2007) were approved as presented.

II. Summary of Reports

A. Report from the Chair

Applegate reported that on December 4th, USGS (Applegate), NIST (Jack Hayes) and FEMA testified at a subcommittee of the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee hearing on the impacts that a repeat of the 1811-12 New Madrid earthquakes would have on the central US. The hearing also focused on FEMA's current catastrophic planning exercise for such an event. The hearing was chaired by Sen. Mark Pryor (D-Ark.).

He also reported that it was time to renew agency funding commitments to SDR; the meeting materials included the annual request letter from the SDR chair to participating agencies. The multi-year Secretariat contract executed by NOAA through the General Services Administration (GSA) ended on November 30th, which is why Emily Wallace and Allison Kilcourse from ManTech GRS Solutions (GRS) were not at the meeting. NOAA has a new contract in place that will be able to cover its SDR contribution, and USGS is in the process of putting a contract in place that can be a vehicle for its and additional agency contributions via a letter of intent. The other option is for agencies to contract directly with GRS using the GSA schedule. USGS will gladly provide their scope of work to any agency who requests it.

Gene Whitney (OSTP) encouraged agencies to support SDR, noting that as with the other 30 subcommittees of the National Science and Technology Council, there are no appropriations to support subcommittee activities, making it necessary to pass the hat. It is a "you get what you pay for" system with the federal agencies.

ACTION: Applegate will send out an electronic version of the support request letter to the SDR agency representatives. Please let him know if a personalized letter to the SDR representative or someone else in your agency will help this process along.

ACTION: Applegate will provide Bruce Davis at DHS with the scope of work information.

B. Report from the Vice Chair

Nell Codner reported that Margaret Davidson sends her best from the NOAA leadership summit. NOAA would like to volunteer to help assemble the wildfire lessons learned paper but were unable to have someone at the meeting.

C. Report from the NSTC Liaison

Whitney reported that the Global Earth Observation summit in Capetown, South Africa, was successful. The delegation was well led by Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne. The U.S. was able to get three key messages into the non-binding declaration that resulted, including support for the Common Alerting Protocol, free and open data policy, and endorsement of the World Radio Conference resolution to set aside part of the radio frequency spectrum for earth observations.

He noted that agencies are receiving their fiscal year 2009 passbacks from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). He regretted that the implementation plans, which are still in clearance at OMB, were not available for use in this process, a catch-22 since the latest delay is because OMB is dealing with the passback. Nathalie Valette-Silver (NOAA) asked who was in charge of OMB review, and

Whitney indicated that it had been changing over time, part of the problem. Currently, we are awaiting an answer from the FEMA examiner.

He also discussed the status of the Wind Hazard Reduction Program, which was authorized at the same time as the latest reauthorization of the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program. OSTP was originally opposed to the legislation, because it assigned OSTP a program coordination role that belongs in the agencies. Congress and the White House are at an impasse: Congress wants the program implemented by OSTP but will not provide appropriations, and OSTP cannot implement until agencies receive funding for it, including the federal advisory committee called for in the legislation. In order to carry out planning and coordination, OSTP established a working group within SDR, which produced the Windstorm Impact Reduction Implementation Plan (2006) and an initial biennial report to Congress, which Whitney will distribute to SDR representatives. Since there is a statutory requirement to maintain this program, he will bring agencies together in the next several months through the working group to discuss how to proceed. Dennis Wenger (NSF) asked if the wind research community was being vocal. Whitney replied that they appear to have moved on to other issues.

ACTION: Whitney will provide WindHRP biennial report to SDR representatives.

III. Discussion Topics

A. Discussion of Wildfire Lessons Learned White Paper

Applegate began the discussion by noting that three years ago at the request of OSTP, SDR did a short (10 pages) lessons learned white paper following the Sumatra earthquake and ensuing Indian Ocean tsunami. With the recent wildfires in southern California and the threat of ongoing debris flows in burned areas, the time is ripe for a white paper on the role that science and technology has played in the response and to identify the way forward for S&T in supporting future prevention, mitigation, and preparedness activities to improve resilience not just in southern California but elsewhere. At OSTP's suggestion, this effort would be conducted jointly with the US Group on Earth Observations, the leadership of which has embraced such an approach. The document would also be an opportunity to highlight the wildfire and debris flow Grand Challenges implementation plans and give them some legs.

With the clearance process a substantial obstacle for SDR publications, Whitney noted that generating a short and timely document would help the clearance process. A document such as this would not face the same policy and budget implications as the Grand Challenges implementation plans and indeed could help to shake those loose as well.

Sue Conard (USFS) emphasized that such a document should focus specifically on S&T given that there are already other lessons learned efforts underway for the broader disaster response activities both at the state and federal levels. She also encouraged that recommendations be much broader than just for southern California and that SDR needs to be sensitive to field perceptions of a high-level group judging what went right and wrong without having been on the ground. William Grosshandler (NIST) noted that the document should recognize that the response was successful and recognize how S&T supported not just federal but especially the state and local activities. Wenger added that the event was a poster child for preparedness and government working together at multiple levels; this was after all the situation for which the incident command system was developed. NSF has an interest in the science of understanding intergovernmental relations. Paula Gori (USGS) noted that many agencies, USGS included, deployed people, resources and technology to this response and that the focus should be on how S&T fared and what more we could do next time. Whitney added that the Grand Challenges represents a great framework for the document, including cascading disasters,

community preparedness, working together, the need to understand impacts, and so forth. Grosshandler stated that there needs to be an emphasis on the role of building codes and the work that goes into developing and testing building technologies. Applegate added that the goal in producing such a document is to have something that the agencies and the White House can use for planning future S&T investments.

Steve Ambrose (NASA) described NASA's involvement in the response, including deployment of the Ikhana Predator drone feeding data directly to first responders, which generated a great deal of public and media interest. He described a recent meeting in southern California to discuss what can be done for post-fire assessment, including state and local government as well as federal agencies including NASA, NIST, NOAA, DHS, FEMA, and USGS. The focus was on post-fire monitoring, transitioning from research to operations, and what can be done over an 8-week timeframe and then longer term for monitoring of the physical conditions. Another session was to be held at the AGU meeting in San Francisco to look at the science aspects and then another meeting in southern California in January to discuss long-term assessments.

ACTION: Let Steve Ambrose know if you would like to receive an invitation to the January post-fire long-term post-fire assessments workshop in southern California.

Davis noted that at the end of a disaster, there are always problems in getting follow-up implementation of new methods. DHS is supporting a pilot study to look at what would be the "perfect" database of information to have. He added that federal, state and local partnerships have started to work together in a model atmosphere to better prepare and implement lessons learned from the model scenarios. Whitney encouraged consideration of what was learned from the fire event that can be applied to other hazards/disasters. In drawing the line between an analysis of S&T and one of overall response, he suggested SDR focus on the tools S&T can provide for the response. Conard added that there could be better policies for coordination of S&T in response and there could be more efficient and better designed projects for sharing the S&T benefit from the response. Bob O'Connor (NSF) noted that NSF has small grants for exploratory research to capture ephemeral data plus the Learning from Earthquakes program. Whitney suggested that at some point SDR should look at federal capabilities for an S&T quick-response team for data collection and other activities. In response to a question from Matt Hayes (USGS), Whitney suggested such a team could address both research needs and help with the response itself by applying S&T expertise and tools. Conard linked this to the broader question of how to make the research to operations transition with such tools, noting the USFS budget restrictions that only made it possible to fly plane-based instruments if receive orders from local incident commander. Noting that this paper would be joint with USGEO, Whitney emphasized the desire to capture the need for both in situ and remote measurements with Gori noting the importance of the former to the debris-flow problem. Davis described the DHS research initiative on structure protection (Secure Against Fire and Embers). Grosshandler noted the temporary housing issue. Whitney noted the broader need for multi-hazard risk maps.

The discussion wrapped up on how to organize the white paper, one approach being to look at tools for planning, assessments during and immediately post-fire, recovery and response with the latter aspects including the flash flood/debris-flow threat. Agencies that wish to be involved include NIST (Grosshandler as point of contact), DOE, DOT (both FAA and FHWA with Duwadi as contact), DHS (Davis), NSF, BLM (Huntsinger), NASA (Ambrose), USGS (Gori/Applegate), USFS (Conard), and CDC and NIH (Deary to identify contact).

ACTION: Applegate will set up the initial drafting team meeting with Grosshandler, Ambrose, Conrad, Gori and likely Mark Paese from NOAA in the next two weeks.

ACTION: Let Applegate know of agency interest and point of contact if not already done so.

Whitney asked if there is a climate change aspect to this issue. Conard noted that it is important in terms of framing the significance of the hazard. In terms of forcings, changes in the built environment – land-use practices, population growth, etc. – are major contributors to the growth in what is at risk. He noted that any climate-change language should be vetted through Climate Change Science Program (CCSP), which is another NSTC subcommittee.

B. Discussion of 2008 Subcommittee Activities

Applegate put up a list of upcoming activities already on the table and asked what other activities SDR should be doing and what is a realistic slate for the year. The list and discussed topics included:

- Clear and publish Grand Challenges Implementation Plans
 - Need to revisit plans for roll-out of these plans with follow-on activities such as briefings to maximize value for budget support; contract has already been paid to print 1000 copies.
- Clear and publish Next Big Disasters paper
- Collaborations with National Research Council Disasters Roundtable
- Collaboration with CCSP
 - Sea Level Rise SAP coming out in January
- Lessons Learned wildfire document
- Ongoing working groups
 - Infrastructure (possible sessions for Disasters Roundtable, Boulder workshop)
 - Resource impacts (work on white paper)
 - Earth observations (identify some new leadership)
- National platform for International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
- WindHRP

In terms of other possible activities that SDR could be doing, the following were discussed:

- Ambrose brought up the national LiDAR initiative. Duwadi noted that the next highway authorization bill is coming up, and it would be good to incorporate risk-reduction in that context such as disaster-resilient bridges and roads. It was agreed that this was a topic that could be addressed through the Infrastructure working group.
- Conard emphasized the need for budget support and getting disaster-reduction mentioned in the OSTP/OMB joint guidance letter to the agencies.
- Gori suggested discussing the wildfire document at the upcoming Natural Hazards Workshop planning meeting and perhaps proposing a session at the workshop. The planning meeting is the afternoon of January 10th right after the next SDR meeting.

Whitney cautioned that the combined list of activities was overly ambitious, especially noting that the presidential transition is coming and it will be difficult to push things through clearance. He emphasized that this is a White House-level group looking at national-level issues. He suggested the group consider what the next Administration will be interested in, proposing that the relationship between climate and disasters is going to be a hot issue. No matter who is in the next administration, they will have to deal with this, so SDR should look at compiling something useful to the next administration. Applegate noted that while there are a number of documents that include natural disasters as one aspect of the broader climate impacts, there is a need for S&T policy recommendations regarding high-priority research paths in light of climate change and disasters.

Whitney noted the need for a look at what has been done, pulling out and addressing the key questions and making recommendations to US agencies.

V. Adjournment

Applegate thanked the group for the lively discussion. The meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Future Meetings

The SDR meets on the first or second Thursday of every month from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

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| January 10, 2008 | March 6, 2008 | July 3, 2008 | November 6, 2008 |
| February 7, 2008 | April 3, 2008 | August 7, 2008 | December 4, 2008 |
| March 6, 2008 | May 3, 2008 | September 4, 2008 | |
| | June 5, 2008 | October 3, 2008 | |

VII. Agenda Items and Other Communications with the Subcommittee

Please send proposed agenda items and any other items intended for distribution to the full Subcommittee to David Applegate (applegate@usgs.gov).

VIII. Contact Information SDR Leadership

David Applegate, Chair, 703-648-6715, applegate@usgs.gov
 Margaret Davidson, Vice Chair, 843-740-1220, Margaret.davidson@noaa.gov
 Gene Whitney, NSTC Liaison, 202-456-6081, gwhitney@ostp.eop.gov

International Working Group

Ralph Braibanti, Chair, 202-663-2330, braibantirl@state.gov

Earth Observations Working Group

Steve Ambrose, Co-Chair, 202-358-0851, sambrose@nasa.gov
 Tim Battista, Co-Chair, 301-713-3028 x171, tim.battista@noaa.gov
 Bruce Quirk, Co-Chair, 605-594-6040, quirk@usgs.gov

IX. Summary of December Actions

| Action | Lead | By When |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Send out an electronic version of the letter to the SDR agency representatives. | Applegate | 15 December |
| Let Applegate know if you would like a personalized support request letter to the SDR representative or someone else in your agency | SDR Members | 31 December |
| Provide Bruce Davis at DHS with the scope of work information. | Applegate | 15 December |
| Provide WindHRP biennial report to SDR representatives | Whitney | 31 December |
| Let Steve Ambrose know if you would like to receive an invitation to the January post-fire long-term post-fire assessments workshop in southern California. | SDR Members | 20 December |
| Set up the initial wildfire white paper drafting team meeting. | Applegate | 15 December |

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| Inform Applegate of agency interest in white paper and point of contact. | SDR Members | 31 December |
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